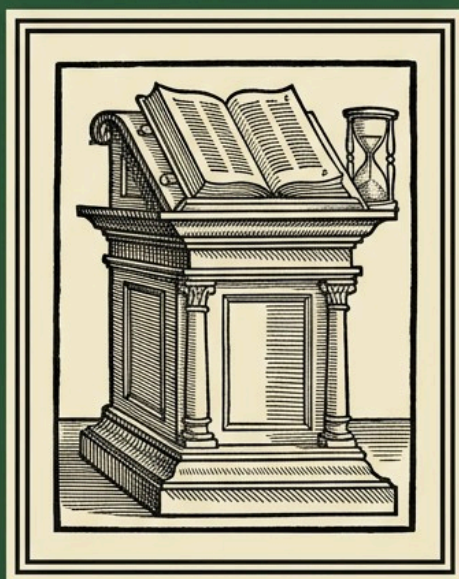


THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

JOHN CALVIN



THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

John Calvin



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TITLE PAGE



The Institutes of Christian Religion, written in Latin by John Calvin, and translated into English according to the author's last edition. Reviewed and approved according to the order appointed in the Queen's Majesty's injunctions.

Printed in London by Reynold Wolfe and Richard Harrison.
Anno 1561.

Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum.

THE PRINTERS TO THE READERS



Some people have thought it was a fault and negligence on our part that we held back this book for so long, since Master John Dawes had translated it and delivered it to us more than a year ago. You should know, as our excuse, that we could not print it sooner. We were, by various necessary reasons, compelled to earnestly ask another friend of ours to translate the whole work again. We trust you will approve of this translation. Not only was it faithfully done by the translator himself, but it was also thoroughly reviewed by men whose judgment and reputation all the godly learned in England know and respect. Now that it has come out, we ask you to accept it and make use of it. If any errors have slipped past us, we ask for your patience, as you have had our diligence.

JOHN CALVIN TO THE READER



When I first began this work, I expected nothing less than that it would eventually be presented to your Majesty. My intent was simply to teach certain foundational truths by which those touched with some zeal for religion might be instructed in true godliness. I undertook this labor primarily for my fellow Frenchmen, of whom I understood many to be hungry and thirsty for Christ, yet I saw very few who had rightly received even a small knowledge of Him. The book itself shows this was my aim, being written in a simple and straightforward manner. But when I saw that the furious rage of certain wicked men had so prevailed in your kingdom that there was no room left for sound doctrine, I thought it worth my effort to accomplish two things in one work: to give instruction to believers, and to offer a confession before you — so that you might learn the nature of the doctrine against which those furious men burn with such rage, troubling your realm today with sword and fire. For I will not fear to confess that this work contains the very sum of that doctrine which they cry out should be punished with imprisonment, banishment, condemnation without trial, and with fire — that it should be driven out by land and sea. I know well with what terrible accusations they have filled your mind and ears, to make our cause hateful to you. Yet this you

ought in your clemency to consider: there can be no innocence, in words or deeds, if accusation alone is enough to condemn. If any one, to bring our doctrine into hatred, alleges that it has long been condemned by the consent of all ranks and has been found guilty in many court judgments already given — all that he says amounts to no more than this: that it has partly been violently suppressed by the power and influence of its adversaries, and partly been treacherously and deceitfully overwhelmed by their lies, clever schemes, and slanders. Violence is shown here, in that bloody sentences are pronounced against it without hearing the case. Fraud is shown here, in that it is falsely accused of sedition and wrongdoing. That no one may think we complain of these things without cause, you yourself can bear witness, most noble King, with what lying slanders it is daily accused before you — that it aims at nothing less than wresting scepters from kings' hands, overthrowing all judges' seats and judgments, subverting all civil order and government, troubling the peace and quiet of the people, abolishing all laws, destroying all property and possessions, and finally turning everything upside down. And yet you hear only the smallest part. For they spread horrible stories among the people — stories which, if true, the whole world would rightly judge worthy of a thousand fires and gallows. Who can wonder that a common hatred is stirred against it when such deeply unjust accusations are believed? This is why all ranks agree and conspire in condemning us and our doctrine. Those who sit in judgment, seized by this passion, pronounce as verdicts the predetermined conclusions they brought with them from home, and think they have discharged their duty well enough if they send no one to execution except those found guilty by their own confession or by sufficient wit-

nesses. But guilty of what charge? Of that condemned doctrine, they say. But condemned by what law? This is where the defense should have stood — not in denying the doctrine itself, but in maintaining it as true. But here all freedom even to whisper is utterly cut off from us.

At Geneva, the first day of August in the year 1559.

Augustine in his 7th Epistle: I count myself among those who write as they grow, and grow as they write.

¶TO THE MOSTE MIGHTIE AND NO-
BLE PRINCE, FRANCISCE THE MOST
CHRISTIAN KYNG THE FRENCH KYNG
HIS SOUERAIGNE LORDE, IOHN
CALUINE WISHETH PEACE AND SALU-
ATION IN CHRIST.



When I did first set my hand to this work, I had no thought, most noble King, of writing anything that would afterward be presented to your Majesty. My only aim was to teach certain foundational truths by which those touched with some zeal for religion might be instructed in true godliness. I undertook this labor primarily for my fellow Frenchmen, of whom I understood many were hungry and thirsty for Christ, yet I saw very few who had received even a small and right knowledge of Him. The book itself shows this was my intent, being written in a simple and plain manner of teaching. But when I saw that the furious rage of certain wicked men had so prevailed in your realm that there was no room left for sound doctrine, I thought it worth my effort to accomplish two things in one work: to give instruction to believers, and to offer a confession before you — so that you might learn the nature of that doctrine against which those furious men

burn with such rage, troubling your realm today with sword and fire. For I will not fear to confess that this work contains essentially the sum of that very doctrine which they cry out should be punished with imprisonment, banishment, condemnation without trial, and fire — that it should be driven out by land and sea. I know well with what terrible accusations they have filled your mind and ears, to make our cause hateful to you. Yet this you ought in your clemency to consider: there can be no innocence in words or deeds if accusation alone is enough to condemn. If anyone, to bring our doctrine into hatred, claims that it has long been condemned by the consent of all ranks and has been found guilty in many court judgments already given — all he says amounts to no more than this: that it has partly been violently suppressed by the power and influence of its adversaries, and partly been treacherously and deceitfully overwhelmed by their lies, schemes, and slanders. Violence is shown here in that bloody sentences are pronounced against it without a hearing. Fraud is shown here in that it is falsely accused of sedition and wrongdoing. That no one may think we complain without cause, you yourself can bear witness, most noble King, with what lying slanders it is daily accused before you — that it aims at nothing less than wresting scepters from kings' hands, overthrowing all judges' seats and judgments, subverting all civil order and government, troubling the peace and quiet of the people, abolishing all laws, destroying all property and possessions, and finally turning everything upside down. And yet you hear only the smallest part. For they spread horrible stories among the people — which, if true, the whole world would rightly judge worthy of a thousand fires and gallows. Who can wonder that a common hatred is stirred against it when such deeply unjust

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Therefore I rightly ask, most victorious King, that you would be pleased to take the whole hearing of this cause into your own hand — a cause that has until now been handled in turmoil, or rather carelessly tossed about without any order of law, driven more by wild heat than by sober judgment. Do not think that I am here making a personal defense in order to secure a safe return to my native country. Though I bear for it the natural love it deserves, I am not unhappy to be without it under the present circumstances. Rather, I take up the common cause of all the godly — indeed, the cause of Christ himself — which has at this day been torn down and trampled in your kingdom, and lies as though in a desperate state. This has come about not through your own doing, but through the tyranny of certain Pharisees. But how this has come to pass need not be explained here. The distress is plain enough. The ungodly have prevailed to such a degree that the truth of Christ, though not destroyed, lies hidden and buried, while the poor Church is either wasted by cruel slaughters, driven out by exile, or so dismayed by threats and terrors that it dare not open its mouth.

And still they continue with the same rage and fierceness as ever, pressing hard against a wall already bending under the ruin they themselves have caused. In the meantime no one steps forward to stand against such fury. Those who most want to appear as friends to the truth say no more than that it would be good to pardon the error and ignorance of uninformed men. These well-meaning people, as they fancy themselves, call it error and ignorance what they know to be the most certain truth of God, and call those men ignorant whose understanding Christ has not despised but has honored with the mysteries of His heavenly wisdom. So much are all ashamed of the Gospel. It is your duty, most noble King, not to close your ears or your mind to so just a defense — especially when the matter at stake is this: how the glory of God may be maintained on earth, how the truth of God may keep its honor, how Christ may have His kingdom preserved whole among us. This is a matter worthy of your ears, worthy of your judgment, worthy of your royal throne. For this very thought makes a true king: to acknowledge himself in the governing of his kingdom to be a minister of God. A king who does not reign for the glory of God is not exercising a kingdom but a robbery. He is deceived who looks for lasting prosperity in a kingdom that is not ruled by the scepter of God — that is, by His holy word. The heavenly oracle cannot prove false when it declares that where there is no vision, the people perish. The contempt in which we are held should not turn you away from this purpose. We know full well how poor and lowly we are — miserable sinners before God, despised persons before men, indeed the very outcasts and refuse of the world, or whatever viler name there may be. There remains nothing for us to glory in before God except His mercy alone, by which we have been received

without any deserving of our own into the hope of eternal salvation. Before men there is nothing left but our weakness, which it is thought a great shame to confess. Yet our doctrine must be lifted high above all worldly glory, and must stand unconquered above all earthly power — because it is not ours, but the doctrine of the living God and of His Christ, whom the Father has appointed King to rule from sea to sea and from the rivers to the ends of the earth. He rules by striking the whole earth with only the rod of His mouth, breaking all iron and bronze strength, all golden and silver splendor, like a potter's vessel — as the prophets foretell of the majesty of His kingdom. Our adversaries cry out against this, claiming that we falsely pretend to the word of God, of which we are most wicked corrupters. But that this is not only a malicious slander but a remarkable shamelessness — this you yourself may judge by your wisdom, after reading our confession. Yet here it is also good to say something, either to stir in you a willingness to hear, or at least to prepare you for reading it. When Paul commanded all prophecy to be measured against faith, he set the surest rule by which the interpretation of Scripture ought to be tested. If our doctrine is examined by this rule of faith, the victory is already in our hands. For what agrees better with faith than to confess ourselves stripped of all virtue, so that God may clothe us? Empty of all good, so that He may fill us? Slaves to sin, so that He may free us? Blind, so that He may enlighten us? Lame, so that He may make us walk? Weak, so that He may uphold us? To take from ourselves all grounds for boasting, so that He alone may be glorified on high, and we may glory in Him? When we say these and similar things, they interrupt and cry out that by this reasoning we have overthrown I know not what — the blind light of nature, their

so-called preparations of merit, free will, works meritorious of eternal salvation, and their works of supererogation — because they cannot bear for all praise and glory of goodness, virtue, righteousness, and wisdom to remain in God. But we do not read of those being rebuked who have drawn too freely from the fountain of living water. On the contrary, those who have dug broken cisterns for themselves that cannot hold water are the ones sharply rebuked. Again, what is more agreeable to faith than to be assured that God will be a favorable Father to those who acknowledge Christ as their brother and mediator? Than to look for all things joyful and prosperous at His hand, whose unspeakable love for us went so far that He did not spare His only Son but gave Him for us? Than to rest in a sure hope of salvation and eternal life when we consider Christ given by the Father, in whom all such treasures are hidden? At this point they step in against us and cry out that such certainty of trust is nothing but arrogance and presumption. But as we presume nothing of ourselves, so we ought to presume all things from God. We are stripped of vain glory for no other reason than that we should learn to glory in the Lord. What more is there to say? Consider, most mighty Prince, every part of our cause, and conclude that we are worse than any wicked men — unless you clearly find that we are in trouble and under attack simply because we trust in the living God and believe that eternal life is to know one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. For this hope, some of us are bound in chains, some are whipped, some are paraded in mockery, some are condemned without trial, some are cruelly tortured, some escape by flight — but all are oppressed with trouble, all are met with terrible curses, torn with slanders, and treated in the most disgraceful ways. Now look at our adversaries

— I speak of the priestly class, at whose command others exercise their hostility against us — and consider with me for a moment what zeal drives them. As for the true religion taught in the Scriptures, which ought to be held as certain by all men, they easily allow both themselves and others to be ignorant of it, to neglect and despise it. They think it matters little what a man believes or does not believe about God and Christ, so long as he submits his mind with an unspoken faith, as they call it, to the judgment of the Church. Nor are they much troubled if the glory of God is defiled with open blasphemies, as long as no one challenges the supremacy of the Apostolic see and the authority of their holy mother the Church. Why, then, do they fight with such cruelty and ferocity for the Mass, Purgatory, Pilgrimages, and such things — going so far as to say that without full expressed faith in these things godliness cannot stand, when they cannot prove that any of these things come from the word of God? Why? Because their belly is their god, their kitchen is their religion. Take that away and they think they will be not just non-Christians but nothing at all. Though some of them gorge themselves in plenty and others gnaw on poor scraps, they all feed from the same pot — which, without these props, would not merely grow cold but freeze solid. So the more any of them is devoted to his belly, the more zealous a fighter he becomes for their faith. In the end, they all work to preserve their kingdom and keep their stomachs full. Not one of them shows the slightest token of genuine zeal. And still they do not stop slandering our doctrine, using every means they can to accuse and defame it in order to bring it into hatred or suspicion. They call it new and recently invented. They complain that it is uncertain and unreliable. They demand to know what miracles confirm it. They

ask whether it is fitting that it should prevail against the consent of so many holy Fathers and the most ancient custom. They press us to admit that it is schismatic — making war against the Church, or that the Church has been dead for many ages in which nothing of this sort was heard. Finally they say that no arguments are needed: the fruit tells you what kind of tree it is — a doctrine that has produced such a heap of sects, such a flood of seditions, and such a license for vice. It is very easy for them to triumph over an abandoned cause before a credulous and ignorant crowd. But if we also were allowed our turn to speak, this hot fervor with which they speak so freely and with such impunity against us would soon cool.

First, when they call our doctrine new, they do great wrong to God, whose holy word deserves no charge of newness. To them, no doubt, it is new — for to them Christ is new, and His Gospel is new. But those who know that Paul's preaching is ancient — that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification — will find nothing new among us. The fact that this truth has long lain hidden, unknown, and buried is the fault of human ungodliness. Now that it has been restored to us by God's goodness, it ought by every right of restoration to receive again the title of antiquity.

From that same fountain of ignorance springs their claim that our doctrine is uncertain and unreliable. This is precisely what the Lord complained of through His prophet — that the ox knew its owner and the donkey its master's stall, but His people did not know Him. But however much they mock the supposed uncertainty of our doctrine, if they were ever required to seal their own teaching with their blood and with their lives, the world would see

how much they truly value it. Our confidence is far different — it does not shrink before the terrors of death or before the very judgment seat of God.

When they demand miracles from us, they deal with us unreasonably. For we introduce no new Gospel, but hold fast to the very same Gospel, for the confirmation of which all the miracles ever done by Christ and His apostles already serve. What they claim as their special advantage over us is that they can still to this day confirm their faith with continual miracles. But wait — the miracles they produce are of a kind that could unsettle a well-grounded mind. They are either trivial and laughable, or false and invented. And yet, even if those miracles were ever so extraordinary, they ought to carry no weight against the word of God — for the name of God must be kept holy at all times and in all places, whether through miracles or through the natural order of things. This false argument might have had more show of credibility, had Scripture not taught us the proper purpose and use of miracles. Mark tells us that the signs which followed the apostles' preaching were given to confirm that preaching. Likewise, Luke says that the Lord bore witness to the word of His grace when signs and wonders were performed through the hands of the apostles. This agrees entirely with what the apostle says — that when the Gospel was preached, salvation was confirmed by the Lord bearing witness to it with signs, wonders, and various acts of power. But shall we take the things appointed as seals of the Gospel and turn them against the credibility of the Gospel? Shall we take the things appointed only to establish truth and apply them to confirming lies? Therefore the doctrine must first be examined — the doctrine which, as the Evangelist says, comes before miracles. If the doctrine is approved,

it may then lawfully receive the confirmation of miracles. And of true doctrine, as Christ teaches, this is the mark: that it tends not to the glory of men but to the glory of God. Since Christ gives this as the test of doctrine, miracles are wrongly valued when they are drawn toward any other end than glorifying the name of God alone. We must also remember that Satan has his own miracles — which, though they are conjuring tricks rather than true powers, are still such as may deceive the ignorant and unskillful. Magicians and sorcerers have always been famous for miracles. Wonderful miracles have nourished idolatry — yet you do not thereby prove that the practices of magicians and idolaters are lawful. In earlier times the Donatists used this very weapon to shake the simplicity of ordinary people, boasting that they excelled in miracles. We therefore now give the same answer to our adversaries that Augustine once gave to the Donatists: that the Lord has put us on guard against such miracle-workers when He foretold that false prophets would come who, with lying signs and various wonders, would lead astray the elect if possible. And Paul warned that the kingdom of Antichrist would come with all power and signs and lying wonders. But these miracles, they say, are not done by idols, not by sorcerers, not by false prophets, but by the saints. As if we did not know that this is precisely the craft of Satan — to disguise himself as an angel of light. In ancient times the Egyptians worshipped Jeremiah, who was buried among them, with sacrifices and divine honors. Were they not thereby abusing the holy prophet of God for the purposes of idolatry? And yet by this veneration of his tomb they believed they obtained healing from snakebite as a fitting reward. What can we say but that this has been and always will be the most just judgment of God — to send a powerful delu-

sion to those who have not received the love of the truth, so that they believe lies? We therefore do not lack miracles — and miracles that are certain and above question. As for the miracles they produce for themselves, they are mere illusions of Satan, since they lead the people away from the true worship of God and into emptiness.

They also slanderously invoke the Fathers against us — I mean the ancient Fathers and writers of the Church from its less corrupted age — as though those men were defenders of their ungodliness. If the debate were to be settled by the authority of the Fathers, the better part of the victory, to speak most modestly, would fall to our side. Many excellent and wise things have been written by those Fathers, but what sometimes happens to men happened to them as well. These devoted sons of theirs, with all their supposed sharpness of wit, judgment, and mind, worship only the Fathers' faults and errors. The things that were well said they either ignore, pretend not to know, or distort. You could well say that their whole effort was to gather dung out of the gold of the Fathers. Then they press us hard with loud cries, calling us despisers and enemies of the Fathers. But we do not so despise them. If it were my purpose here, I could very easily prove from their own consenting voices the greater part of what we teach today. Yet we read their writings always remembering that all things are ours to serve us, not to rule over us, and that we belong to Christ alone, to whom we must submit in all things without exception. Whoever does not maintain this distinction will find no firm ground in religion — for those holy men were ignorant of many things, often disagreed with one another, and sometimes even contradicted themselves. They cite Solomon's warning that we should not move the

ancient boundary markers our fathers set. But there is not the same rule for boundary lines in fields and for the obedience of faith, which must be shaped so that it forgets its own people and its father's house. If they find such pleasure in allegories, why do they not rather point to the apostles as their fathers, whose appointed boundaries no one may move? This is how Jerome interpreted that passage — and his words are recorded in their own canon law. But if they insist that the boundaries of these same Fathers be strictly kept — why do they themselves cross those boundaries so freely and so often whenever it suits them? Among those Fathers was one who said that our God neither eats nor drinks, and therefore needs neither cups nor plates. Another said that holy things require no gold, and that things not purchased with gold are not made more pleasing by it. Those who delight so greatly in gold, silver, ivory, marble, precious stones, and silk in holy things, and who think God is not rightly worshipped unless everything is lavishly adorned with exquisite splendor — or rather with outrageous excess — have gone beyond those boundaries. A Father said he freely ate meat on the days when others fasted, because he was a Christian. Those who accuse the soul that eats meat in Lent have gone beyond that boundary. Fathers said that a monk who does not labor with his hands is to be judged as bad as a violent thief, and that it is not lawful for monks to live off others' goods, even if they are continually occupied with contemplation, prayer, and study. Those who have placed the pampered, idle bellies of monks in houses to be fattened on other men's substance have gone beyond that boundary. A Father said it was a horrible abomination to see any image painted of Christ or any saint in the churches of Christians. That was not the voice of one man only.

Another Father stoutly maintained that the blood of the Lord ought not to be denied to the Christian people, for whose confession they were commanded to shed their own blood. Those who by an inviolable law commanded the very thing that one of these Fathers punished with excommunication and another condemned with strong argument have gone beyond that boundary. A Father affirmed it was rash to make any determination on a doubtful matter on either side without clear and evident testimony of Scripture. Those who have established so many constitutions, canons, and authoritative decisions without any word of God have gone beyond that boundary. A Father, among other things, charged Montanus with the fault that he was the first to burden men with laws of fasting. Those who have commanded fasting with the strictest laws have gone far beyond that boundary. A Father denied that marriage should be forbidden to ministers of the Church, and declared that a man's living with his own wife was chastity. Other Fathers agreed with him. Those who strictly imposed celibacy on their priests have gone beyond those boundaries. A Father judged that only Christ should be heard — the Christ of whom it is written, Hear Him — and that we ought not to regard what other men before us have said or done, but what Christ, who is first of all, has commanded. Those who place over themselves and others any master whatever rather than Christ, and do not allow others to have Christ as their master, do not appoint this boundary for themselves. A Father declared that the Church ought not to place itself above Christ, for Christ always judges truly while the judges of the Church, as men, are commonly deceived. Those who break through this boundary do not hesitate to affirm that the entire authority of Scripture depends upon the verdict of the Church. All the

Fathers with one heart cursed and with one mouth pronounced it abominable that the holy word of God should be entangled with the subtleties of sophists and the quarrels of logicians. Do they stay within these boundaries, when their whole life's work is nothing but endless disputes and more than sophistic wrangling to wrap and tangle the simplicity of Scripture — so that if the Fathers were raised to life again and heard such an art of brawling as these men call Speculative Theology, they would not believe any discussion of God was taking place at all? But my remarks would stretch beyond all proper limits if I were to count up all the ways these men shake off the yoke of the very Fathers whose obedient children they claim to be. Months and years would not be enough. And yet they have the extreme and shameless audacity to blame us for not staying within the ancient boundaries.

Now when they appeal to custom, they make no progress with us. It would be the greatest injustice if we were compelled to yield to custom. In human judgment, custom ought to be derived from what is good. But it often happens that men act otherwise. Whatever is seen to be done by many immediately acquires the standing of a custom. Yet the condition of humanity has rarely been good enough that the better things pleased the majority. So for the most part, the private vices of many have been transformed into a public error — or rather a common agreement in vice — which these good men now want treated as law. Anyone with eyes can see that not just one sea of evils has flooded in; many poisonous plagues have invaded the world, and all things are rushing headlong toward ruin. Either we must give up all hope for humanity, or we must lay hands on — indeed, use force against — such great evils. The only reason remedy has been driven away is that

we have long accustomed ourselves to these evils. But even if public error may have a place in matters of civil governance, in the kingdom of God only His truth is to be heard and obeyed. No length of years, no custom, no agreed consensus can establish a prescription against it. So in earlier times Isaiah taught God's elect not to call 'conspiracy' everything the people called 'conspiracy' — that is, not to join the wicked agreements of the people, nor to fear what the people fear, but to sanctify the Lord of hosts and make Him their fear and dread. Therefore, however much they object to us using past or present ages as evidence, if we sanctify the Lord of hosts, we will not be greatly afraid. For whether many ages have agreed together in ungodliness, He is powerful to take vengeance to the third and fourth generation. Or if the entire world conspires together in wickedness, He has shown by experience what becomes of those who sin along with the majority — when He destroyed the whole human race with a universal flood, preserving only Noah with a small household, that one man who by his faith condemned the whole world. In the end, an evil custom is nothing but a common plague — and people still die from it even when they die in the company of a multitude. Moreover, they should have considered what Cyprian says in certain places: that those who sin through ignorance, though they cannot be entirely cleared of fault, may in some sense be excused. But those who obstinately reject the truth offered to them by the grace of God have nothing to offer as an excuse.

As for their two-pronged argument, it does not drive us into a corner where we must admit either that the Church has been dead for a time or that we are at war with the Church. The Church of Christ has lived and will live as long as Christ reigns at the right

hand of the Father — upheld by His hand, defended by His help, kept safe by His power. He will without doubt fulfill what He once promised: that He will be with His people even to the end of the world. We have no war against the Church. Together with all the faithful we worship the one God and Christ the Lord in the same way He has always been worshipped by the godly. But our adversaries go far astray when they acknowledge no Church except what they can see with their own eyes, and try to confine it within boundaries that cannot contain it. The points of our controversy are these: First, they claim that the form of the Church is always visible and apparent. Second, they locate that form in the see of the Church of Rome and in the order of their prelates. We, on the contrary, affirm both that the Church may exist without any visible form, and that the form itself is not found in the outward show they so foolishly admire. Rather, the true mark of the Church is quite different: the pure preaching of the word of God and the right administration of the sacraments. They are enraged unless the Church can always be pointed to with a finger. But how often was the people of Israel so deformed that no form of the Church appeared at all? What form do we imagine shone forth when Elijah lamented that he alone was left? How long after Christ's coming did the Church lie hidden, without visible form? How often since then has it been so oppressed by wars, seditions, and heresies that it shone out nowhere? If our adversaries had lived in such times, would they have believed any Church existed? Yet God said to Elijah that seven thousand men had been preserved who had not bowed the knee to Baal. We should not doubt that Christ has always reigned on earth since His ascension into heaven. But if the godly of those days had looked for a visible, discernible form,

would they not immediately have been discouraged? Hilary already in his own time counted it a very great fault that people, captivated by the foolish admiration of the dignity of bishops, failed to see the deadly plague lurking beneath that outward show. For he wrote: One thing I warn you — beware of Antichrist. You are wrongly taken with the love of walls. You wrongly worship the Church of God in houses and buildings. Under them you wrongly thrust in the name of Peace. Is it doubtful that Antichrist will sit in these? Mountains, woods, lakes, prisons, and caves are safer for me. For it was in these that the prophets, whether dwelling in them or cast into them, prophesied. But what does the world today honor in its mitred bishops, except that it thinks them holy rulers of religion because they head great cities? Away with such foolish esteem. Rather, let us leave this to the Lord, who alone knows who are His, and who sometimes hides from human sight the outward marks of His Church. That, I grant, is a dreadful judgment of God upon the earth. But if the wickedness of men so deserves it, why do we seek to resist God's just judgment? So has the Lord in times past taken vengeance on human ingratitude. Because men would not receive His truth and had quenched His light, He allowed them, darkened in understanding, both to be mocked by absurd lies and to be drowned in deep darkness, so that no face of the true Church could be seen. Yet all the while He preserved His own — scattered and hidden in the midst of errors and darkness — from destruction. This is no wonder. He is able to save even in the very confusion of Babylon and in the flame of the furnace. But whereas they want the form of the Church to be judged by some vain and pompous outward show — how dangerous that is, I will merely point to rather than fully explain, lest I extend this address to an

infinite length. The Pope, who holds the Apostolic see, they say, and the bishops anointed and consecrated by him, adorned with their tassels and miters, represent the Church and must be taken as the Church. Therefore they cannot err. Why not? Because they are pastors of the Church and consecrated to the Lord. But were not Aaron and the other rulers of Israel also pastors? And yet Aaron and his sons, even after being made priests, went astray when they made the golden calf. By this logic, why should the four hundred prophets who lied to Ahab not have represented the Church? But the Church was on Micah's side — just one man, ignored and disregarded — from whose mouth came the truth. Did not the false prophets bear both the name and appearance of the Church when with one violent assault they rose up against Jeremiah, boasting that the law would never depart from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet? Jeremiah alone was sent against the entire company of the prophets to declare from the Lord that the law would indeed depart from the priest, counsel from the wise, and the word from the prophet. Did not a glittering show of authority shine in that council assembled by the bishops, scribes, and Pharisees to plan the death of Christ? Let them go on clinging to outward appearances, and they will make Christ and all God's prophets into schismatics, while making the ministers of Satan into instruments of the Holy Spirit. If they speak what they truly believe, let them honestly answer me: in what nation and place did they think the Church remained after the Council of Basel deposed Eugenius from the papacy and installed Amadeus in his place? They cannot deny — however much they might strain against it — that this council, as far as outward solemnities go, was lawful, summoned not by just

one pope but by two. Eugenius was there condemned for schism, rebellion, and obstinacy, along with the whole company of cardinals and bishops who had worked with him to dissolve the council. Yet afterward, carried by the favor of princes, he recovered his papacy. The election of Amadeus, which had been duly made by authority of a general and holy Synod, vanished into smoke — except that he was pacified with a cardinal's hat, like a barking dog silenced with a piece of bread. Out of the ranks of these heretics, rebels, and obstinate ones have come all the popes, cardinals, bishops, abbots, and priests that have followed. Here they are trapped and cannot move. For to which side will they give the name of the Church? Will they deny that the council was a general one — a council that lacked nothing of outward majesty, that was duly summoned by two bulls, properly organized in all things, and continued in the same dignity to the very end? Will they confess that Eugenius and all his company were schismatics — the very men by whom all of them have been consecrated? Therefore, either let them define the form of the Church differently, or all of them, without exception, must be accounted by us as schismatics who have knowingly and willingly been ordained by heretics. Even if it had never been known before, they themselves are sufficient proof that the Church is not bound to outward pomp — they who for so long have proudly boasted under the glorious title of the Church, while all the time being its most deadly pestilence. I say nothing here of their conduct and the tragic deeds that fill their entire lives, since they claim to be like the Pharisees who are to be heard but not followed. But if you will give some of your time to reading our

writings, you will clearly see that the very doctrine itself — the doctrine by which they claim to be the Church — is a deadly slaughter of souls, a firebrand, the ruin and destruction of the Church.

Finally they also act dishonestly when they spitefully rehearse the great troubles, uproars, and contentions that the preaching of our doctrine has brought with it, and the fruits it is now bearing in many places. The blame for these evils is being unfairly laid on our doctrine, when it ought rather to be placed on the malice of Satan. It is, so to speak, a natural property of the word of God that whenever it rises up, Satan is never quiet or sleeping. This is the surest and most reliable mark by which the word of God is distinguished from lying doctrines, which easily make a show of themselves when they are received with approval by all and heard with the world rejoicing. So in certain earlier ages, when all things were drowned in deep darkness, the lord of this world played and sported with nearly all people, lying idle and taking his ease like some Sardanapalus in undisturbed peace. For what else should he do but laugh and play when sitting in quiet and peaceable possession of his kingdom? But when the light shining from above began to scatter his darkness, and when that strong man began to trouble and assault his kingdom, Satan then shook off his usual drowsiness and hurried to arm himself. First he stirred up men by force to violently suppress the truth as it was beginning to shine. When that failed to work, he turned to subtle traps. He stirred up divisions and doctrinal conflicts through his Anabaptists and other wicked troublemakers, hoping to cloud the truth and at last utterly extinguish it. And now he continues to assail it with both weapons. He is working both through human force to uproot that seed, and through his weeds — as much as he can — to choke it so it cannot

grow and bear fruit. But all of this is in vain if we heed God's warning, which has long revealed Satan's schemes so that we are not caught off guard, and has equipped us with sufficient defenses against all his attacks. How great a wickedness it is, then, to lay upon the word of God the blame for either the seditions stirred up by wicked and rebellious men, or the sects raised against it by deceivers? Yet this is nothing new. Elijah was asked whether he was the one troubling Israel. Christ was considered by the Jews to be a dangerous agitator. The apostles were accused of inciting a commotion among the people. What else are those doing today who blame us for all the troubles, uproars, and contentions that arise against us? But what we should answer to such people, Elijah has already taught us: it is not we who scatter errors or stir up uproars — it is they themselves who wrestle against the power of God. While that answer alone is enough to rebuke their rashness, we must also address the weakness of others who are often disturbed by such offenses and begin to waver in their dismay. Let such people, so that they do not faint and lose heart, know that the apostles in their own time experienced the very same things we experience now. There were unlearned and unstable men who twisted the things Paul had written by the inspiration of God to their own destruction, as Peter says. There were despisers of God who, when they heard that sin abounded so that grace might abound all the more, immediately objected: 'Then let us remain in sin, so that grace may abound.' When they heard that the faithful are not under the law, they immediately replied: 'Then we will sin, since we are not under the law but under grace.' There were those who accused Paul as an encourager of evil. Many false apostles secretly entered to destroy the churches he had built. Some preached the

Gospel out of envy and rivalry, not sincerely — indeed maliciously — hoping to add to his afflictions while he was imprisoned. In some places the Gospel did not take much root. All sought their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. Some went back like dogs returning to their vomit and pigs to wallowing in the mud. Most twisted the liberty of the Spirit into license for the flesh. Many false brothers crept in, from whom great dangers to the godly followed. Among the brothers themselves many quarrels arose. What should the apostles have done in all this? Should they not have either hushed things up for a time, or simply given up and abandoned the Gospel altogether, when they saw it was the seedbed of so many contentions, the source of so many dangers, the occasion of so many offenses? No. What sustained them in such distress was this: that Christ is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, appointed for the fall and rising of many, and for a sign that is spoken against. Armed with this truth, they went forward boldly through all the dangers of uproars and offenses. We too must be upheld by the same understanding, for Paul declares it to be the permanent character of the Gospel that it is the aroma of death leading to death for those who are perishing — even though it was appointed to be the aroma of life leading to life, and the power of God for the salvation of the faithful. We too would experience this saving power if we did not, through our own ingratitude, corrupt so remarkable a gift of God and turn to our own destruction the very thing that was meant to be our only defense and safety.

But now I return to you, my sovereign Lord. Do not let those false reports move you — the reports by which our adversaries try to make you afraid of us by claiming that this new Gospel, as they call it, is being used only to seek occasions for sedition and unpun-

ished license for vice. For our God is not the author of division but of peace, and the Son of God is not the servant of sin — He who came to destroy all the works of the Devil. We are unjustly accused of such desires, of which we have never given even the smallest hint of suspicion. As if we were plotting to overthrow kingdoms — we, from whom no seditious word has ever been heard, whose lives have always been known to be quiet and simple when we lived under your rule, and who, even now driven from our homes, do not cease to pray for all things prosperous for you and your kingdom. As if we were chasing after license for vice — we in whose conduct, though many faults may be found, there is nothing worthy of such enormous reproach. By the grace of God we have not profited so poorly from the Gospel that our lives cannot stand as an example to our detractors of chastity, generosity, mercy, temperance, patience, modesty, and every other virtue. It is proved by fact that we truly fear and worship God, since we desire that His name be glorified both in our life and in our death. Even envy itself is compelled to bear witness to the innocence and upright conduct of some among us — men who were put to death for nothing other than what should have been counted a singular honor. But if anyone under the pretense of the Gospel stirs up tumults — though until now no such person has been found in your realm — or if anyone uses the liberty of God's grace as a cover for the license of vices, as I have known many to do, there are laws and legal penalties by which such people may be properly and severely punished. But let it be done in such a way that the Gospel of God is not blamed for the wickedness of evil men. Thus, O King, the poisonous injustice of these slanderers has been plainly enough set before you, so that you will not too easily lend your ear to their reports. I fear that I

have drawn this preface out too long — it has grown almost to the size of a full defense, when my intent was not to offer a formal defense at all, but only to soften your mind beforehand so that you would be willing to give our cause a hearing. That mind of yours, though it is now turned away and estranged from us, even inflamed against us, we trust we can recover, if you will once read through our confession calmly and without prejudice — the confession that we offer as our defense before your Majesty. But if the whisperings of the malicious have so filled your ears that there is no room for accused men to speak for themselves, and if those raging furies continue with your approval to exercise their cruelty with imprisonment, torture, mutilation, and burning — we will indeed be brought to every extremity, like sheep appointed for slaughter. Yet in our patience we will possess our souls and wait for the strong hand of the Lord, which will without doubt arrive in its time, stretch out its arm, and both deliver the poor from affliction and take vengeance on the despisers who now triumph with such assured confidence.

May the Lord the King of Kings establish your throne with righteousness and your seat with equity, most noble King. At Basel, the first day of August, in the year 1536.

¶THE .I. CHAPTER. THAT THE
KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND OF OURE
SELUES, ARE THYNGES CONIOYNED:
AND HOWE THEY BEE LYNCKED THE
ONE WYTH THE OTHER.



Nearly the whole sum of our wisdom — the only wisdom that deserves to be called true and complete — consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. These two kinds of knowledge are tightly bound together, yet it is difficult to say which one comes first or produces the other. No one can look at himself without immediately turning all his attention to the contemplation of God, in whom he lives and moves. It is clear that the gifts with which we are endowed are not from ourselves — indeed, even our very existence is nothing other than a subsistence in God alone. So the good things that are poured into us drop by drop from heaven lead us as though along streams back to their source. In this way, our own poverty makes the infinite abundance of good things residing in God all the more apparent. In particular, the miserable ruin into which the fall of the first man has thrown us compels us to lift up our eyes — not only in hunger and need, to seek from God what we lack, but also in fear, to learn

humility. For there is in man a whole world of miseries, and since we have been stripped of the divine covering, our shameful nakedness exposes an endless heap of filthy disgraces. Every man must therefore be pierced by the knowledge of his own wretchedness in his conscience, driving him to at least some knowledge of God. So by understanding our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, weakness, perverseness, and corruption, we learn to acknowledge that nowhere but in the Lord dwells the true light of wisdom, genuine virtue, perfect abundance of all good things, and purity of righteousness. Thus our own evils stir us to consider the good things of God, and we cannot earnestly reach toward Him until we begin to be dissatisfied with ourselves. For what man is there who would not gladly rest content in himself? Indeed, who does not rest content, so long as he does not know himself — that is, so long as he is satisfied with his own gifts and ignorant or unmindful of his own misery? Therefore every man, through self-knowledge, is not only driven to seek God but also led as if by the hand to find Him.

On the other side, it is certain that a man never comes to true self-knowledge unless he has first looked on the face of God and, from that sight, descends to examine himself. For, such is the pride naturally planted in us, we always think ourselves righteous, innocent, wise, and holy until we are confronted with undeniable evidence of our unrighteousness, filthiness, folly, and uncleanness. But we are not confronted with this if we look only at ourselves and not also at God, who is the only standard by which such a judgment ought to be made. Because we are naturally inclined toward self-deception, a vague imitation of righteousness satisfies us in place of true righteousness. And because there is nothing among us or around us that is not stained with much filthiness, whatever

is somewhat less filthy pleases us as if it were perfectly pure — as long as we measure ourselves only against the standard of human uncleanness. It is like an eye accustomed to seeing only darkness, which thinks something merely gray to be pure white. We can see this even more clearly in the way our bodily senses work. If at mid-day we look down at the ground or at the things spread out before our eyes, we think our vision is very keen and reliable. But when we look directly at the sun and try to gaze at it with steady eyes, that same sharpness of sight that worked so well on the ground is instantly dazzled and overwhelmed by the brightness — and we are forced to admit that what seemed like sharp vision for earthly things is mere dullness when turned toward the sun. The same thing happens when we evaluate our spiritual condition. As long as we look no further than the earth, we rest comfortably in our own righteousness, wisdom, and strength, gently flattering ourselves and thinking we are almost like gods. But if we begin to lift our thoughts toward God and consider what He is — how perfect is the righteousness, wisdom, and power by whose standard we ought to be measured — then what formerly pleased us in ourselves as righteousness will become hateful to us as the greatest wickedness. What marvelously deceived us under the appearance of wisdom will stink before us as utter folly. What bore the face of strength will be exposed as the most pitiable weakness. So poorly does even what seems most perfect in us measure up against the purity of God.

From this comes the trembling and amazement which Scripture in many places describes as striking the holy men when they perceived the presence of God. We see that those who stood firm and undisturbed in God's absence begin to tremble and are so

overcome as soon as He reveals His glory — they fall down, are overwhelmed, and are virtually undone with the terror of death. From this we gather that man is never sufficiently touched and inwardly moved by knowledge of his own lowliness until he has compared himself with the majesty of God. Examples of such overwhelming awe are found frequently in the Judges and the Prophets, so that a common saying arose among the people of God: 'We shall die, because the Lord has appeared to us.' And so the book of Job, in order to bring men down with the knowledge of their own folly, weakness, and uncleanness, builds its principal case by describing the wisdom, strength, and purity of God. And this is not without reason. For we see how Abraham, the closer he came to beholding the glory of God, the more clearly he acknowledged himself to be earth and dust. We see how Elijah could not endure to wait for His coming with his face uncovered — so overwhelming is the sight of Him. And what can man do — man who is but corruption and a worm — when even the cherubim must hide their faces in fear? This is what the prophet Isaiah speaks of: the sun will be ashamed and the moon will blush when the Lord of hosts reigns — that is, when He displays His brightness and brings it close to sight, even the brightest things are darkened by comparison. Yet however closely the knowledge of God and of ourselves are joined together, the proper order of teaching requires that we first treat the knowledge of God, and then come down to speak of the knowledge of ourselves.

¶ THE .II. CHAPTER. ¶WHAT IT IS TO KNOWE GOD, AND TO WHAT ENDE TENDETH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HYM.



By the knowledge of God I do not mean merely the knowledge that God exists, but the knowledge of what is necessary and profitable for us to know about Him — what tends to His glory and is truly useful to us. Strictly speaking, we cannot say that God is known where there is no religion or godliness. But I am not here speaking yet of that special knowledge by which those who are themselves reprobate and condemned come to know God as Redeemer in Christ the Mediator. I am speaking only of that first and simpler kind of knowledge — the kind to which the natural order itself would have led us if Adam had remained in innocence. For although no one, since mankind fell into ruin, can recognize God as Father, author of salvation, or favorable toward us except through Christ as the mediator who reconciles us to God, there is still a difference between this: feeling that God our Maker sustains us by His power, governs us by His providence, and nourishes and blesses us in every way — and this: embracing the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ. Therefore, since the Lord first reveals Himself simply as Creator, both through the creation of the

world and through the general teaching of Scripture, and then in the person of Christ as Redeemer, two kinds of knowledge of Him arise. The first is what we treat now, and the second will follow in its proper place. Although our minds cannot conceive of God without giving Him some kind of worship, it will not be enough simply to know that He is the one who should be honored and worshipped by all people — we must also be persuaded that He is the fountain of all good things, so that we seek nothing anywhere else but in Him. I mean not only that He who once created the world sustains it by His infinite power, governs it by His wisdom, preserves it by His goodness, and rules humanity by His righteousness and judgment, bears with us by His mercy, and protects us by His care. I also mean this: that there is nowhere a single drop of wisdom, light, righteousness, power, integrity, or genuine truth that does not flow from Him and of which He is not the cause. Therefore we should learn to seek and ask all these things from Him, and with thankfulness to receive them as given by Him. For this sense of God's power and goodness is the school of godliness that produces religion. By godliness I mean a reverence for God joined with love for Him — a love produced by knowledge of His benefits. Men will never willingly and obediently submit themselves to God until they recognize that they owe everything to Him, that they are nourished by His fatherly care, and that He is the source of all good things, so that nothing is to be sought anywhere but in Him. Indeed, they will never truly and wholeheartedly give themselves to Him unless they firmly believe that perfect happiness is laid up for them in Him.

Those who make it their purpose, when treating this question, to discuss what God is in His essence are merely toying with empty speculation. What we need to know is what kind of God He is, and

what agrees with His nature. For what is gained by confessing, as Epicurus does, that there is a God who only delights in his own idleness and takes no care of the world? What good does it do to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? Rather, the knowledge of God should accomplish this: first, to form us in fear and reverence, and then, guided and taught by it, to lead us to seek all good things from Him and to receive them as coming from Him. For how can any thought of God enter your mind without your at once recognizing that, as His creature, you are rightly subject to His authority, that you owe Him your life, and that everything you undertake and do ought to be directed to Him? If this is true, then your life is thoroughly corrupted if it is not shaped by obedience to Him — since His will ought to be the law by which we live. Again, you cannot see Him clearly without recognizing that He is the fountain and source of all good things — from which should grow both a desire to cling to Him and a firm trust in Him, were it not that man's own corruption pulls his mind away from rightly seeking Him. For the godly mind does not, as in a dream, imagine any random god, but steadfastly looks to the one true God. It does not invent whatever it likes about Him, but is content to believe Him to be such as He reveals Himself to be, and always carefully guards against rashly going beyond what He has revealed and so wandering from the right path. And knowing Him in this way, because it understands that He governs all things, it firmly trusts that He is its keeper and defender, and therefore commits itself wholly to His care. Because it understands that He is the author of all good things, whenever anything troubles it or it stands in need, it immediately flies to Him for help, looking to receive it from His hand. Because it is persuaded that He is good and merciful, it rests on

Him with confident trust, and does not doubt that it will find ready help in His merciful kindness in all its troubles. Because it knows Him as its Lord and Father, it judges Him worthy of its complete reverence in all things — reverence for His authority, honor given to His majesty, promotion of His glory, and obedience to His commands. Because it sees that He is a righteous judge, armed with severity to punish sin, it keeps His judgment seat always before its eyes, and with fear of Him draws itself back and restrains itself from provoking His wrath. Yet it is not so afraid of His judgment that it would escape from it if some way of escape were open. Rather, it loves Him no less when He pours out vengeance on the wicked than when He is gracious to the godly — for it understands that it belongs no less to His glory that He has punishment in store for the wicked and evildoers than that He has eternal life as a reward for the righteous. Moreover, it does not refrain from sin merely out of fear of punishment. Because it loves and reveres Him as its Father, submits to Him and honors Him as its Lord, it would dread His displeasure even if there were no hell at all. Now see what pure and true religion is — it is faith joined with earnest fear of God, a fear that contains within it a willing reverence, and draws with it the proper form of worship as appointed in God's law. This deserves careful attention, because although people generally worship God, few truly revere Him. Everywhere there is great outward show in ceremonies, but purity of heart is rare.

Those who judge rightly will always hold it as certain that a sense of the divine has been engraved in the minds of men and can never be fully erased. That the persuasion that God exists is naturally planted in people from birth and deeply rooted in their very bones — of this, the stubbornness of the wicked is solid evidence.

For despite all their furious striving, they cannot free themselves from the fear of God. Even if Diagoras and men like him mock and laugh at everything that has ever been believed about religion, and Dionysius scoffs at heavenly judgment — that laughter is only from the teeth outward. Inwardly the worm of conscience gnaws them far more sharply than any searing iron. I do not rely on Cicero's claim that errors gradually fade away with time while religion daily grows and becomes purer. For the world — as we will shortly have occasion to show — works as hard as it can to shake off all knowledge of God and to corrupt His worship by every means available. What I am saying is simply this: even when the thick hardness that the wicked deliberately cultivate in order to despise God lies festering in their hearts, that same sense of God which they most of all wish to destroy lives on and sometimes forces itself out. From this we gather that the knowledge of God is not a doctrine first learned in schools, but one of which every man is his own teacher from the womb — one that nature will not allow anyone to forget, though many bend every effort to drive it from their minds. Now, if all people are born and live for this purpose — to know God — and if this knowledge remains shallow and quickly fades unless it advances to its true end, then it is clear that all who do not direct all their thoughts and actions to this goal are living contrary to the very law of their creation. The philosophers themselves were not ignorant of this. Plato meant nothing else when he repeatedly taught that the highest good of the soul is the likeness of God — that the soul, having fully received the knowledge of Him, is wholly transformed into Him. Therefore Grillus reasons very aptly in Plutarch when he declares that if religion were once taken from human life, people would not only be no better than brute beasts,

but in many ways would be far more miserable. Being subject to so many kinds of evils, they would drag out a troubled and restless life. The worship of God, he says, is the one thing that raises people above brute animals — the one thing by which they aspire to immortality.

¶ THE .iii. CHAPTER. THAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS NATURALLY PLANTED IN THE MYNDES OF MEN.



It is beyond dispute that there is in the human mind, even by natural instinct, a certain sense of the divine. God Himself has planted in all people an awareness of His divine majesty, so that no one can take refuge in the excuse of ignorance. He continually refreshes this awareness, as though dropping in fresh reminders from time to time. Since all without exception know that there is a God and that He is their Maker, they will all be condemned by their own testimony for not having worshipped Him and dedicated their lives to His will. If the total absence of the knowledge of God is to be found anywhere, we would expect to find it among the most primitive peoples and those furthest from civilized order. Yet even the ancient writers observed that there is no nation so barbarous and no people so savage as to lack this persuasion that there is a God. Even those who in other aspects of their life seem barely above the level of brute animals still maintain a certain seed of religion. So thoroughly has this universal conviction taken hold of all human minds and lodged itself so deeply in every heart. Since from the beginning of the world there

has been no country, no city, indeed no household that could exist entirely without religion, this implies a silent confession that the sense of the divine is written in the hearts of all people. Idolatry itself is solid evidence of this conviction. We know how unwilling man is to humble himself by honoring creatures below himself. Yet when a man would rather worship a block of wood or a stone than be thought to have no god at all, it is clear how powerful is the engraved persuasion of God — so impossible to erase from the human mind that it is far easier to break the instincts of nature than to root it out. Indeed those instincts are broken when a man, out of his own natural pride, stoops down to the lowest creatures to honor God in them.

Therefore it is completely false what some say — that religion was invented by the cleverness and craft of a few men as a policy to keep simple people in fear and submission, while those who promoted the worship of God themselves believed nothing of the sort. I grant that shrewd men have invented many things in religion to bring the people to a reverence and a fear that would make them more compliant and obedient. But they could never have succeeded in this if people's minds had not already been beforehand persuaded that there is a God — for from that persuasion, as from a seed, springs the ready inclination toward religion. It is also unlikely that even those who craftily deceived the simple with the appearance of religion were themselves entirely without knowledge of God. For though in earlier times there were some, and today many arise, who deny that there is any God, yet whether they want to or not they often feel what they wish not to know. We have read of no one who burst out into more presumptuous and unbridled contempt of God than Caius Caligula — yet no one trembled more

miserably when any sign of God's wrath appeared. Against his will, he shook with fear before the very One he deliberately set out to despise. The same thing can commonly be seen in others like him. The bolder a man's contempt of God, the more he is troubled at the mere sound of a falling leaf. And where does that come from but from the vengeance of God's majesty, which strikes their consciences all the more violently the harder they labor to flee from it? They look for every hiding place to escape the presence of the Lord, but whether they want to or not, they remain tightly held. Even when the sense of God seems to disappear for a moment, it returns again with fresh force and assaults them anew — so that whatever rest they have from the torment of conscience is much like the sleep of drunkards or madmen, who even while they sleep do not rest quietly because they are at every moment troubled by horrible and frightening dreams. Therefore the ungodly themselves serve as examples to prove that some knowledge of God always lives in all human minds.

CHAPTER 4: THAT THE SAME KNOWLEDGE IS EITHER CHOKED OR CORRUPTED, PARTLY BY IGNORANCE AND PARTLY BY MALICE



But as experience shows that God has sown the seed of religion in all people, scarcely one in a hundred can be found who, having received it in his heart, actually cherishes it — and no one in whom it fully ripens and produces fruit in due season. Some become entangled in their own superstitions, while others deliberately and maliciously turn away from God. In either case, all wander away from the true knowledge of Him. As a result, no genuine godliness remains in the world. When I say that some fall into superstition through error, I do not mean that their simplicity excuses them from blame. Their blindness is almost always mixed with proud vanity and stubbornness. Vanity joined with pride shows itself in this: these miserable people, when seeking God, do not rise above themselves as they should, but measure Him according to the limitations of their own dull, fleshly minds. They also neglect the right way of seeking Him and rush off into worthless speculation. So they do not conceive of God as He actually offers Himself, but invent the kind of god that their own rash

presumption has fashioned. Once that chasm is opened, whatever direction they take, they are rushing headlong toward destruction. For whatever they then attempt in worship or service to God cannot be credited to Him — they are not worshipping Him but the invention of their own heart, their own dream put in His place. Paul directly addresses this corruption where he says that they became fools when they desired to be wise. He had already said that they became vain in their imaginations. But lest anyone excuse them from blame, he adds that they are rightly blinded — because, not content with humility, they presumptuously took upon themselves more than they should, and so willfully brought darkness upon themselves, making themselves fools by vain and perverse pride. Their foolishness is therefore not excusable, since its cause is not only idle curiosity but a greed to know more than is fitting, combined with false confidence.

As for what David says — that the wicked and foolish say in their hearts there is no God — this refers only to those who, suppressing the light of nature, deliberately make themselves senseless, as we will see again shortly. We see many who, hardened by boldness and long habit of sinning, furiously drive from their minds all remembrance of God, even though this remembrance is inwardly supplied to them by the very feeling of their nature. David, to make their madness more detestable, portrays them as though they flatly deny there is any God — though what they actually deny is not His existence but His judgment and providence. They shut Him up as idle in heaven. For nothing is more contrary to the nature of God than to abandon the governance of the world, leave everything to chance, and wink at human sin so that people may live in unrestrained wickedness unpunished. Therefore who-

ever quenches the fear of heavenly judgment and carelessly follows his own desires is in effect denying that there is a God. And this is God's just judgment — to bring a spiritual blindness over their hearts, so that the wicked, once they have closed their eyes, cannot see even while they look. David elsewhere explains his own meaning best when he says that the fear of God is not before the eyes of the wicked, and again that in their evil deeds they congratulate themselves because they are convinced that God does not look upon them. So although they are compelled to acknowledge some god, they rob Him of His glory by denying Him His power. For as God — as Paul testifies — cannot deny Himself, because He always remains consistent with Himself, so it is rightly said that these men, in pretending God to be a dead and empty image, effectively deny God. It should also be noted that although they wrestle against their own natural sense of God, and wish not only to drive it from their hearts but to destroy God in heaven as well, their dull hardness can never prevail so completely that God does not sometimes drag them back before His judgment seat. But since no fear holds them back from rushing violently against God, a brutish forgetfulness of God certainly reigns in them for as long as that blind fit of rage carries them along.

So the empty defense many typically use to excuse their superstition is demolished. They think that any form of devotion to religion is sufficient, however contrary to order and truth it may be. But they fail to consider that true religion must be shaped according to God's will as the one constant rule, and that God Himself always remains the same — He is not a phantom or illusion that can be molded according to every person's preference. We can plainly see with what lying deceits superstition mocks God, even while at-

tempting to please Him. It seizes on the things God has testified He does not care about, and either contemptuously ignores or openly refuses the things He has appointed and said are pleasing to Him. Therefore, whoever invents new forms of worshipping God is in fact worshipping the inventions of his own confused mind — for he would never have dared to trifle so with God unless he had first fashioned a god to match the foolishness of his trifling. So the apostle declares that this unstable and wandering opinion of the majesty of God is a true ignorance of God. 'When you did not know God,' he says, 'you served those who by nature are not gods.' And in another place he says that the Ephesians were without God at the time when they wandered from the right knowledge of the one God. In this case it matters little whether you believe in one god or many, for in both cases you depart from and abandon the true God. Once you forsake Him, nothing remains with you but a detestable idol. We must therefore agree with Lactantius: there is no lawful or acceptable religion except that which is joined with truth.

There is a second fault as well: they never give any thought to God except against their will, and they do not draw near to Him until they are forcibly dragged to Him despite all their resistance. And even then, the fear they have is not a willing fear proceeding from reverence for God's majesty — it is a servile, forced fear wrung out of them by His judgment. Because they cannot escape that judgment, they dread it, but they dread it while also hating it. So the saying of Statius — that fear first made gods in the world — may rightly be applied to ungodliness, and to this kind of ungodliness only. Those whose minds recoil from the justice of God sincerely wish to see His judgment throne overthrown, for they know it stands to punish offenses against His justice. In this they make

war against God, who cannot exist apart from His judgment. But when they understand that His power, which they cannot avoid, hangs over them — that they can neither remove it by force nor escape it by flight — they are afraid of it. So that they may not in every way seem to despise God, whose majesty still bears down on them, they maintain a certain outward form of religion. But in the meantime they do not stop defiling themselves with every kind of vice, piling outrageous wickedness on wickedness, until they have in every point violated the Lord's holy law and destroyed His righteousness entirely. Or at the very least, they are not held back by that hollow fear of God from finding pleasure in their sins — flattering themselves and following the desires of their flesh rather than restraining them by the Spirit. Since this religion is nothing but an empty and lying shadow of religion — hardly worthy even to be called a shadow — we can easily see from this how far the true godliness poured only into the hearts of the faithful differs from this confused knowledge of God. Yet hypocrites try by roundabout means to appear near to God, from whom they flee. Where there ought to have been one unbroken course of obedience throughout their whole life, they live in virtual rebellion against Him in nearly everything, and then try to appease Him with a few sacrifices. Where they ought to have served Him with holiness of life and sincerity of heart, they invent empty rituals and observances of no value to try to purchase His favor. And they live all the more carelessly in their own filth, trusting that they can satisfy His demands with their own invented acts of atonement. Finally, where their trust ought to have been fixed in Him, they neglect Him and rest in themselves or in created things. In the end they become entangled in such a mass of errors that the dark fog of their malice chokes

and at last utterly extinguishes the sparks that were dimly shining to show them the glory of God. Yet that seed remains — the belief in some Godhead — a seed that cannot be fully uprooted. But it is so corrupted that it produces only evil fruit. This actually proves my point all the more firmly: that the sense of the divine is naturally engraved in human hearts, since even the reprobate themselves are compelled of necessity to confess it. In comfortable prosperity they mock God cheerfully and talk freely to diminish His power. But the moment any desperation touches them, it rouses them to seek the very same God, and sudden brief prayers burst from them — showing that they were not entirely ignorant of God, but that what should have come out long before was suppressed by obstinacy.

THE .V. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT THE
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Moreover, because the ultimate end of a blessed life rests in the knowledge of God, God has not only planted in human minds that seed of religion we have already spoken of — He has also revealed Himself in the entire fabric of the world, and daily presents Himself so openly that people cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see Him. His essence is indeed incomprehensible, so that His divine majesty far surpasses all human understanding. But He has engraved in all His works certain marks of His glory — marks so clear and plainly visible that even the most dull-witted person has no excuse for ignorance. Therefore the psalmist rightly cries out that God is clothed with light as with a garment — as if saying that God first began to appear in visible form from the moment He displayed His works in the creation of the world, through which, wherever we turn our eyes, He appears glorious. In that same psalm the psalmist fittingly compares the heavens spread out overhead to His royal tent, says He has laid the

beams of His chambers on the waters, makes the clouds His chariot, rides on the wings of the wind, and makes the winds and lightning His swift messengers. And because the glory of His power and wisdom shines most fully above, the heavens are commonly called His palace. Wherever you turn your eyes, there is not one part of the world, however small, where at least some sparkles of His glory do not shine. But this vast and beautiful world — you cannot survey its wide extent in a single glance without being overwhelmed on every side by the boundless force of its brilliance. The author of Hebrews therefore very fittingly calls the ages of the world the visible representation of invisible things, for the orderly structure of the world serves us as a mirror in which we behold the otherwise invisible God. For this reason the psalmist assigns to the heavenly bodies a language understood by all nations — for in them is a testimony of God so evident that it ought not to escape the consideration of any people, however dull. The apostle states this even more plainly by saying that what is necessary to be known about God has been disclosed to all people, since all people without exception thoroughly perceive His invisible attributes — even His eternal power and divine nature — through what He has made.

As for His wonderful wisdom, there are countless proofs of it both in heaven and earth. I do not mean only the more hidden things that require astronomy, natural science, and all of philosophy to explore carefully, but even those things that thrust themselves before everyone's eyes — even the most uneducated person — so that you cannot open your eyes without being a witness to them. Those who have studied or even tasted the liberal arts are greatly helped by them and can look further into the secrets of God's wisdom. Yet no lack of education keeps anyone from seeing

more than enough of God's skilled workmanship in His works to fill him with admiration for the One who made them. For example: to trace the movements of the stars, determine their positions, measure their distances, and note their properties requires skill and careful attention. When these things are thoroughly understood, the providence of God is all the more plainly revealed, and it is fitting that the mind rise higher by this means to behold His glory. But since even uneducated people — even the roughest sort, equipped with nothing but their eyes — cannot be ignorant of the excellence of God's workmanship, which displays itself so openly in this countless yet perfectly ordered and arranged variety, it is clear that there is no person to whom God has not generously opened His wisdom. Likewise, it requires exceptional intelligence to analyze with the skill of Galen the arrangement, the proportions, the beauty, and the function of the human body. Yet by everyone's acknowledgment, the human body in its very appearance presents such intricate construction that its Maker may rightly be judged wonderful.

For this reason, some ancient philosophers were not wrong to call man a little world — for he is a remarkable display of God's power, goodness, and wisdom, and contains within himself enough wonders to occupy our minds completely, if we are willing to take notice of them. This is why, after Paul said that even the blind can feel their way toward God, he immediately adds that God is not to be sought far away — because all people unmistakably feel within themselves the heavenly grace by which they are made alive. But if we need go no further than ourselves to find and take hold of God, what pardon will his laziness deserve who will not stoop to look within himself and find God there? This is also why David, after

briefly celebrating the wonderful name and glory of God that shines gloriously everywhere, immediately cried out, 'What is man, that You are mindful of him?' And again: 'From the mouths of infants and nursing babies You have established strength.' By this he declares not only that in the entire human race there is a mirror of God's works, but that even infants at their mothers' breasts have tongues eloquent enough to proclaim His glory, so that no other speakers are needed. Therefore he does not hesitate to place their mouths in the front line, as a force capable of overcoming the madness of those who in their devilish pride would seek to blot out the name of God. Here also arises what Paul quotes from Aratus — that we are the offspring of God — because by adorning us with such excellence, God has testified that He is our Father. Even pagan poets, by common reasoning and, as it were, by the lessons of experience, called Him the father of men. And truly, no one will willingly submit himself to serve God except one who, having tasted God's fatherly love, is drawn in return to love and worship Him.

And here we see the terrible ingratitude of humanity. People have within themselves a workshop gloriously furnished with countless works of God, a storehouse packed with immeasurable riches. They should burst out in praise of Him, but instead they swell with even greater pride. They experience how wonderfully God works in them in so many different ways. Experience itself teaches them how great a variety of gifts they possess through His generosity. Whether they want to or not, they are forced to recognize that these are signs of His divine nature. Yet they suppress this knowledge deep within themselves. They would not even need to look beyond themselves, if only they would stop arrogantly

claiming as their own what was given from heaven, burying underground what brightly shines in their minds to reveal God. But even today the earth produces many monstrous minds that do not hesitate to abuse the whole seed of divinity sown in human nature and use it to suppress the name of God. How detestable is this madness, that a person who finds God displayed a hundred times in body and soul should use that very excellence as a reason to deny that God exists! They will not say they were made different from animals by mere chance. But they hide behind a mask of "nature," which they treat as the maker of all things, and in this way they push God aside. They see exquisite craftsmanship in every part of their bodies, from mouth and eyes down to their toenails, and yet here too they put nature in God's place. Above all, the swift movements, the remarkable powers, and the rare gifts of the soul point to a divine nature that does not easily let itself be hidden -- unless the Epicureans, like the giant Cyclopes, would boldly use their high position to wage outrageous war against God. Do all the treasures of heavenly wisdom come together just to govern a worm five feet long? And shall the whole universe lack this privilege? First, to agree that there is a certain organic system that corresponds to all the parts of the human body does nothing at all to diminish God's honor. Rather, it displays His glory all the more. Let Epicurus answer me: what random collision of atoms, digesting food and drink in a person, sends part out as waste and part into blood, and brings it about that every member of the body works so diligently at its task -- as if many separate souls were ruling one body by common agreement?

But I am not dealing now with that pigsty of Epicureans. I am speaking rather to those who, given to clever arguments, would twist Aristotle's cold saying by roundabout reasoning both to destroy the immortality of the soul and to rob God of His rights. Because the soul has organic powers, they use this as a pretext to bind the soul to the body so that it cannot survive without the body. Through their praise of nature, they do everything they can to suppress the name of God. But the powers of the soul are far from being limited to the functions that serve the body. For what does it have to do with the body that a person can measure the sky, count the stars, learn the size of each one, discover how far apart they are from one another, and track the speed or slowness and degrees of their courses? I admit that astronomy has practical uses. But my point is simply to show that in this deep exploration of heavenly things, what is at work is not merely a bodily instrument. The soul has functions of its own, separate from the body. I have given one example, from which readers can easily gather the rest. Truly, the remarkable agility of the soul -- by which it surveys both heaven and earth, joins past things with future things, retains in memory things heard long before, and pictures each thing to itself through imagination, along with the ingenuity by which it invents incredible things and gives birth to so many marvelous arts - these are sure signs of a divine nature in humanity. Beyond that, even in sleep the soul does not merely toss and turn, but also grasps many useful ideas, reasons through many matters, and even foresees things to come. What can we say to this, except that the marks of immortality imprinted in human beings cannot be erased? Now what reason could support the idea that a human being should share in divine nature and yet not acknowledge his

Creator? Shall we, by the judgment placed within us, distinguish right from wrong and yet suppose there is no Judge in heaven? Shall some remnant of understanding remain with us even in our sleep, and yet no God be awake governing the world? Shall we be considered the inventors of so many arts and useful things, while God is robbed of His praise -- even though experience plainly teaches that everything we have comes from another source, not from ourselves, and is distributed among us in various ways? As for what some people babble about a secret force that gives life to the world, it is not only weak but also ungodly. They approve of that famous passage from Virgil.

First heaven, and earth, and flowing fields of seas, the shining globe of moon, and Titan's stars -- spirit feeds within, and throughout all the limbs infused mind moves the whole huge mass, and mingles with the vast body. From there come the kinds of men and also of beasts, and lives of flying birds, and strange monsters that the water bears within the marble sea. A fiery liveliness and heavenly origin there is within those seeds. Etc.

As if the world, which was created to display the glory of God, should be its own creator! Elsewhere the same author, following the common opinion of the Greeks and Latins, says: Some say that bees have part of the divine mind and heavenly inspiration. For they also say that God passes through the lands, the bays of the sea, and the deep sky. And from there the flocks and herds, and men, and every kind of wild beast, each at their birth receive their delicate lives. And to that they are all returned at last, all dissolved and given back again. No place there is for death, but living still they fly up to join the number of the stars above, and take their place within the lofty sky.

To this end, where the psalmist recounts how God, when the case seems beyond all hope, suddenly and wondrously rescues people who are in misery and all but lost — whether He protects those wandering in the wilderness from wild animals and leads them back to the road, or supplies food to the hungry and needy, or delivers prisoners from terrible dungeons and iron chains, or brings those in danger of shipwreck safely into harbor, or heals the half-dead from disease, or scorches the earth with heat and drought, or makes it fruitful by the hidden watering of His grace, or raises up the most lowly from the dust, or casts down the noble from their high seat of dignity — by these examples he shows that what people regard as random occurrences of chance are in fact testimonies of God's providence and especially of His fatherly kindness. From this the godly find cause for rejoicing, and the mouths of the wicked and reprobate are stopped. But because most people, corrupted by their errors, are blind in so clear and visible a light, the psalmist cries out that it is a rare and exceptional gift of wisdom to rightly weigh the works of God — works which give no benefit even to those who otherwise seem the most clear-sighted, if they do not truly see them. And truly, however clearly the glory of God shines before them, scarcely one in a hundred is a genuine observer of it. Neither are His power and wisdom hidden in darkness. His power is conspicuously on display when the fierce and seemingly unconquerable arrogance of the wicked is suddenly crushed in a moment — their pride tamed, their strongest fortresses razed, their weapons and armor shattered, their strength broken down, their schemes overturned, and they themselves brought down by their own weight. The bold presumption that exalted itself above the heavens is cast down to the very

depths of the earth. On the other side, the lowly are lifted up from the dust, the needy raised from the dunghill, the oppressed and afflicted pulled out of desperate straits, those in despair are restored to hope, the unarmed carry off victory from the armed, the few from the many, the weak from the strong. His wisdom, for its part, shows itself brilliantly — disposing all things at the most fitting moment, confounding the wisdom of the world however sharp it may be, catching the cunning in their own cunning, and governing all things in the most fitting order.

We see that no long or laborious presentation of arguments is needed to furnish testimonies for the glorious display and proof of God's majesty — for the few examples we have touched show that wherever a man looks, these evidences are so common and ready at hand that they can easily be seen and pointed out. Here again we must note that we are called to a knowledge of God — not the kind that, content with vain speculation, merely floats around in the mind, but the kind that is sound and fruitful when it is rightly received and takes root in the heart. For the Lord is revealed through His powers, and because we feel those powers within us and enjoy their benefits, we must be inwardly moved all the more vividly by such a knowledge than if we were merely imagining a God of whom we had no experience. From this we understand that the right way and proper order for seeking God is not to attempt to penetrate deeply into His essence with presumptuous curiosity — His essence is to be reverently worshipped, not scrupulously dissected — but rather to behold Him in His works, through which He makes Himself near and familiar to us, and in a manner communicates Himself to us. This is what the apostle meant when he said that God is not to be sought far away, since He dwells within ev-

everyone with His most immediate power. Therefore, after David had confessed the unspeakable greatness of God, he moved on to a particular description of His works, declaring that they would display this greatness. We too should give ourselves to this kind of seeking of God — a seeking that holds our minds in wonder and at the same time moves us with genuine, heartfelt feeling. And as Augustine teaches elsewhere, because we cannot fully comprehend God, we must, as it were, faint under the weight of His greatness and turn to look at His works, so that we may be refreshed by His goodness.

To this end also, where the psalmist recounts how God, when the case seems beyond all hope, suddenly and wondrously rescues those in misery who are all but lost — whether He protects wanderers in the wilderness from wild beasts and leads them back to the road, or supplies food to the needy and hungry, or delivers prisoners from terrible dungeons and iron chains, or brings those in danger of shipwreck safely into harbor, or heals the half-dead from illness, or scorches the earth with heat and drought, or makes it fruitful by the hidden watering of His grace, or raises the most lowly from the dust, or casts down the noble from their high seat of dignity — from such examples he concludes that what people regard as random strokes of fortune are in fact testimonies of God's heavenly providence, and especially of His fatherly kindness. From this the godly find cause for rejoicing, and the mouths of the wicked and reprobate are stopped. But because most people, infected with error, are blind in so clear a light, the psalmist cries out that it is a rare and exceptional gift of wisdom to rightly weigh the works of God — works from which those who otherwise seem most clear-sighted gain nothing if they do not truly see. And truly, how-

ever clearly the glory of God shines before them, scarcely one in a hundred genuinely beholds it. Neither are His power and wisdom hidden. His power is conspicuously displayed when the fierce arrogance of the wicked, seemingly unconquerable, is suddenly crushed in a single moment — their pride tamed, their strongest fortresses razed, their weapons and armor shattered, their strength broken down, their schemes overturned, and they themselves brought down by their own weight. The bold presumption that had exalted itself above the heavens is cast to the very depths of the earth. On the other side, the lowly are lifted from the dust, the needy raised from the dunghill, the oppressed and afflicted delivered from desperate distress, the despairing restored to hope, the unarmed carry off victory from the armed, the few from the many, the weak from the strong. His wisdom, for its part, is manifestly brilliant — disposing all things at the fittest moment, confounding the world's wisdom however sharp it may be, catching the cunning in their own cunning, and governing all things in the most fitting order.

We see that no long or laborious gathering of arguments is needed to provide testimonies for the glorious declaration and proof of God's majesty. From these few examples we have touched it is clear that wherever a man looks, these evidences are so common and ready that they can easily be observed and pointed out. Here again it must be noted that we are called to a knowledge of God — not the kind that, content with empty speculation, merely floats about in the mind, but the kind that is sound and fruitful when it is rightly received and takes root in the heart. For the Lord is revealed through His powers, and since we feel those powers working within us and enjoy their benefits, we must be inwardly

moved far more vividly by such a knowledge than if we were imagining a God of whom we have no experience. From this we understand that the right and fitting way to seek God is not to attempt to penetrate deeply into His essence with presumptuous curiosity — for His essence is to be reverently worshipped, not scrupulously picked apart — but rather to behold Him in His works, through which He draws near to us and makes Himself familiar, communicating Himself to us in a manner. This is what the apostle meant when he said that God is not to be sought far away, since He dwells within everyone through His most immediate power. Therefore, after David had briefly confessed God's unspeakable greatness, he went on to rehearse His particular works and declared that they would display that greatness. We too ought to give ourselves to this kind of seeking of God — a seeking that holds our minds in wonder and at the same time moves us with genuine, active feeling. And as Augustine teaches elsewhere, because we cannot fully comprehend God, we must, as it were, faint under the burden of His greatness and turn to look at His works, so that we may be refreshed by His goodness.

Such knowledge also ought not only to move us to worship God but also to awaken us and raise us to hope in the life to come. For when we consider that the examples God gives of both His mercy and His severity are only beginnings, not yet half complete, we must undoubtedly conclude that He is here making a preliminary display of things whose full and open manifestation is deferred to another life. On the other side, when we see the godly being grieved with afflictions by the ungodly, troubled with injuries, oppressed with slanders, and vexed by spite and reproaches — while the wicked flourish, prosper, and enjoy peace and honor, even un-

punished — we must immediately conclude that there must be another life, in which due punishment for wickedness and reward for righteousness are stored up. Moreover, when we observe that the faithful are often disciplined with God's rod, we can be even more certain that the ungodly will not escape His scourges. Augustine said it well: if every sin were openly punished now, it would seem that nothing was reserved for the last judgment. On the other hand, if God openly punished no sin now, it would be believed there was no divine providence at all. We must therefore confess that in every particular work of God — and especially in the full sweep of them all — His powers are displayed as in a painted picture, by which all mankind is invited and drawn to the knowledge of Him, and from knowledge to complete and perfect happiness. But though His powers most brilliantly appear in His works, we only understand what they chiefly point to, how great they are, and for what purpose we ought to consider them when we descend into ourselves and consider the ways in which God reveals His life, wisdom, and power in us, and shows toward us His righteousness, goodness, and merciful kindness. For though David rightly complains that unbelievers are made fools because they do not weigh God's deep counsels in His governance of human affairs, it is also most true, as he says in another place, that the wonderful wisdom of God in this regard surpasses even the hairs of our head. But since this point will be more fully treated in a fitting place later, I pass it over for now.

But however brightly God displays Himself and His immortal kingdom in the mirror of His works, such is our thick dullness that we stand stupidly amazed at such plain testimonies, and they pass before us without profit. How many of us, when we lift our eyes to

heaven or look out across the various regions of the earth, actually direct our minds to the remembrance of the Creator — rather than simply resting in the view of the works themselves without a thought for the workman? And as for those things that happen daily beyond the ordinary course of nature, how many actually think about them as governed by God's providence, rather than being tossed about by the blind randomness of chance? And even if the direction of such things sometimes forces us to the consideration of God — as it must in all people — no sooner have we carelessly formed some vague sense of a divine power than we slide back into the foolish inventions of our own flesh, and with our own vanity corrupt the pure truth of God. In this we differ from one another in that each person privately crafts some particular error of his own. But in this we are all alike, without exception: we all depart from the one true God toward monstrous absurdities. This disease does not only afflict ordinary and unlearned minds — even the most excellent, those endowed with the sharpest understanding, are entangled in it. How plainly has the entire school of the philosophers betrayed their dullness and crude ignorance in this regard? To say nothing of the rest, who are even more foolish. Plato himself, the most devout and sober of them all, wanders vainly in his sphere. What then could happen to the others, when the best of them, who were supposed to give light to the rest, themselves err and stumble so badly? Likewise, though God's governance of human affairs so plainly demonstrates His providence that it cannot be denied, it makes no more impression on people than if they believed all things were tossed about by the random will of Fortune — so great is our inclination to vanity and error. I

speak now entirely of the most excellent minds, not of the common sort, whose madness has wandered infinitely far in profaning the truth of God.

From this comes the immeasurable flood of errors with which the whole world has been filled and overflowed. Each person's mind is to himself a maze, so it is no wonder that different nations have been drawn into different inventions — and not only that, but each individual has fashioned his own private gods. For once rash presumption and willfulness were joined to ignorance and darkness, scarcely a single person has ever been found who did not forge for himself some idol or fantasy in place of God. Just as waters flow from a wide and abundant spring, so from the human mind has flowed an infinite number of gods, as every man strays beyond all proper limits and contrives his own notions about God. I need not here make a catalog of the superstitions with which the world has been entangled — doing so would be endless, and even without a single word from me, so many corruptions sufficiently demonstrate the horrible blindness of the human mind. I pass over the rude and unlearned people. But among the philosophers, who undertook with reason and learning to reach up to heaven — how shameful is their disagreement? The sharper the intellect with which any one of them was equipped, and the more thoroughly he was stocked with learning, the more brilliantly his opinions appeared to be painted in glorious colors. Yet if anyone examines them closely, he will find them to be nothing but vanishing, false colors. The Stoics seemed to themselves to speak very wisely when they taught that from all the parts of nature various names of God can be gathered, while God Himself, being one, is not divided by this. As though we were not already more than enough inclined to

vanity, unless a rich abundance of gods set before us should draw us even more violently into error. Likewise the mystical theology of the Egyptians shows that they all carefully worked to avoid appearing to err without reason. It is possible that at first glance something plausible might have deceived the simple and ignorant. But no mortal has ever invented anything by which religion has not been foully corrupted. And this utterly confused diversity emboldened the Epicureans and other crude despisers of godliness to gradually cast off all sense of God altogether. For when they saw the wisest of all men contending in opposing opinions, they did not hesitate to conclude from their disagreements, and from the foolish or obviously erroneous teachings of each, that men vainly and foolishly torment themselves by searching for a God who does not exist at all. And they felt they could do this without punishment, since it was better to flatly deny that there is any God than to invent uncertain gods and so raise endless controversies. But they reason far too foolishly — or rather cast a smoke screen to hide their ungodliness by pointing to human ignorance, which provides no reason at all to take anything away from God. But since all agree that there is nothing on which the learned and unlearned disagree more completely, the conclusion is that the minds of men are more than dull and blind in heavenly mysteries, erring so badly in seeking out God. Some praise the answer of Simonides, who when King Hieron asked him what God was, asked for a day to think about it. When the next day the king asked the same question, Simonides asked for two days, and kept doubling the number of days — until at last he answered: the more I consider it, the harder the matter seems to me. Even granting that he was wise to withhold his judgment on so dark a matter, it is clear from this

that if men are taught by nature alone, they can know nothing certain, sound, and clear about God, but are left only with confused impulses to worship an unknown God.

We must also hold that all who corrupt pure religion — as all must who follow their own opinions — depart from the one God. They will boast that their intentions are different, but what they intend or what they tell themselves matters little, since the Holy Ghost declares that all who in the darkness of their own mind put devils in the place of God are apostates. For this reason Paul declares that the Ephesians were without God until the Gospel taught them what it meant to worship the true God (Ephesians 2:12). And we should not think this was said of one nation only, since elsewhere he broadly affirms that all people became vain in their imaginations after the majesty of the Creator was displayed to them in the creation of the world (Romans 1:21). Therefore Scripture, to make room for the one true God, condemns as false and lying all the gods that were celebrated among the Gentiles in former times, and leaves no God except on Mount Zion, where the distinctive knowledge of God flourished (Habakkuk 2:18-20; John 4:22). Among the Gentiles, the Samaritans in Christ's time seemed to come closest to true godliness — and yet we hear from Christ's own mouth that they did not know what they worshipped (John 4:22). It follows that they were deceived by empty error. In the end, even those not infected with gross vices or fallen into open idolatry had no true and approved religion grounded on common reason alone. For though a few were not as mad as the common people, Paul's teaching still stands certainly true: the rulers of this age did not understand the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:8). Now if the most excellent have wandered in darkness, what can be

said of the common mass? Therefore it is no wonder that the Holy Ghost rejects as illegitimate all forms of worship devised by human will. For in heavenly mysteries, opinions conceived by the human mind — even when they do not always produce a pile of errors — are always the mother of error. And even if nothing worse comes of it, it is no small fault to worship an unknown God at random — a fault of which all are found guilty by Christ's own words who are not taught by the law what God they should worship. And truly the greatest lawmakers who ever lived went no further than to say that religion should be grounded on common consent. Indeed, even Socrates in Xenophon praised Apollo's answer, in which Apollo told every man to worship gods according to the customs of his country and his own city. But how did mortal men come to possess the authority to determine by their own judgment what far exceeds the world? Or who can rest so fully in the decrees of elders or the common ordinances of peoples as to receive without hesitation a God delivered by human invention? Every man will rather stand by his own judgment than yield to another's will. Since it is therefore far too weak a foundation for godliness to follow either the custom of a city or the consensus of antiquity in the worship of God, it follows that God Himself must testify of Himself from heaven.

In vain, therefore, do so many lamps lit in the edifice of the world shine forth to display the Creator's glory — though their beams fall upon us on every side, they are not sufficient in themselves to bring us into the right way. They do kindle certain sparks, but these are choked before they can spread into any full brightness. Therefore the apostle, in the same place where he calls the ages of the world images of invisible things, adds further that by

faith we understand that they were framed by the word of God (Hebrews 11:3) — meaning that the invisible Godhead is indeed represented by these visible shows, but that we have no eyes to see it truly unless they are enlightened by God's revelation through faith. And where Paul teaches that through the creation of the world what was to be known about God was disclosed, he does not mean a disclosure that can be comprehended by human intelligence. He rather shows that this disclosure goes no further than to leave people without excuse. The same Paul, though in one place he says God is not to be sought far off since He dwells within us, in another place makes clear what that nearness actually accomplishes. 'In past ages,' he says, 'God allowed the nations to walk in their own ways, yet He did not leave Himself without testimony, doing good from heaven, giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling people's hearts with food and gladness' (Acts 17; Acts 14; Acts 13; Acts 16). Yet though the Lord is thus not without witness — sweetly drawing people to the knowledge of Him by His great and manifold generosity — they nevertheless cease not to follow their own ways, that is, their ruinous errors.

But although we lack the natural ability to climb to a pure and clear knowledge of God, yet since the fault lies in our own dullness, all grounds for excuse are stripped from us. We cannot plead ignorance without our own conscience convicting us of laziness and ingratitude. Is it a valid defense for a man to claim he lacked ears to hear the truth, when the very mute creatures proclaim it with loud voices? Or to say he could not see things with his eyes that even creatures without eyes show him? Or to use the weakness of his mind as an excuse, when creatures without reason instruct him? Since all things point us to the right way, we are rightly left without

any excuse for wandering and going astray. But while the fault is to be charged to people themselves for immediately corrupting the seed of the knowledge of God that nature with marvelous skill has sown in their minds — so that it does not grow into good and pure fruit — it is also most true that we are not sufficiently instructed by the plain and simple testimony that the creatures give of God's glory. For as soon as we have gotten, by beholding the world, a small taste of the divine, we turn from the true God and raise up in His place the dreams and fantasies of our own minds. We take the praise of righteousness, wisdom, goodness, and power and scatter it here and there, drawing it away from its true fountain. Moreover, we either darken His daily works or misrepresent them in our estimation, and so rob the works of their glory and the author of His due praise.

¶THE .VI. CHAPTER. THAT, TO AT-
TEYNE TO GOD THE CREATOUR, IT IS
NEDEFULL TO HAUE THE SCRIPTURE
TO BE OUR GUYDE AND MAISTRESSE.



Therefore, although that same brightness which shines in the eyes of all people in heaven and earth is sufficient to strip the wicked of all excuse — and God, in order to leave all mankind without defense, displays His divine majesty to everyone without exception as though painted in His creatures — yet we also need another and better help to rightly direct us to the very Creator of the world. Therefore He has not added the light of His word in vain, so that through it He might be known to salvation. This privilege He has been pleased to grant to us, whom it pleased Him to draw more closely and intimately to Himself. For seeing that the minds of all people are carried about in restless and unsteady motion, after He had chosen the Jews as His special people, He enclosed them as if with fences, so they would not wander off into vanity as others did. And He holds us by the same means in the true knowledge of Himself — rightly so, since without it even those who seem to stand firm in comparison with others would quickly go astray. It is like old men or those with weak or failing

eyesight: if you set a fine book before them, they may perceive that something is written in it but cannot read two words together. But when fitted with spectacles, they begin to read distinctly. So the Scripture, gathering together the knowledge of God in our minds — knowledge that would otherwise be confused — clears away the mist and plainly shows us the true God. This is therefore a singular gift: that for the instruction of His church God uses not only silent teachers but also opens His own holy mouth — not only publishing that there is some God to be worshipped, but also declaring that He Himself is that God — and does not only teach the elect to look toward God but presents Himself to them to be seen. This has been His practice from the beginning toward His church: alongside the general instruction common to all, to also give them His word as a more certain and reliable mark by which to know Him. And there is no doubt that Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the rest of the patriarchs attained by this help that intimate knowledge which set them apart from unbelievers. I am not yet speaking of the special doctrine of faith by which they were enlightened to the hope of eternal life. For in order to pass from death to life, they needed to know God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer — and both of these they obtained through the word. That knowledge which enables us to understand who is the God by whom the world was made and governed came first in order; and then that inward knowledge was added — the knowledge that alone gives life to dead souls — by which God is known not only as Maker of the world and sole author and judge of all things, but also as Redeemer in the person of the Mediator. But since I have not yet come to the fall of the world and the corruption of nature, I will also leave aside the treatment of the remedy. Let readers therefore bear in mind that I am not yet

speaking of the covenant by which God adopted the children of Abraham as His own, nor of that special part of doctrine by which the faithful have always been distinctly separated from the pagan nations — since that doctrine was founded on Christ. I am speaking of how we ought to learn from Scripture that God, who is the Creator of the world, is to be distinguished by certain marks from the whole crowd of false gods. The proper order of the subject will then lead us to the Redeemer. And although we will cite many passages from the New Testament and some from the law and the prophets where Christ is expressly mentioned, all of them will serve this one purpose: to show that God the Creator of the world is revealed to us in Scripture, and that Scripture sets forth what we ought to think of Him, so that we do not wander in search of some uncertain deity.

Whether God made Himself known to the patriarchs through oracles and visions, or instructed them through human intermediaries so that they could pass the knowledge on to their descendants, it is without doubt true that a firm and settled certainty of doctrine was engraved in their hearts — enough to persuade them and give them understanding that what they had learned came from God. For God always provided undeniable assurance of the credibility of His word, which far exceeded mere uncertain opinion. At last, so that the truth might survive through the continuous passing on of doctrine and remain in the world in every age, He was pleased to have those same oracles He had deposited with the fathers enrolled, as it were, in public records. For this purpose the law was published, to which the prophets were afterward added as its interpreters. For although the law served several purposes, as will more fully appear in a fitting place later — and especially since

the chief aim of Moses and all the prophets was to teach the way of reconciliation between God and humanity, for which reason Paul also calls Christ the end of the law — yet, as I say again, Scripture, beyond the specific doctrine of faith and repentance that sets forth Christ the Mediator, does by certain marks and tokens paint out the one true God as the Creator and Governor of the world, so that He may be distinctly known and not numbered among the crowd of false and invented gods. Therefore, although it is fitting for a person to fix his eyes earnestly on the works of God — since he is placed, as it were, in this magnificent theater to behold them — yet he ought above all to bend his ear to the word, that he may profit by it all the more. And therefore it is no wonder that those who are born in darkness grow more and more stubbornly dull, since very few of them willingly submit to be taught by the word of God to keep within proper limits — they rather take pleasure in their own vanity. We must therefore hold this: that for true religion to flourish among us, we must begin with heavenly doctrine. No one can have even the slightest taste of true and sound doctrine unless he has been a student of Scripture. From this obedience springs the beginning of true understanding — that we reverently embrace whatever God is pleased to testify of Himself therein. For not only perfect and complete faith, but also all right knowledge of God springs from obedience. In this regard God by His remarkable providence has made provision for people in every age.

For if we consider how slippery a tendency the human mind has to slide into forgetfulness of God, how readily it falls into every kind of error, and how eagerly it is always inventing new and counterfeit religions, we can see how necessary it was for heavenly doctrine to be committed to writing — so that it would not perish

through forgetfulness, decay through error, or be corrupted by the presumption of men. Since it is therefore clear that God has always employed the help of His word toward all those He was pleased at any time to instruct fruitfully — because He foresaw that His image impressed upon the beautiful form of the world was not sufficiently effective — it follows that we must travel this direct path if we truly desire to arrive at the genuine sight of God. We must, I say, come to His word, where God is well and vividly set out in His works, when those works are weighed not by the distortion of our own judgment but according to the rule of eternal truth. If we depart from that word — as I just said — however fast we run, we will never reach the goal, for we will be running off course. We must think of it this way: the brightness of the face of God, which the apostle says is unapproachable, is to us like a maze from which we cannot find our way out unless we are guided through it by the thread of the word. It is therefore far better to limp along in this path than to sprint down any other. And therefore David, when he teaches that superstitions must be removed from the world so that pure religion may flourish, repeatedly brings in God reigning — by which word he means not the raw power God possesses but the teaching by which God establishes His rightful governance. For errors can never be rooted out of human hearts until the true knowledge of God is planted there.

Therefore the same psalmist, after declaring that the heavens tell the glory of God, that the firmament shows forth the works of His hands, and that the orderly succession of day and night proclaims His majesty, then goes on to speak of His word. 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the precepts of the Lord are right,

rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' For although he also includes the other uses of the law, his general meaning is that, since God calls all nations to Himself in vain through the contemplation of heaven and earth, Scripture is therefore the special school of God's children. Psalm 29 carries the same meaning: after the psalmist has proclaimed God's terrible voice — which in thunder, wind, rain, whirlwinds, and storms shakes the earth, makes mountains tremble, and breaks the cedar trees — he finally goes on to say that God's praises are sung in the sanctuary, because unbelievers are deaf to all God's voices resounding in the air. Similarly in another psalm, after describing the terrifying waves of the sea, he concludes: 'Your testimonies are completely reliable; holiness adorns Your house forever.' From the same understanding came what Christ said to the Samaritan woman: that her people and the rest did not know what they worshipped, while only the Jews worshipped the true God. For since the human mind by its own weakness can in no way reach God unless helped and lifted up by His holy word, it necessarily followed that all people except the Jews wandered in vanity and error, because they sought God without His word.

¶ THE .vii. CHAPTER. BY WHAT TESTIMONY THE SCRIPTURE OUGHTE TO BE ESTABLISHED, THAT IS BY THE WITNESSE OF THE HOLY GOST, THAT THE AUTHORITIE THEROF MAY REMAINE CERTAINE. AND THAT IT IS A WYCKED INUENTION TO SAY THAT THE ER[••]YT THEROF DOETH HANGS VPON THE IUDGEMENTE OF THE CHURCHE.

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Before going further, it is necessary to say something about the authority of Scripture — not only to prepare people's minds to reverence it, but also to remove all doubt about it. Now, when it is an admitted matter that what is set forth there is the word of God, no person of so reckless a boldness, unless stripped of all common sense, would dare to rob credibility from the One who speaks it. But since oracles are no longer given from heaven daily, and Scripture alone remains — wherein it has pleased the Lord to preserve His truth for perpetual record —

Scripture holds full credibility among the faithful only in this: that they believe it has come from heaven just as truly as if they heard the living voice of God speaking in it. This matter is genuinely worthy of thorough treatment and careful consideration. But readers will pardon me if I attend here more to the proportions of the work I have begun than to the full scope the subject demands. Among most people a very harmful error has grown up: that Scripture has only as much authority as the church by common consent has given to it — as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God rested on the pleasure of men. For on this basis they ask us, with great contempt for the Holy Spirit, who can assure us that these Scriptures came from God? Who can certify us that they have come down to our age uncorrupted? Who can persuade us that one book should be reverently received and another excluded from the canon of Scripture, unless the church had appointed a fixed rule for all these things? It depends therefore, they say, on the church's determination, both what reverence is due to Scripture and which books belong in its canon. So these robbers of God's honor, while seeking under the cover of the church's name to introduce an unbridled tyranny, care nothing about what absurdities they entangle themselves and others in, as long as they can force this one thing to be believed among the simple: that the church can do all things. But if this were true, what would become of poor consciences seeking firm assurance of eternal life, if all the promises remaining for it stand and depend solely on the judgment of men? If they received such an answer, would they cease to waver and tremble? Moreover, to what mockery from the ungodly is our faith exposed? Into what suspicion with all men is it cast, if it is believed to rest on nothing more than a borrowed credit given by human favor?

Such babblers are however well silenced by a single word from the apostle. He testifies that the church is built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles. If the doctrine of the prophets and apostles is the foundation of the church, then that same doctrine must have stood in firm certainty before the church began to exist. Nor can they rightly object that although the church takes its beginning from that doctrine, it still remains doubtful what writings are to be counted as those of the prophets and apostles unless the church's judgment declares it. For if the Christian church was from the beginning built on the writings of the prophets and the preaching of the apostles, then wherever that doctrine is found, its proved authority existed before the church — without which the church itself would never have come into being. It is therefore a vain and invented notion that the church has power to judge Scripture, as if the certainty of Scripture were thought to depend on the will of the church. Therefore when the church receives Scripture and seals it with her consenting testimony, she is not making an otherwise doubtful or disputed thing authentic and credible. Rather, because she recognizes it as the truth of her God, she honors it without delay, as her duty of godliness requires. As for their question — how are we to be convinced that Scripture came from God unless we appeal to the decree of the church — this is exactly like asking how we are to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, or sweet from sour. For Scripture gives no less clear evidence of its own truth than white and black things give of their color, or sweet and sour things of their taste.

I know they commonly cite Augustine's saying, where he declares that he would not believe the Gospel except that the authority of the church moved him to it. But how falsely and craftily this

is cited for such a meaning is easy to perceive from the whole course of his writing. He was dealing with the Manichees, who demanded to be believed without contradiction when they boasted they had the truth on their side but could not prove it. And to get their Manichaeus believed, they appealed to the Gospel. Augustine therefore asks them what they would do if they encountered a man who would not even believe the Gospel itself — with what argument would they draw him to their opinion? He then says: I myself would not believe the Gospel, etc., except that the authority of the church moved me to it. He meant that he himself, while still a stranger to the faith, could only be brought to embrace the Gospel as the certain truth of God by being overcome by the authority of the church. And what wonder is it that a man not yet knowing Christ should have regard to men? Augustine therefore is not teaching there that the faith of the godly is grounded on the church's authority, nor does he mean that the certainty of the Gospel depends on it. He simply means that there would be no way for unbelievers to be won to Christ unless the consent of the church drove them to it. The same meaning he plainly confirms a little before in these words: When I praise what I believe and mock what you believe, what do you think we ought to judge or do? We ought to forsake those who first call us to come and learn certain truths and then command us to believe uncertain things. We ought to follow those who require us first to believe what we are not yet able to see, so that being strengthened by believing we may come to understand what we believe — not men now inwardly strengthening and enlightening our minds, but God Himself. These are Augustine's own words, from which every reader may easily gather that the holy man did not intend to make our faith in Scripture de-

pend on the will and judgment of the church. He intended only to show — what we ourselves also acknowledge as true — that those not yet enlightened by the Spirit of God are brought by the reverence they have for the church to a willingness to be taught, so that they find it in their hearts to learn the faith of Christ through the Gospel. In this way the authority of the church serves as an introduction that prepares us to believe the Gospel. For as we see, his intention is that the assurance of the godly rest on a very different foundation. I do not deny that elsewhere he often presses the Manichees with the consent of the whole church when he seeks to prove the Scripture they rejected. This is why he so reproached Faustus for not yielding to the truth of the Gospel — a Gospel so well established, so solidly confirmed, so gloriously renowned, and commended in continuous succession from the apostles' own time. But he never labors to teach that the authority we acknowledge in Scripture depends on the determination or decree of men. He simply brings forward — because it served him greatly in his argument — the universal judgment of the church, in which he had the advantage over his adversaries. For a fuller proof of this, anyone may read his book on the profit of believing, where he will find that the only readiness of belief he commends to us is what gives us an entry and a fitting starting point for inquiry, as he calls it — and yet not that we should rest on bare opinion, but that we should lean on certain and sound truth.

We ought to hold, as I said before, that the authority of this doctrine is not established in us until we are undoubtedly persuaded that God is its author. Therefore the primary proof of Scripture is ordinarily taken from the person of God who speaks in it. The prophets and apostles do not boast of their own sharp wit

or any other quality that procures credibility for speakers. Nor do they stand on reasoned proofs. They simply bring forth the holy name of God, by which they compel the whole world to obedience. Now we need to see how, not by mere probable opinion but by evident truth, it is plain that the name of God is not without cause or deceitfully invoked in this. If we are to provide well for consciences — that they may not be perpetually tossed about by unsteady doubting, that many may not waver and stumble at every small difficulty — this persuasion must be sought at a deeper level than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures: it must come from the secret testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is true that if we were to work by argument, many things could be brought forward to easily prove — if there is a God in heaven — that the law, the prophecies, and the Gospel came from Him. Indeed, even if learned men of deep judgment stood against us and brought the full force of their minds to bear in debate, if they are not so hardened as to be past all shame, they would be compelled to confess that in Scripture there are clear tokens that it is God who speaks therein, so that it evidently appears that the doctrine is from heaven. Shortly we shall see that all the books of Holy Scripture far surpass all other writings of whatever kind. Indeed, if we bring pure eyes and uncorrupted senses to Scripture, we will at once find there the majesty of God, which will overcome all resistance and compel us to obey. But those who by disputation labor to establish the full authority of Scripture are going about it in the wrong way. And truly, although I am not furnished with great skill or eloquence, if I were to contend with the most shameless despisers of God who want to seem clever by undermining the authority of Scripture, I trust it would not be hard to silence their babbling. And if it were prof-

itable to spend effort refuting their objections, I could without great difficulty scatter the boasts they mutter in corners. But though a man might defend the true word of God from the insults of men, that is not yet sufficient to plant in their hearts the assurance that godliness requires. Profane men, because they think religion stands only in opinion, and wanting to believe nothing rashly or lightly, desire to have it proved to them by reason that Moses and the prophets spoke from God. But I answer: the testimony of the Holy Spirit is better than all reason. For as only God is a fitting witness of Himself in His own word, so that word will never find credibility in human hearts until it is sealed by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore necessary that the same Holy Spirit who spoke by the mouth of the prophets enter into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully uttered what God commanded them. This order is fittingly expressed by Isaiah in these words: 'My Spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, or from the mouth of your offspring, or from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, says the Lord, from this time and forevermore.' Some good people are troubled that they do not have a clear proof ready to produce when the wicked without punishment murmur against the word of God — as though the Holy Spirit were not called both a seal and a pledge for precisely this reason: that until He enlightens men's minds, they always waver among many doubts.

Let this therefore stand as a firmly settled truth: those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught rest wholly upon Scripture, and Scripture is to be believed for its own sake and must not be subjected to proofs and arguments. Yet the certainty it gains among us is obtained through the witness of the Holy Spirit. For

though by its own majesty alone it procures reverence, it truly pierces our hearts only when it is sealed there by the Holy Spirit. So being enlightened by His power, we then believe — not by our own judgment or another's — that Scripture is from God. Rather, above all human judgment we hold it as most certainly established, as if we beheld the very majesty of God present there — that by the ministry of men it came to us from the very mouth of God. We do not look for arguments and likelihoods on which to rest our judgment, but we submit our judgment and understanding to it as to something entirely beyond calculation. And not in the way some hastily seize on something unknown that later displeases them when they get to know it better — but because we are firmly assured in our consciences that we hold an invincible truth. And not in the way foolish people surrender their minds to superstitions — but because we undeniably perceive in Scripture the power and breath of divine majesty, by which we are drawn and moved to obey, willingly and knowingly, and yet more effectively and vigorously than any human will or understanding could attain. Therefore God rightly cries out through Isaiah that the prophets with the whole people bear witness to Him, because being taught by the prophecies they believed undoubtedly and without deception or uncertainty that God Himself had spoken. Such therefore is our persuasion — it requires no reasons. Such is our knowledge — it has very good reason behind it, yet it is a reason on which the mind rests more firmly and steadfastly than on any argument. Such is our feeling — it can only proceed from heavenly revelation. I speak now of nothing other than what each of the faithful experiences in himself, except that my words fall far short of a full expression of it. I leave many things unspoken here, as there will be a

fitting place elsewhere to treat this matter more fully. For now, let us simply know that only that faith is true which the Spirit of God seals in our hearts. For the sober and willing learner, this reason alone will be sufficient. Isaiah promises that all the children of the renewed church will be taught by God. In this God graciously extends a singular privilege to His elect alone, whom He separates from all the rest of humanity. For what is the beginning of true doctrine but a ready willingness to hear the voice of God? But God requires to be heard through Moses' mouth, as it is written: 'Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? or, Who will descend into the deep? The word is near you, in your mouth.' If it pleases God to lay up this treasure of understanding for His children, it is no wonder or surprise that in the common mass of people such ignorance and dullness is found. By the common mass I mean even the most excellent among them, until they have been grafted into the body of the church. Moreover, Isaiah, warning that the prophets' doctrine would seem incredible not only to outsiders but even to those Jews who counted themselves among God's household, gives this reason: because the arm of God will not be revealed to all. Therefore, as often as the small number of believers troubles us, let us recall on the other side that none can comprehend the mysteries of God except those to whom it is given.

¶ THE .VIII. CHAPTER. THAT SO
FARRE AS MANS REASON MAY BEARE,
THERE ARE SUFFICIENT PROUES TO
STABLYSHE THE CREDITE OF
SCRIPTURE.



U nless we have this assurance — which is both more excellent and more powerful than any human judgment — it will be useless to try to strengthen the authority of Scripture with arguments, establish it with the church's consent, or confirm it by any other means of defense. For unless this foundation is laid, it still hangs in doubt. On the other hand, when we have received Scripture devoutly, setting it apart from common things and treating it according to its true worth, then these other supports become very fitting helps — which before had little power — to root and fasten its authority firmly in our minds. For it is remarkable how great an establishment of faith grows when we earnestly consider the orderly and well-ordered wisdom of God that appears throughout Scripture, the heavenly character of its teaching everywhere with nothing earthly about it, the beautiful harmony of all its parts with one another, and the other qualities that give to writings their proper majesty. But our hearts are even more fully con-

firmed when we consider how we are, as it were, forcibly carried into admiration of Scripture by the dignity of its subject matter rather than by the beauty of its style. For it was not without the singular providence of God that the great mysteries of the heavenly kingdom are for the most part expressed in a seemingly plain and lowly manner of speech — lest if they had been adorned with more splendid language the wicked could cavil that only the power of eloquence holds sway in them. But when that rough and, in a manner, unpolished simplicity produces greater reverence than any rhetorician's eloquence, what can we conclude but that the holy Scripture possesses a power of truth mightier than anything that any art of words could supply? Not without reason therefore does the apostle make his argument to prove that the faith of the Corinthians was grounded in the power of God rather than in human wisdom — because his preaching among them was delivered not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in plain demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Corinthians 2:4). For truth is then freed from all doubt when, without leaning on outside aids, it is sufficient to sustain itself. How this power belongs uniquely to Scripture is shown by this: of all the writings of men, however artfully composed, none is so able to penetrate our hearts. Read Demosthenes or Cicero, read Plato, Aristotle, or any of their kind — I grant they will marvelously attract, delight, move, and carry you away. But if from them you come to this holy reading of Scripture, whether you intend it or not, it will move your heart so vividly, pierce you so deeply, and settle so thoroughly into your bones that in comparison with the force of this feeling, all the power of those rhetoricians and philosophers will virtually vanish.

From this it is easy to perceive that the Scriptures, which far excel all the gifts and accomplishments of human effort, truly breathe out a certain divinity.

I grant that some of the prophets write in an elegant, clear, and even beautiful style, so that their eloquence yields nothing to pagan writers. By such examples the Holy Spirit was pleased to show that He was not without eloquence, even though in other writers He employed a rougher and plainer style. But whether one reads David, Isaiah, and others who have a flowing and pleasant speech, or Amos the herdsman, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, whose rougher language savors of country plainness — in every one of them the majesty of the Holy Spirit I spoke of is apparent. I am also well aware that Satan, as an imitator of God in many things — the better to creep into simple minds by deceptive resemblance — has craftily spread his wicked errors in rude and barbarous speech, and has often used disjointed phrases under which he might hide his deceptions. But how vain and foul that clever imitation is, all those with even moderate understanding can plainly see. As for holy Scripture, though wicked men labor hard to bite at many things in it, it is full of sentences that no human mind could have conceived. Look through all the prophets — not one will be found who has not far surpassed all human capacity, so that those to whom this doctrine is without taste must be judged to have no power of discernment at all.

Others have treated this argument at length, so at this point it is enough to touch on only a few things that bear most directly on the main point. Besides the things already mentioned, the very antiquity of Scripture carries great weight. For however much Greek writers tell many fables about Egyptian antiquity, no monument of

any religion remains that is not far inferior in age to Moses. And Moses does not devise a new God but sets forth the very same thing that the Israelites had received down through long ages, passed from father to son as though by hand — concerning the everlasting God. For what does he do but labor to call them back to the covenant made with Abraham? If he had brought something never heard of before, he would have had no way to begin. It was necessary that the deliverance from the bondage in which they were held should be something well and commonly known among them, so that the mere mention of it would immediately stir all their minds. It is also probable that they were informed of the number of the four hundred years. Now consider this: if Moses himself, who was already by so great a distance of time earlier than all other writers, traces the origin of his doctrine back to a beginning even more remote from himself — how much more ancient is holy Scripture than all other writings?

Unless perhaps some prefer to believe the Egyptians, who stretch their antiquity to six thousand years before the creation of the world. But since their empty boasting has been universally scorned even by all the pagan writers themselves, there is no reason for me to spend effort refuting it. Josephus, in his work against Appion, produces testimonies worthy of notice from ancient writers, from which it can be gathered that the doctrine contained in the law has been celebrated by the consent of all nations from the earliest ages, even though it was neither read nor truly known. Now, so that the malicious should have no reason for suspicion and the wicked no occasion for objection, God has provided good remedies against both dangers. When Moses rehearses what Jacob had declared by heavenly inspiration almost three hundred years

earlier concerning his own descendants, how does he describe his own tribe? He marks it in the person of Levi with eternal infamy. 'Simeon and Levi are vessels of wickedness. O my soul, do not enter their council; O my glory, do not join their assembly.' He could easily have passed over that stain in silence — both to please his father and to avoid tainting himself and his whole family with a share of the same shame. How can a writer be suspected of fraud who freely publishes by the oracle of the Holy Spirit that the chief ancestor of the family from which he himself was descended was a shameful evildoer, and who neither protected his own honor nor shrank from incurring the anger of all his kinsmen, who would undoubtedly have felt the sting of this? When he likewise rehearses the wicked murmuring of Aaron his own brother and of Miriam his sister — shall we say he spoke from the flesh, or rather that he wrote it in obedience to the Holy Spirit? Moreover, since he himself was the highest in authority, why did he not at least assign the office of the high priesthood to his own sons, rather than appointing them to the lowest place? I touch here only a few things out of many. But in the law itself one will everywhere meet with many arguments powerful enough to give full proof that Moses comes from God as surely as an angel from heaven.

Now all the many and remarkable miracles he recounts serve as so many confirmations of the law he delivered and the doctrine he proclaimed. That he was carried up in a cloud to the mountain; that there he remained for forty days without the company of men; that in the very promulgation of the law his face shone as if wrapped in sunbeams; that lightning flashed all around; that thunders and loud noises were heard throughout the air; that a trumpet sounded, blown by no human mouth; that the entry to the taberna-

cle was hidden from the people's sight by an intervening cloud; that his authority was so miraculously vindicated by the terrible destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all that wicked company; that a rock struck with a rod poured forth a river; that at his prayer manna rained from heaven to feed the people — did not God in all these things commend him from heaven as an undoubted prophet? If anyone objects that I am assuming as settled things that are still in dispute, the objection is easy to answer. For since Moses published all these things before the entire assembly, what room was there to invent them before witnesses who had themselves seen them done? Is it plausible that he would come among them, reproach the people for unbelief, stubbornness, ingratitude, and other sins, and boast that his doctrine was confirmed in their own sight by such miracles — miracles they had in fact never seen?

This too is worth noting: every time Moses recounts a miracle, he also pointedly joins to it things that would have stirred the entire people to cry out against him if there had been even the slightest opportunity. This shows that they were brought to agree with him by no other means than that they were more than sufficiently persuaded by their own experience. But because the matter was too plain for the pagans to deny that miracles were worked by Moses, the father of lies has furnished them another objection: that these things were done by magical arts and sorcery. But what likely evidence do they have to accuse him of sorcery — a man who so thoroughly abhorred such practices that he commanded the stoning of anyone who so much as consulted sorcerers or diviners? Certainly no deceiver practices his tricks without studying to dazzle people's minds in order to gain fame for himself. But what does

Moses do? By crying out that he and his brother Aaron are nothing — that they only carry out what God has appointed — he sufficiently clears himself of all sinister suspicion. Now consider the things themselves: what enchantment could have produced manna raining daily from heaven to feed the people? And if anyone stored more than his due share, was he not taught by the very rotting of it that God was punishing his unbelief? Beyond this, God allowed His servant to be tested by so many great trials that the wicked now can make no progress with their railing against him. For how often did the people boldly and shamelessly rise up in rebellion, or various parties conspire together to try to overthrow God's holy servant — and how could he have deceived their fury with illusions? And the result that followed makes it plain that by this means his doctrine was established to endure to the end of all ages.

Moreover, when Jacob, in his patriarchal blessing, assigned the chief rule to the tribe of Judah — who can deny that this was done by the spirit of prophecy, especially when we weigh how exactly it proved true? Even if we suppose Moses was the first to put it in writing, four hundred years passed after he wrote it before there was any mention of a scepter in the tribe of Judah. When Saul was consecrated king, it seemed the kingdom would rest permanently in the tribe of Benjamin. When David was anointed by Samuel, what reason appeared for the course of royal inheritance to change? Who would have expected a king to come out of the humble household of a shepherd? And when there were seven brothers in that household, who would have said this honor would fall on the youngest? By what means could he have had hope of becoming a king? Can anyone say that this anointing was governed by any human art, effort, or strategy, rather than by the fulfillment of the

heavenly prophecy? Likewise, those things Moses spoke beforehand — though darkly — concerning the Gentiles being adopted into the covenant of God, seeing that they came to pass almost two thousand years later, do they not make it plain that he spoke by divine inspiration? I pass over his other predictions, which so plainly bear the marks of divine revelation that all people of sound mind can clearly perceive it is God who speaks. In short, that one song of Moses alone is a clear mirror in which God openly appears.

But in the other prophets all of this is seen even more plainly. I will select only a few examples, since to gather them all would be too great a labor. When in the time of Isaiah the kingdom of Judah was at peace — indeed when they thought the Chaldeans were a support and defense to them — Isaiah prophesied the destruction of the city and the exile of the people. Admittedly, even this — predicting events long before they happened, events that then seemed false but afterward proved true — might not by itself be taken as a plain enough sign of divine inspiration. But those prophecies he utters concerning their deliverance: where could they have proceeded from but God? He names Cyrus as the man by whom the Chaldeans would be subdued and the people restored to freedom. More than a hundred years passed from the time Isaiah prophesied this to the birth of Cyrus — for Cyrus was born roughly a hundred years after Isaiah's death. No one could then have guessed that there would be any such Cyrus, that he would make war against the Babylonians, bring so mighty an empire under his dominion, and put an end to the exile of the people of Israel. Does not this plain statement, without any ornament of words, make it clearly evident that what Isaiah speaks are the undoubted oracles of God and not human guesses? Again, when Jeremiah, shortly be-

fore the people were carried into exile, fixed the end of the captivity at seventy years and promised return and freedom — must it not be that his tongue was governed by the Spirit of God? What shamelessness would it be to deny that the credibility of the prophets was established by such proofs, especially when the very thing they spoke to make their words believable was in fact fulfilled? 'The former things have come to pass, and new things I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.' I leave aside how Jeremiah and Ezekiel, though far apart from each other, prophesying at the same time, agreed so completely in all their words as if one of them had dictated what the other wrote. What about Daniel? Does he not write prophecies covering six hundred years of events yet to come, and with such precision that it reads as though it were a history of things already done and commonly known? If godly people have reflected well on these things, they will be sufficiently equipped to silence the barking of the wicked. For the plain proof is too clear to be vulnerable to any caviling at all.

I am aware of what some learned men say in private to show their cleverness in attacking the truth of God. They ask who has assured us that what is read under the names of Moses and the prophets was actually written by them. Some are even bold enough to raise the question whether any such Moses ever existed. But if someone were to call in doubt whether there ever was a Plato, an Aristotle, or a Cicero, who would not say that such madness deserved to be corrected with blows? The law of Moses has been preserved in a marvelous manner, more by heavenly providence than by human diligence. And though it lay buried for a short time through the negligence of the priests, since the time that godly

King Josiah found it, it has been continuously in use from age to age, passed through human hands. Nor did Josiah bring it out as an unknown or new thing, but as something that had always been publicly known and whose memory was then still celebrated. The original book itself was appointed to be kept sacredly in the temple, with a copy made to remain with the keepers of the royal records. What had happened was simply that the priests had stopped reading the law according to the old custom, and the people had neglected their accustomed practice of reading it. In fact, scarcely an age passed without the establishment of the law being confirmed and renewed. Did those who had David in their hands not know of Moses? But to speak of them all at once: it is most certain that their writings came down to posterity in no other way than by what I would call a continuous and orderly chain — passed on year by year from parents who had either partly heard them speak, or had learned of them from those who heard them while the memory was still fresh.

As for what they raise from the history of the Maccabees to undermine the credibility of Scripture — nothing could be better suited to establish that credibility than this very history. But let us first clear away the argument they lay, and then turn their own weapon against them. They say that Antiochus commanded all the books to be burned — where then did these copies we now have come from? I ask them in return: in what workshop could they have been produced so quickly? It is evident that as soon as the cruelty ended, the books immediately reappeared — and all godly men who had been raised in this teaching recognized them without any dispute as the very same writings they had known intimately. Indeed, even when all the wicked men seemed to conspire together

to heap insults on the Jews with great contempt, not one of them ever dared to charge them with having falsified or substituted their books. For whatever they may think of the Jewish religion, they still acknowledge Moses as its author. What then do these babblers accomplish except to expose their own perverse stubbornness, while falsely claiming that the books were changed and replaced — books whose sacred antiquity is confirmed by the agreement of all the histories? But to spend no more labor refuting such empty quibbles: let us rather consider here how great was God's care in preserving His word. Beyond all human hope He saved it from the outrage of the most cruel tyrant, as from a present fire. He endowed the godly priests and others with such steadfastness that they did not hesitate to redeem this book at the cost of their lives if necessary, and to carry it safely down to future generations. He foiled the thorough searches of so many governors and soldiers. Who can fail to acknowledge the remarkable and miraculous work of God, that these sacred writings — which the wicked truly believed to be utterly destroyed — came back immediately in full, and with even greater honor? For they were shortly after translated into Greek, to be published throughout the world. And the miraculous work appeared not only in this — that God preserved the records of His covenant from the bloody decrees of Antiochus — but also in that amid the endless miseries by which the whole Jewish nation was at times worn down to a small remnant, and finally all but brought to utter destruction, they still remained safe and intact. The Hebrew language lay not only neglected but almost unknown. Had it not been God's pleasure to provide for His religion, it would have perished entirely. How far the Jews after their return from exile had drifted from the natural use of their mother

tongue is evident from the prophets of that era — a fact worth noting, since by this comparison the antiquity of the law and the prophets becomes all the more plainly visible. And by whom has God preserved for us the saving doctrine contained in the law and the prophets, so that Christ might be openly revealed in His appointed time? By the most bitter enemies of Christ — the Jews — whom Augustine rightly called the librarians of the Christian church, because they have supplied us with what they themselves have no use to read.

Now if we come to the New Testament, how sound are the pillars on which its truth stands? The three Evangelists write their history in plain and simple language. Many proud people despise that simplicity because they pay no attention to the chief points of doctrine in it — by which it would be easy to gather that they are treating of heavenly mysteries beyond human capacity. Surely anyone with a single drop of honest humility will feel shame if they read the first chapter of Luke. The sermons of Christ, briefly set forth by these three Evangelists, easily deliver their writings from all contempt. But John, thundering from on high, overthrows the stubbornness of those he cannot compel to faith more forcefully than any thunderbolt. Let all these sharp-nosed critics who take great pleasure in shaking the reverence of Scripture out of their own and others' hearts come forward and read John's Gospel. Whether they want to or not, they will find a thousand sentences there that will at least stir their sluggishness — indeed that will brand their consciences with a mark horrible enough to check their laughter. The same must be said of Peter and Paul: though the great majority are blind to their writings, the very heavenly majesty in them holds all readers bound and tied fast. This one

thing alone sufficiently lifts their doctrine above the world: Matthew, previously given over entirely to the profit of his money table; Peter and John, raised in their fishing boats — all unlearned men who had learned nothing in any human school to deliver to others. Paul, converted from being not merely a declared enemy of Christ but a cruel and bloody one, shows by his sudden and unexpected transformation that he was compelled by heavenly authority to defend the very doctrine he had previously fought against. Now let these mockers deny that the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles, or discredit the history — the truth itself still cries out openly that they were taught by the Holy Spirit: people who had previously been despised as common and obscure suddenly began to treat of heavenly mysteries with such extraordinary power.

There are further many very good reasons why the agreement of the church should not be treated as worthless. It is no small thing that since Scripture was first published, the minds of so many generations have constantly agreed to submit to it. And that however Satan with all the world has labored by remarkable means to suppress it, overthrow it, or blot it entirely from human memory, it has still, like a palm tree, risen above all opposition and remained unconquerable. For there has scarcely been a sophist or rhetorician of above-average ability in earlier times who did not bring his full force against this Scripture — yet they all accomplished nothing. The whole power of the earth has armed itself to destroy it, and yet all their efforts have dissolved like smoke. Could it have resisted such mighty assaults from every side if it had had no defense but from men? Rather, the very fact that through all the efforts of men striving against it, it has still risen by its own power — this proves that it came from God Himself. Beyond that, it is not

one city alone, nor one nation only, that has agreed to receive and embrace it. As far as the world extends in length and breadth, Scripture has attained its authority through a kind of holy agreement among diverse nations that in everything else are in disagreement. And since the agreement of minds so diverse and disagreeing in nearly everything else ought to move us strongly — precisely because it is evident that it could not have come about except through the working of the divine majesty — no small weight is added when we behold the godly character of those who so agree. I mean not all who have professed the faith, but only those whom God was pleased to use as lights in His church.

Now with what confidence of mind ought we to submit to that doctrine which we see established and witnessed with the blood of so many holy men? When they had once received it, they did not hesitate to die for it boldly and without fear — yes, with great joy. How then should it be that we, having it delivered to us with so firm a pledge, should not receive it with certain and unshakeable conviction? It is therefore no small confirmation of Scripture that it has been sealed with the blood of so many witnesses — especially when we consider that they suffered death to bear witness to their faith, and not from some frantic disorder of mind, as deluded spirits sometimes do, but with a firm and constant yet sober zeal for God. There are other reasons, neither few nor weak, by which Scripture not only has its dignity and majesty established in godly hearts but also nobly defended against the subtleties of objectors. Yet by themselves these are not sufficient to produce firm and settled credibility, until the heavenly Father, revealing His majesty therein, brings all reverence for it beyond all controversy. Therefore Scripture will be sufficient for a saving knowledge of

God only when its certainty is grounded in the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. The testimonies of men that serve to confirm it will then not be useless — if, as secondary supports for our weakness, they follow that first and highest testimony. But those who would have unbelievers persuaded by argument that Scripture is the word of God are acting foolishly, since Scripture can only be known for what it is by faith. Therefore Augustine rightly warns that godliness and peace of mind must come first, before a person can understand anything of such great matters.

¶THE .IX. CHAPTER. ¶THAT THOSE
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Those who forsake Scripture and imagine some other way to reach God should be thought of as driven not so much by error as by madness. For in recent times there have arisen certain unstable men who, with great presumption claiming to be taught by the Spirit, both abandon all reading themselves and mock the simplicity of those who still follow what they call the dead and killing letter. But I would gladly have these men tell me what spirit it is that carries them so high that they dare to despise the teaching of Scripture as childish and elementary. If they say it is the Spirit of Christ, this carelessness deserves only laughter. I think they will grant that the apostles of Christ and the other faithful in the early church were enlightened by no other Spirit. But not one of them learned from that Spirit to despise the word of God — on the contrary, each was moved to greater reverence for it, as their writings most plainly show. And this is exactly what Isaiah foretold. For when he says, 'My Spirit that is upon you, and My

words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, or from the mouth of your offspring, or from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, says the Lord, from this time and forevermore' — he is not binding the Old Testament people to the outward doctrine as though they were set to learn the alphabet. Rather he is teaching that this will be the true and perfect blessing of the new church under the reign of Christ: to be led no less by the voice of God than by the Spirit of God. From this we gather that these wicked men, with sacrilegious impiety, tear apart what the prophet has joined with an unbreakable bond. Moreover, Paul, though caught up to the third heaven, did not cease to advance in the doctrine of the law and the prophets — going so far as to urge Timothy, a teacher of singular excellence, to give himself to reading. And worthy of remembrance is the commendation with which Paul speaks of Scripture, saying that it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped. How devilish a madness it is to pretend that the usefulness of Scripture is only temporary and passes away, when it in fact guides the children of God to the very end! Again, I would have these men answer me this: whether they have received a different Spirit from the one the Lord promised His disciples. Mad as they are, I do not think their madness has gone so far that they would dare to boast of this. But what kind of Spirit did He speak of in His promise? The Spirit who would not speak of Himself, but would bring to their minds the very things He the Lord had already taught by His word. It is therefore not the office of the Spirit promised to us to invent new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new kind of doctrine that

would lead us away from the received teaching of the Gospel — but to seal in our minds that very same doctrine which the Gospel commends to us.

From this we plainly understand that we ought to apply ourselves diligently to the reading and hearing of Scripture if we wish to take any benefit from the Spirit of God. So also Peter praises the diligence of those who attend carefully to the doctrine of the prophets — which might seem to have given way after the light of the Gospel arose. On the other side, if any spirit, abandoning the wisdom of God's word, thrusts upon us a different doctrine, that spirit ought rightly to be suspected of vanity and deception. For consider: when Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, how would the Holy Spirit have any standing with us if He were not distinguished by some reliable mark? And truly He has been plainly pointed out to us by the word of the Lord — but these miserable men willfully choose to err to their own destruction, seeking a spirit from themselves rather than from God. But they object: is it not dishonoring the Spirit of God, to whom all things should submit, to make Him subject to Scripture? As if it were a dishonor to the Holy Spirit to be consistent with Himself everywhere, to agree with Himself in all things, and to vary nowhere. If the Spirit were to be tested by the standard of men, or angels, or any other rule, then one might say He was being brought into subjection or bondage, if you will. But when He is compared with Himself, when He is considered in Himself, who can say that any wrong is done to Him? He is brought to trial in this way, yes — but by a trial He Himself was pleased to use to establish His own majesty. It ought to satisfy us as soon as He enters into us. But lest the spirit of Satan should creep in under His name, God wills us to know the

Holy Spirit by that image of Himself which He has impressed in the Scriptures. He is the author of the Scriptures — He cannot be different from or contrary to Himself. He must therefore remain as He has revealed Himself therein. This is no dishonor to Him — unless we count it honorable to be inconsistent and unlike oneself.

When they complain that we rest on the letter that kills, they are suffering the consequences of their own contempt for Scripture. For it is plain enough that Paul there contends against the false apostles who commended the law without Christ, drawing the people away from the blessing of the new covenant — in which the Lord promises that He will engrave His law within the hearts of the faithful. The letter is therefore dead, and the law of the Lord kills its readers, when it is separated from the grace of Christ and, not touching the heart, only sounds in the ears. But when it is effectively written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, when it presents Christ to us — then it is the word of life, converting souls, giving wisdom to the simple. In that same passage the apostle also calls his preaching the ministry of the Holy Spirit — meaning that the Holy Spirit is so firmly joined to the truth He has expressed in the Scriptures that He puts forth and displays His power only when Scripture receives its due reverence and honor. And this does not contradict what I said earlier — that the word itself is not sufficiently confirmed for us unless it is sealed by the witness of the Holy Spirit. For the Lord has joined the certainty of His word and of His Spirit together with a kind of mutual bond, so that a settled reverence for the word takes hold in our minds when the Holy Spirit shines upon us to let us behold in it the face of God. And on the other side, we receive the Holy Spirit without any fear of being deceived when we recognize Him in His own image — that is, in

His word. This is how it stands without doubt: God did not bring His word into the world for a momentary display, intending to withdraw it as soon as the Spirit came. Rather, He afterward sent the same Spirit by whose power He had distributed His word, to complete His work by effectively confirming that word. In this way Christ opened the minds of the two disciples on the road — not so that they might throw away the Scriptures and become wise on their own, but so that they might understand the Scriptures. Likewise, when Paul urges the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit, he does not carry them off into empty speculations without the word. He immediately adds that prophecies must not be despised — by which he undoubtedly means that the light of the Spirit is extinguished as soon as prophecies come to be despised. What have these arrogant, Spirit-ravished men to say to all this — those who consider their highest illumination to consist in carelessly dismissing and saying farewell to the word of God, while boldly and rashly seizing hold of everything they have dreamed up? A very different sobriety becomes the children of God. They see that without the Spirit of God they are empty of all light of truth — and they also know that the word is the instrument by which the Lord distributes the light of His Spirit to the faithful. For they know no other Spirit but the one who dwelt and spoke in the apostles, by whose words they are continually called to the hearing of the word.

CHAPTER 10: THAT THE SCRIPTURE, TO CORRECT ALL SUPERSTITION, DOES IN COMPARISON SET THE TRUE GOD AGAINST ALL THE GODS OF THE GENTILES, RECKONING HIM AS NONE OF THEM



Since we have shown that the knowledge of God set forth in the fabric of the world and all its creatures — though fairly plain — is declared even more familiarly and plainly in the word, it is now good to consider whether the Lord reveals Himself in Scripture as He first chose to be represented in His works. But for the present I will be content only to point this out, so that godly minds, being warned, may know what above all to seek in Scripture concerning God, and may be directed to one fixed goal in their seeking. I do not yet address the special covenant by which God separated the line of Abraham from the other nations. For even then He showed Himself as Redeemer, receiving as His children by free adoption those who had been enemies. We are still treating of that knowledge which rests in the creation of the world and does not yet ascend to Christ the Mediator. And though it will shortly be appropriate to cite certain passages from the New

Testament — since even from it both the power of God the Creator and His providence in sustaining the original creation are confirmed — I warn readers beforehand of my present purpose, so that they do not go beyond the appointed bounds. For now let it suffice to learn how God the Maker of heaven and earth governs the world He has created. Everywhere His fatherly generosity and His ready will to do good are celebrated, and examples of His severity are also recounted, showing Him to be a righteous judge of wicked deeds — especially when His patience produces no effect on the obstinate.

In certain places more explicit descriptions are set forth, in which His nature is portrayed for us as in an image. For in the place where Moses describes it, his intention seems to have been to briefly sum up all that it is proper for people to understand about God. 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin — but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' Here let us note that His eternity and self-existence are expressed in the twice-repeated use of that honored name. Then His attributes are rehearsed — describing not what He is in respect to Himself, but what He is in relation to us — so that this knowledge of Him might rest in a living experience rather than in an empty and lofty speculation. Here we hear recited those very qualities we noted shining in heaven and earth: clemency, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment, and truth. For power and might are contained in the name Elohim, God. With these same descriptive names the prophets set forth God whenever

they intend to fully portray His holy name. But since I would not heap up too many examples, let one psalm for now suffice us — one in which the sum of all His virtues is so exactly enumerated that nothing seems to be left out. And yet nothing is rehearsed there that we cannot also behold in His creatures. So clearly do we perceive from experience that God is such as He declares Himself to be in His word. In Jeremiah, where God declares what He would have us know of Him, He gives a description not quite so full but pointing to the same effect: 'Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.' Surely these three things are necessary for us to know: mercy, in which alone all our salvation consists; judgment, which is daily executed on evil-doers and is prepared in even more terrible form for them leading to eternal destruction; and righteousness, by which the faithful are preserved and tenderly cared for. When you have grasped these things, the prophecy says you have sufficient grounds to glory in God. And yet His truth, power, holiness, and goodness are not omitted here. For how could the knowledge of His justice, mercy, and judgment here required stand firm unless it rested on His unchangeable truth? And how could we believe He governs the earth with justice and judgment without understanding His power? And from where does His mercy come but from His goodness? If then all His ways are mercy, judgment, and justice, in them His holiness must also be seen. And the knowledge of God set forth for us in Scripture aims at no other end than the knowledge imprinted in His creatures: first, to move us to fear of God, and then to trust in

Him — so that we may learn first to honor Him with pure integrity of life and sincere obedience, and then to rest wholly on His goodness.

But here I intend to gather the main lines of general doctrine. First, let readers note that Scripture, in order to direct us to the true God, explicitly excludes and dismisses all the gods of the Gentiles — because religion has been corrupted in nearly every age. It is true that the name of one God was universally known and celebrated. Even those who worshipped a multitude of gods, whenever they spoke according to the natural sense, would simply use the singular name of God, as if content with one alone. Justin Martyr wisely observed this, writing a book specifically on the Monarchy of God, in which by many testimonies he shows that the belief in one God is engraved in the hearts of all people. Tertullian proves the same from common speech. But since all without exception are either drawn or have fallen into false inventions by their own vanity, and their thinking has thereby become empty, whatever they naturally understood about the existence of one God served only to leave them without excuse. For even the wisest among them plainly show the wandering error of their minds when they wish for some god to assist them and so call upon uncertain gods in their prayers. Moreover, in imagining God to have many forms — though they thought somewhat less absurdly than the common people did about Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, Minerva, and others — they were still not free from the deceits of Satan. As we have already said elsewhere, whatever clever evasions the philosophers devised, they cannot clear themselves of rebellion against God — they all corrupted His truth. For this reason,

Habakkuk, after condemning all idols, commands the faithful to seek God in His own temple — that they should not admit Him to be other than as He has revealed Himself in His word.

CHAPTER 11: THAT IT IS UNLAWFUL TO ATTRIBUTE TO GOD A VISIBLE FORM, AND THAT GENERALLY THEY FORSAKE GOD, SO MANY AS DO ERECT TO THEMSELVES ANY IMAGES



But as Scripture, accommodating itself to the limited understanding of people, is accustomed to speak in the common manner — so when it intends to distinguish the true God from false gods, it chiefly compares Him with idols. This is not because it approves of the more refined and subtle inventions the philosophers teach, but in order to expose more plainly the foolishness of the world — indeed their very madness — in seeking God while clinging to their own imaginations. Therefore that excluding statement we so often hear sweeps away every kind of deity that people frame for themselves by their own opinion, because God Himself is the only fitting witness of Himself. In the meantime, since this crude blindness has taken hold of the whole world — this craving for visible forms of God, and the consequent fashioning of gods from wood, stone, gold, silver, and other dead and perishable materials — we must hold this as a firm principle: the glory of God is corrupted with wicked falsehood every time any

shape is invented to represent Him. Therefore, in the law, after God had claimed the glory of His divinity for Himself alone — intending to teach us what forms of worship He approves or rejects — He immediately adds: 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness.' In these words He restricts our freedom, so that we do not attempt to represent Him in any visible form. There He briefly lists all the forms through which superstition had long before begun to replace His truth with falsehood. We know that the Persians worshipped the sun — indeed, as many stars as foolish nations saw in the sky, so many gods they invented. Scarcely any living creature was not, among the Egyptians, a figure of God. The Greeks were thought to be wiser than the rest, because they worshipped God in human form. But God does not compare images with one another, as though some were more and others less suitable for use. Without any exception He rejects all images, pictures, and other signs by which the superstitious thought to bring God near to them.

This is easy to gather from the reasons He attaches to the prohibition. First, consider Moses: 'Remember that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form — there was only a voice. Therefore watch yourselves carefully, so that you do not act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves in the form of any figure...' We see how openly God sets His voice against all counterfeit forms, so that we may know that whoever desires to have a visible shape of God has forsaken God. Of the prophets, Isaiah alone will suffice — he speaks often and at length on this subject — to teach that the majesty of God is defiled by unworthy and foolish imitation when He, who has no body, is likened to bodily material; He who is in-

visible, to a visible image; He who is Spirit, to a lifeless thing; He who is incomprehensible, to a small lump of wood, stone, or gold. Paul reasons similarly: 'Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.' From this it is clear that whatever images are erected or pictures painted to express the form of God simply displease Him as insults to His majesty. And what wonder is it if the Holy Spirit thunders out these declarations from heaven, when He even compels the wretched and blind idolaters themselves to confess this on earth? It is well known how Seneca complained, as Augustine records it. 'They dedicate to the holy, immortal, and inviolable gods,' he says, 'the most base and vile material, and clothe them in the shapes of men and beasts — some of them a mixture of man and woman, and some with bodies of various combined forms — and these they call gods, which if they were to come to life and be met on the road would be counted as monsters.' From this it is also plain how foolish an evasion it is when defenders of images claim that the Jews were forbidden images because they were prone to superstition — as if something that God grounds in His eternal being and the permanent order of nature applied to only one nation. And Paul spoke not to Jews but to Athenians when he refuted their error of fashioning a bodily form for God.

God did at times grant tokens of His presence — showing Himself so that He was said to be seen face to face — yet every such sign He ever gave was carefully suited to teach, and at the same time plainly warned people of an essence beyond all comprehension. For the cloud, smoke, and flame — though they were tokens of the heavenly glory — served as it were as a bridle to re-

strain people's minds from attempting to press any further. For this reason, not even Moses himself, to whom God disclosed Himself most intimately compared to others, obtained what he asked to see — that face — but received this answer: no man is able to endure so great a brightness. The Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, but since He immediately vanished, who does not see that by that token of so brief a moment the faithful are reminded that they ought to believe Him to be an invisible Spirit — that being satisfied with His power and grace, they should fashion no outward image of Him? That God sometimes appeared in human form was a foreshadowing of the revelation that was to be made of Him in Christ. It was therefore not lawful for the Jews to abuse this precedent to set up for themselves a visible representation of the Godhead in human form. The mercy seat, through which God displayed the presence of His power during the age of the law, was also constructed in such a way as to teach that the best contemplation of the Godhead is one in which the human mind is carried beyond itself in wonder at it. For the cherubim covered it with their outstretched wings, the veil concealed it, and the place itself, set far within, kept it sufficiently hidden. It is therefore very clear that those who seek to defend images of God and the saints by citing these cherubim are very confused. For what, I ask, did these figures mean but to show that images are not fit to represent the mysteries of God? They were made precisely in order to hide the mercy seat with their wings — not only to keep people's eyes but all their senses from beholding God, and so to restrain their reckless boldness. This is also the meaning of what the prophets described when the Seraphim were shown to them in vision with covered faces — signifying that so great is the brightness

of God's glory that even the angels are kept from looking directly at it, and the small sparks of that glory reflected in the angels are withdrawn from our eyes. And yet those who judge rightly acknowledge that the cherubim we have just spoken of belonged only to the elementary and childish manner of instruction used in the old covenant. To draw them as a precedent for our own age is an absurdity. That childish stage — if I may call it so — is past, for which such elementary forms were appointed. It is greatly shameful that pagan writers are better interpreters of the law of God than the Papists are. Juvenal taunts the Jews, as if in mockery, for honoring white clouds and the deity of the sky. I grant he speaks perversely and wickedly — yet he says something more true in saying that they have no image of God among them than the Papists do who babble that they had a visible image of God. And when that people with a certain headlong eagerness repeatedly broke out in pursuit of idols — bursting out like waters from a great rushing spring with violent force — let us learn from this rather how great is our nature's inclination toward idolatry. Let us not cast upon the Jews the blame for a fault common to all, while we ourselves sleep a deadly sleep under sin's vain allurements.

To the same point serves this passage: 'The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands.' For the prophet draws from the very material itself the conclusion that those with a golden or silver image are no gods — taking it as an acknowledged truth that whatever we conceive of God from our own minds is a foolish fiction. He names gold and silver rather than clay or stone, so that beauty or price should not lend any reverence to idols. But his conclusion is general: nothing is more impermissible than making gods out of dead material. And all the while he dwells on

this point: that people are swept away by a mad recklessness — they who carry in themselves only a borrowed breath ready to vanish at any moment, and yet dare to give the honor due to God to idols. A person must acknowledge that he is himself a creature of a day's duration, and yet he wants a piece of metal to be counted God — a piece of metal to which he himself gave the beginning of being a god. For where did idols originate but in the will of men? The pagan poet aptly taunts them with this: 'I was once a fig tree log, a block that served no purpose. The workman hesitated as to what to make of me — a stool to sit on, or a god Priapus. At last he decided it was better to make a god of me.'

So a frail earthly creature who breathes out his own life practically moment by moment shall by his workmanship convey the name and honor of God to a lifeless block. But since Epicurus, with mocking laughter, cared nothing for religion, let us leave aside the taunts of him and his kind, and let the rebuke of the prophet pierce us — or rather run us through — where he says that those who with the very same piece of wood both make a fire to warm themselves, heat the oven to bake bread, roast or boil their meat, and then fashion a god before which they fall down in humble prayer, have minds no better than brutes. So in another place the prophet does not only charge them under the law but also reproaches them for not having learned from the foundations of the earth — that nothing is more absurd than to reduce God, who is above all measure and comprehension, to the measure of five feet. And yet this very monstrosity, which plainly contradicts the order of nature, custom makes appear natural to men. We must also bear in mind that superstitions are commonly rebuked in Scripture with the expression that they are 'the works of human hands' — lacking the authority of

God. This makes it certain that all forms of worship that people invent for themselves are detestable. The psalmist amplifies the madness of those who have been given understanding precisely so that they might know that all things are moved by God's power alone — and yet they pray for help to things dead and senseless. But because the corruption of nature drives both all nations and every individual to such great madness, the Holy Spirit in the end thunders a terrible curse against them, saying: 'Those who make them become like them, and so do all who trust in them.' It is also to be noted that a painted likeness is forbidden no less than a carved image — which refutes the empty cleverness of the Greeks, who think they are fully excused if they do not carve a god, while in paintings they behave more recklessly than any other nations. But the Lord forbids an image of Himself not only to be made by a sculptor but to be counterfeited by any craftsman, since such counterfeiting is wicked and dishonoring to His majesty.

I know that among ordinary people the saying is almost universally heard that images are the books of the unlearned. Gregory said so, but the Spirit of God declares otherwise — and had Gregory been taught in that school, he would never have said it. For since Jeremiah says plainly that an idol is a teaching of emptiness, and Habakkuk teaches that the molten image is a teacher of lies, a general conclusion must be drawn: whatever people learn about God from images is vain and false. If someone objects that the prophets only reprove those who misused images for wicked superstition — I grant that is true. But I add further what all can easily see: they condemn outright the very thing which the Papists take as an established principle — that images serve as books. For the prophets set images against God as things directly contrary

and wholly incompatible. This comparison is made, I say, in the passages I have cited. Since there is but one true God whom the Jews worshipped, it is absurd and false to fashion visible shapes to represent God — and those who seek the knowledge of God through such means are miserably deceived. Finally, if it were not true that images produce a deceptive and corrupt knowledge of God, the prophets would not have condemned it so broadly. At least this much I gain: when I show that what men attempt by representing God in images is vanity and falsehood, I do nothing but repeat word for word what the prophets taught.

Let what Lactantius and Eusebius have written on this matter be read — men who do not hesitate to take it as certain that all those of whom images exist were mortal. Likewise Augustine, who without hesitation declares it unlawful not only to worship images but even to set them up for God. And yet he says nothing other than what was decreed many years earlier by the Council of Elvira, of which this is the thirty-sixth chapter: 'It is ordained that there be no pictures in the church, and that what is honored and worshipped be not painted on the walls.' But most notable is what Augustine elsewhere cites from Varro, and confirms with his own agreement: that those who first introduced images of the gods both removed the fear of God and introduced error. If Varro alone had said this, perhaps it would carry little weight. Yet we ought rightly to be ashamed that a pagan man groping in darkness came to this light — to see that bodily images are unfit for the majesty of God because they diminish the fear of God and increase error among people. The facts themselves bear witness that this was spoken no less truly than wisely. But Augustine, having borrowed it from Varro, brings it forward as his own conviction. First he warns that

the original errors into which people fell concerning God did not begin with images — but were increased by them as by the addition of new fuel. Second, he explains that the fear of God is diminished — or rather entirely destroyed — by images, because His majesty can easily come to be despised through the foolishness and the absurd, ridiculous counterfeiting of images. This second point I wish to God we did not find so true by experience. Whoever therefore desires to be rightly taught should learn elsewhere than from images what is proper to know about God.

Therefore if the Papists have any shame left, let them no longer use the excuse that images are the books of the unlearned — an excuse so openly refuted by many testimonies of Scripture. And even if I granted them this much, it would do little to defend their idols. What monstrosities they trust as substitutes for God is well known. The pictures and images they dedicate to the saints — what are they but examples of the most extreme immodesty and lewdness, such that anyone who modeled himself after them would deserve to be beaten? Brothel houses can show their women more modestly and soberly dressed than the temples of the Papists show the images of those they want called virgins. They dress the martyrs just as indecently. Let them at least fashion their idols to some honest show of modesty, so that their lie about them being books of holiness might have at least some color to it. But even if that were the case, we would still answer that this is not the right way to instruct God's faithful people in holy places — people whom God wills to be taught there by very different doctrine than by such trifles. God commanded that a common doctrine be set forth in churches for all people through the preaching of His word and the administration of His holy sacraments. Those who cast their eyes

about to look at images are showing that they have no very attentive mind for this. But whom do the Papists call unlearned laypeople too ignorant to be taught by anything but images? Even those whom the Lord acknowledges as His disciples, to whom He is pleased to reveal heavenly wisdom, and whom He wills to be instructed in the wholesome mysteries of His kingdom. I grant indeed, as things stand, that there are many today who cannot get along without such books. But from what does that dullness come, I ask, but from the fact that they have been robbed of the doctrine that alone was fitted to instruct them? For the only reason those who had care of the churches abandoned their duty of teaching to idols is that they themselves were mute. Paul testifies that Christ is, in the true preaching of the Gospel, painted out and virtually crucified before our eyes (Galatians 3:1). To what purpose then would it be to set up in churches so many crosses of wood, stone, silver, and gold, if this were faithfully and thoroughly impressed on the people's minds: that Christ died to bear our curse on the cross, to cleanse our sins by the sacrifice of His body and wash them away with His blood, and finally to reconcile us to God the Father? From this one truth they could learn more than from a thousand crosses of wood or stone. For it is likely the greedy have their eyes and minds far more fixed on golden and silver crosses than on any words of God.

As for the origin of idols, there is a widespread belief — taken from the book of Wisdom — that those who gave divine honors to the dead and superstitiously worshipped their memory were the first to introduce them. I grant that this evil custom is very ancient, and I do not deny that it was the spark that kindled the rage of men toward idolatry, causing it to burn all the more fiercely. Yet I

do not grant that this was the original source of the evil. For it is clear from Moses that images were used before this practice of dedicating images to the dead — a practice so often mentioned by pagan writers — had come into common use. When Moses recounts that Rachel stole her father's idols, he speaks of it as a familiar occurrence. From this we may gather that the human mind is, as I may call it, a perpetual factory of idols. After the great flood there was, as it were, a fresh beginning of the world — and yet few years had passed before people, following their own desires, invented gods for themselves. It is likely that while the holy patriarch was still alive, his children's children were already given to idolatry — so that to his bitter grief he saw the earth defiled with idols, whose corruption the Lord had only recently purged with so terrible a judgment. For Terah and Nahor were worshippers of false gods even before the birth of Abraham, as Joshua testifies. If the line of Shem so quickly went astray, what should we expect of the descendants of Ham, who were already cursed in their father? The human mind, being full of pride and rash boldness, presumes to imagine God according to its own ideas. And being taken over by dullness — indeed, overwhelmed by gross ignorance — it conceives vanity and an empty fantasy instead of God. To these evils is added a further mischief: a person then attempts to express in a physical form the kind of God he has inwardly conceived. Thus the mind generates the idol, and the hand brings it to birth. The example of the Israelites proves that this is the root of idolatry: the belief that God is not truly present unless He shows Himself in some physically visible way. 'We do not know what has happened to this Moses,' they said. 'Make us gods who will go before us.' They knew there was a God — they had experienced His power in so many

miracles — but they did not believe He was near to them unless they could see with their own eyes some bodily representation of His face, serving as a visible witness to the God who governed them. Their idea was to know by the image going before them that God was the guide of their journey. Daily experience teaches the same lesson: the flesh is always restless until it has gotten hold of some invented device in its own likeness, in which it may vainly delight as in an image of God. In nearly every age since the creation of the world, people have obeyed this blind desire by setting up visible signs in which they imagined God to be bodily present before them.

After such an invention is fashioned, worship soon follows. For when people thought they beheld God in images, they also worshipped Him in them. At length, having fixed both their minds and their eyes entirely upon the images, they began to grow more and more senseless, and to wonder at them and hold them in awe as if some divine power resided in them. So it is clear that people did not break out into image worship until they were convinced by some crude notion — not that the images themselves were gods, but that some divine power or force dwelt in them. Therefore whether you set before yourself an image of God or of a creature, when you fall down to worship, you are already caught in some superstition. For this reason the Lord has forbidden not only the erecting of images made to represent a likeness of Him, but also the setting up of any stone pillars to be bowed before and worshipped. For the same reason also, in the commandment of the law, this additional point is added regarding worship. For as soon as people have fashioned a visible form for God, they also attach the power of God to it. So senseless are people that they fasten God

to the place where they have portrayed Him, and thus feel compelled to worship it. Nor is there any difference between simply worshipping an idol or worshipping God through an idol. It is always idolatry when honors due to God are given to an idol, under whatever pretense. And because God will not be worshipped in a superstitious manner, whatever is given to idols is taken away from Him. Let those who seek pretexts to defend the abominable idolatry — by which true religion has for many ages been drowned and overthrown — take heed of this. But they say: the images are not taken to be gods. Neither were the Jews themselves so blind as to forget that it was God by whose hand they had been brought out of Egypt before they made the golden calf. Indeed when Aaron declared that these were the gods by whom they had been delivered out of Egypt, they readily agreed — showing their clear intention: to keep the God who had delivered them, provided they could see Him going before them in the calf. Nor is it to be believed that the pagan nations were so crude as to think God was nothing more than wood and stone. For they changed their images whenever they pleased, yet kept the same gods in their minds. Many images could exist for one god, and yet they did not multiply their gods to match the number of images. Moreover they daily consecrated new images without thinking they were thereby making new gods. Read the excuses that Augustine says were offered by the idolaters of his time. When rebuked, the common people answered that they did not worship the visible thing before them but the divine power that invisibly dwelt in it. And those of somewhat better learning, as he calls them, said that they worshipped neither the image nor the spirit residing in it, but that through the bodily image they beheld a sign of the thing they ought to worship. What then? All idolaters

— whether Jewish or Gentile — were minded in just this way, as I have described. Not content with a spiritual understanding of God, they thought that in images God would be more firmly and more immediately impressed upon them. Once this disorderly counterfeiting of God pleased them, they never stopped — but being deceived more and more daily by new inventions, they came to imagine that God displayed His power through images. And yet the Jews were persuaded that in worshipping such images they were worshipping the one true Lord of heaven and earth — and the Gentiles in the same way were persuaded they were worshipping their false gods, whom they nevertheless imagined to dwell in heaven.

Whoever denies that this is what has been done in former times — indeed within living memory — lies shamelessly. For why do they fall down before images? And when they pray, why do they turn toward them as toward the ears of God? For it is as Augustine says: no one prays or worships while looking at an image without being so affected in mind that he thinks he is being heard by it, or that it will do for him what he desires. Why is there such a difference between images of the same God, that people will pass by one image with little or no reverence, yet solemnly honor another? Why do they weary themselves with vowed pilgrimages to visit images of which they have equal examples at home? Why do they to-day fight to the slaughter in defense of them, as if for religion and country — willing rather to suffer the loss of the one true God than the loss of their idols? And yet I am not even counting the crude errors of common people, which are nearly infinite and seem to fill all hearts. I am only pointing out what the defenders of images themselves admit when they are doing their best to excuse them-

selves from idolatry. 'We do not call them our gods,' they say. Neither did the Jews nor the Gentiles call theirs gods in former times — and yet the prophets everywhere cease not to charge them with spiritual fornication with wood and stone, simply for doing the very things done daily by those who would be counted Christians: that is, carnally worshipping God in wood and stone.

I am not unaware, nor do I think it right to pass over as if I were, how they attempt to escape by means of a more subtle distinction, which I will address more fully later. They pretend that the worship they give to images is idoloduly, which is service to images, and not idolatry, which is worship of images. For this is how they put it: they claim they may lawfully, without any wrong to God, give to images and pictures that worship they call duly, or service. They think themselves blameless if they are only servants and not worshippers of idols — as if service were somehow significantly less serious than worship. And yet in their attempt to hide behind a Greek word, they contradict themselves in a childish way. For since the Greek word *latreuo* means nothing but to worship, what they are saying amounts to this: that they do in fact worship their images, but without any worshipping. There is no reason why they should say I am playing with words — it is they who, while trying to throw dust in the eyes of the simple, expose their own ignorance. And however eloquent they may be, no eloquence will succeed in proving to us that one and the same thing is two different things. Let them show me — in the matter itself, not just in terms — where they differ from the ancient idolaters. For just as an adulterer or a murderer cannot escape the guilt of his crime by giving his sin a newly invented name, so it is completely absurd to think these people are acquitted by a verbal novelty if in the sub-

stance of the matter they do not differ from those idolaters they themselves are compelled to condemn. Indeed, so far are they from proving their case differs from those old idolaters that the very fountain of this entire evil is the disorderly counterfeiting in which they have rivaled the ancient idolaters — both devising with their own minds and shaping with their own hands visible forms to express a version of God.

And yet I am not so rigid as to think no images may be permitted at all. For since sculpture and painting are gifts of God, I require that both be used purely and lawfully — so that these things God has given for His glory and our own benefit are not defiled by disordered misuse or turned to our destruction. We hold it unlawful to fashion God into visible form because He Himself has forbidden it, and because it cannot be done without some injury to His glory. And lest they think this is only our opinion, those who have studied the writings of the Fathers will find that all sound writers have always condemned the same thing. If then it is unlawful to make any bodily image of God, much less shall it be lawful to worship it as God, or to worship God through it. It therefore remains lawful to depict in painting or sculpture only those things that our eyes are capable of perceiving — but the majesty of God, which infinitely surpasses the reach of our eyes, must not be dishonored by invented and improper forms. Images of this lawful kind are of two sorts: those that depict histories and events, and those that are simply portraits and forms of bodies without depicting any action. The first have some use in teaching or reminding a person of something. But what profit the second can bring, other than mere delight, I do not see. And yet it is evident that almost all the images that have stood in churches until now have been of this second

kind. From which we may judge that they were placed there not by sober judgment and deliberate choice, but by foolish and thoughtless desire. I say nothing here about how badly made and indecent most of them were, nor how freely painters and carvers have shown their indulgence in this — which I have already touched on. My point here is only this: even if there were no fault in them at all, they still do nothing to teach.

But setting aside that distinction, let us consider in passing whether it is appropriate for Christian churches to contain any images at all — whether of scenes or of human figures. First, if the authority of the ancient church means anything to us, let us recall that for roughly five hundred years, while religion still flourished more purely and sincere doctrine was in force, the Christian churches were universally without images. When images were first introduced for the ornamentation of churches, the sincerity of ministry had already been considerably diminished. I will not argue here about the motives of those who first introduced them. But if one compares the periods, the age that had images had clearly departed much from the uprightness of those who had none. Would those holy fathers have allowed the church to go so long without something they judged profitable and good for it? Rather, because they saw little or no benefit in images, and recognized the great danger lurking beneath them, they deliberately and purposefully refused them — not through ignorance or negligence. Augustine also expressly testifies this. 'When they are set,' he says, 'in an honored, elevated position to be seen by those who pray and make offerings, even though they have neither sense nor life, yet by the very likeness of living members and senses they so move weak minds that they seem to live and breathe.' And in another

place: 'For the shape of the body is such that it leads the mind dwelling within a body to assume that a body like its own also possesses sense.' And a little after: 'Images do more to bow down an unhappy soul — by having mouth, eyes, ears, and feet — than to improve it by having no speech, sight, hearing, or movement.' This seems to be the very reason John warned us to beware not only of worshipping images but of images themselves. And we have found it all too true by experience, that through the horrible madness which has previously possessed the world — to the destruction of nearly all godliness — as soon as images are placed in churches, it is as if a signal for idolatry has been raised. For the foolishness of people cannot restrain itself from rushing headlong into superstitious worship. But even if there were no such danger attached to it, when I consider the purpose for which churches are established, I think it is very ill-suited to their holiness to receive any images other than these living and natural images which the Lord has consecrated by His word — I mean Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the other ceremonies by which our eyes ought to be occupied more earnestly and moved more vividly than by any images fashioned by human ingenuity. Behold — this is the incomparable benefit of images, which according to the Papists can be compensated by no other value.

I think I had already said enough on this subject, but the Nicene Synod, as it were, lays its hand on me and forces me to say more. I mean not the famous council that Constantine the Great assembled, but the one held eight hundred years ago by the command and authority of Empress Irene. For that council decreed that images should not merely be kept in churches but also worshipped. Whatever I say, the authority of a synod would create a

strong prejudice on the other side. Although, to speak truthfully, that does not trouble me so much as it shows readers how far the rage extended of those who were more eager for images than befitted Christians. But first let us deal with the matter directly. Those who today maintain the use of images cite the decree of the Nicene Synod in their defense. There is extant a book of refutation bearing the name of Charlemagne, which by its style we can gather was written at about the same time. In it are recorded the statements of the bishops present at that council and the arguments by which they contended. John, the legate from the eastern parts, said: God created man after His own image — and from this he concluded that we ought to have images. The same man thought that images were commended to us in the sentence: 'Show me your face, for it is beautiful.' Another, to prove that images should be placed on altars, cited: 'No one lights a candle and puts it under a basket.' Another, to show that looking at images is profitable, brought forward a verse from the Psalms: 'The light of Your countenance is stamped upon us.' Another used this comparison: just as the patriarchs used the sacrifices of the Gentiles, so Christian men must have images of the saints in place of images of the Gentiles. To the same purpose they twisted the saying: 'Lord, I have loved the beauty of Your house.' But especially clever is the interpretation of this passage: 'As we have heard, so we have seen' — meaning, they say, that God is known not only by hearing His word but also by looking at images. Similar is the sharp reasoning of Bishop Theodore: 'God is marvelous in His saints,' he says. And in another place: 'In the saints who are in the earth.' Therefore, he concludes, this ought to be applied to images. Their absurdities are so disgraceful that it pains me to rehearse them.

When they discuss worship, they bring in the worship of Pharaoh, of Joseph's rod, and of the pillar Jacob set up — though in this last example they not only distort the meaning of Scripture but introduce something nowhere in the text. Then these passages seem to them overwhelmingly strong proofs: 'Worship His footstool.' And again: 'Worship on His holy hill.' And again: 'All the wealthy of the people will bow before Your face.' If someone wanted to put on a mock performance of a court jester playing the role of an image defender, could he assemble greater or more foolish absurdities? But to remove all doubt, Bishop Theodosius of Myra confirms by means of his archdeacon's dreams that images should be worshipped — as confidently as if he had a direct oracle from heaven to present. Now let the defenders of images go and press us with the decree of that Synod. As if those venerable fathers did not entirely discredit themselves by handling the Scriptures so childishly, or by tearing them apart so ungodly and shamefully.

Now I come to those monstrous impieties which it is remarkable they ever dared to utter, and doubly remarkable that they were not met with loud denunciation from everyone. It is good that this outrageously wicked madness be exposed, so that the false color of antiquity which the Papists invoke for the worship of images may at least be stripped away. Theodosius, Bishop of Amorum, pronounces a curse on all who refuse to worship images. Another blames all the disasters that fell on Greece and the eastern regions on the failure to worship images. What punishment, then, would the prophets, the apostles, and the martyrs have deserved — in whose time there were no images at all? They add further: if the Emperor's image is met with incense and ceremony, much more is

this honor due to the images of the saints. Constantius, Bishop of Constantia in Cyprus, professes that he reverently embraces images and declares that he will pay them the same honorable worship due to the life-giving Trinity. And whoever refuses to do so he curses, bundling them off with the Manichees and Marcionites. And do not think this was the private opinion of one man — they all assented to it. Indeed, John the Legate of the eastern parts, carried away by even greater heat, said it would be better to bring all the brothels of the world into the city than to refuse the worship of images. Finally by common agreement it was decreed that the Samaritans are worse than all heretics, and the enemies of images worse than the Samaritans. And so that the performance might not end without its solemn conclusion, this clause was added: let those who have the image of Christ rejoice and be glad, and offer sacrifice to it. Now where is the distinction between latria and dulia, with which they are accustomed to try to blind the eyes of both God and men? For the council, without any qualification, grants to images as much as it grants to the living God Himself.

¶THE .XII. CHAPTER. THAT GOD IS
SEUERALLY DISCERNED FROM IDOLS,
THAT HE MAY BE ONLY AND WHOLLY
WORSHIPPED.



W e said at the beginning that the knowledge of God does not consist in bare speculation but draws with it the worship of God — and along the way we touched on what right worship looks like, a point that will be set forth more fully elsewhere. Now I only briefly repeat this: whenever Scripture affirms that there is but one God, it is not contending merely over a name. It also commands this: that whatever belongs to the Godhead must not be given to any other. This shows what pure religion and superstition differ in. The Greek word *eusebeia* means true worship, because even those who are blind and groping in darkness have found that this rule must be maintained: God must not be worshipped carelessly. The name religion, though Cicero rightly and well derives it from *relegere*, meaning to record or gather together, gives a forced and far-fetched reason: that devout worshippers often recalled and carefully weighed what was true. I think rather that the name stands as the opposite of wandering liberty, because the greater part of humanity rashly seizes whatever it

first encounters and goes chasing here and there. But true godliness, to maintain its steady state, gathers itself within its own bounds. Likewise, I think superstition gets its name from this: not content with the prescribed manner and order, it heaps up a superfluous abundance of empty things. But leaving words aside, it has always been agreed across all ages that religion is corrupted and perverted by false errors. From this we gather that the pretense the superstitious use to excuse themselves is very foolish — claiming the freedom to do all things in the name of ill-considered zeal. And although this confession is on everyone's lips, a shameful ignorance betrays itself here: they neither cling to the one God nor maintain any proper order in His worship, as we have already shown. But God, claiming His own right, cries out that He is jealous — and that He will take severe vengeance if He is mixed with any invented god. Then He sets forth the lawful manner of worship to hold humanity in obedience. He covers both these points in His law: first by binding the faithful to Himself alone as their lawgiver, and then by prescribing a rule by which He is to be worshipped according to His own mind. Of the law, because its uses and ends are many, I will discuss it in a fitting place. For now I only touch this point: that through it people are restrained from running off into unauthorized worship. As I first said, we must bear in mind that if all that properly belongs to the Godhead does not rest in God alone, He is robbed of His honor and His worship is broken. Here we must note with some care the subtle ways in which superstition deceives. It does not revolt to foreign gods in such a way as to appear to forsake the supreme God or to lower Him to the level of other gods. Rather, while granting Him the highest place, it surrounds Him with a crowd of lesser gods — among whom it distrib-

utes His offices. And so, though cloaked and craftily, the glory of the Godhead is carved into pieces, and it no longer remains intact with Him. So in ancient times both Jews and Gentiles placed beneath the father and judge of the gods a great crowd of gods, each of whom shared, according to his rank, in the government of heaven and earth along with the highest God. So the saints who have died in recent centuries are elevated to share in God's place — to be worshipped, called upon, and honored in His stead. And yet with such abominations we suppose that the majesty of God is not so much as diminished — when in fact a great part of it is suppressed and extinguished, except that we still retain a bare opinion of His supreme power, while we are enticed by entangling subtleties and drawn away to various gods.

For this purpose also was invented the distinction of *latria* and *dulia* — worship and service, as they call them — by which they could seem to freely assign the honors of God to angels and departed men. For it is evident that the worship the Papists give to the saints differs in no real way from the worship of God. They worship both God and the saints in exactly the same way — except that when charged with it, they slip away with the excuse that they still keep for God the honor due to Him inviolate, since they reserve for Him the worship they call *latria*. But since the question is about the matter itself and not just the word, who should allow such careless mockery on a question of the greatest possible weight? But even setting that aside, they gain nothing from this distinction except to prove that they give worship to one and service to another. For in Greek, *latria* means the same as the Latin *cultus* and English worship. *Dulia* properly means service. Yet in Scripture this distinction is sometimes blurred without any clear

difference. But even granting that it is a fixed distinction, let us examine what both words mean. *Dulia* is service, *latria* is worship. Now no one doubts that to serve is more than to worship. Many a person could hardly bring themselves to serve one they would readily worship. It is therefore an uneven arrangement to give the saints the greater thing while leaving God the lesser. Many of the ancient writers used this distinction, it is true. But what does that matter, if everyone can see that it is not only unfitting but utterly absurd?

Now setting aside fine subtleties, let us weigh the matter itself. When Paul reminds the Galatians what they were before they were enlightened in the knowledge of God, he says that they gave *dulia*, service, to those who by nature were no gods. Though he does not name *latria* or worship, is their superstition therefore excusable? He nevertheless condemns their perverse superstition, which he names by the word *dulia* no less than if he had used the word *latria*. And when Christ repelled Satan's assault with the shield of Scripture — 'You shall worship the Lord your God' — it was not the word *latria* that was in question. Satan required only an act of adoration. Likewise when the angel rebuked John for falling on his knees before him, we should not think John was so irrational as to intend to give the angel the honor due only to God. But because it was unavoidable that any worship joined with religion would carry the flavor of belonging to God, he could not adore the angel without taking something away from the glory of God. We read that men were often honored, but that was a civil honor, as I may call it. But religion has another rule — one that, as soon as it is joined with worship, carries with it a profane abuse of the honor due to God. The same can be seen in Cornelius. He had not made so little

progress in godliness that he had not learned to give supreme worship to God alone. Therefore when he fell down before Peter, his intention was not to worship him in the place of God. And yet Peter earnestly forbade him from what he was doing. Why? Because people never draw the line between worship of God and worship of His creatures so precisely that they do not, without distinction, end up giving to the creature what belongs to God. Therefore if we have one God, we must bear in mind that nothing — however small — must be taken away from His glory, but that He must retain what is properly His. Therefore Zechariah, when he speaks of the restoration of the church, states plainly that there shall not only be one God, but also one name of God — so that He would have nothing in common with idols. What kind of worship God requires will be seen in another place, when it comes in order. For it pleased Him in His law to prescribe to people what is lawful and right, and so to bind them to a fixed rule, so that each person would not freely invent whatever form of worship he pleased. But since it is not fitting to burden readers by crowding many matters together, I will not address that point yet. For now let it be enough to keep in mind that every diversion of the duties of godliness to any other than God alone is a robbery of God. First, superstition devised giving divine honors to the sun, the stars, and idols. Then ambitious pride followed, adorning mortal men with spoils taken from God and presuming to profane whatever was holy. And although the principle of honoring the supreme deity remained among them, it became common practice to offer sacrifices to spirits, lesser gods, and honored dead men. So easy is it to slide down the path of sharing with a multitude what God jealously claims for Himself alone.

CHAPTER 13: THAT THERE IS TAUGHT IN THE SCRIPTURES ONE ESSENCE OF GOD FROM THE VERY CREATION, WHICH ESSENCE CONTAINS IN IT THREE PERSONS



What the Scriptures teach about the incomprehensible and spiritual essence of God should be enough not only to correct the foolish errors of ordinary people but also to refute the clever arguments of secular philosophy. One ancient writer seemed to put it well when he said that God is everything we see and everything we do not see. But by saying this, he imagined the Godhead to be spread out through all parts of the world. Although God speaks sparingly about His own essence in order to keep our minds sober, the two descriptions He gives both sweep away crude misconceptions and check the presumptuous boldness of the human mind. His immeasurable greatness should make us afraid to try to comprehend Him with our senses, and His spiritual nature forbids us from imagining anything earthly or physical about Him. For this same reason He often describes His dwelling place as heaven. Although, being incomprehensible, He fills the earth as well, He sees that our minds tend to stay fixed on earthly

things — and so He rightly lifts us above the world to shake off our slowness. Here the error of the Manichees collapses, for in assigning two original principles they effectively made the devil nearly equal with God. This was nothing less than breaking the unity of God and limiting His immeasurability. Their attempt to misuse certain Scripture passages reveals deep ignorance, just as their error itself reveals a terrible madness. The Anthropomorphites are also easily answered — those who imagined God to have a body because Scripture often assigns Him a mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet. What person, even one of modest intelligence, does not understand that God speaks to us in this way as a nurse speaks to an infant? These ways of speaking do not describe what God actually is so much as they adapt our understanding of Him to our limited capacity. To accomplish that, it was necessary for Him to come far down from His own height.

But God also reveals Himself by another distinctive mark, through which He may be more closely known. He declares Himself to be one, yet He presents Himself as three persons — and unless we grasp this, we end up with a bare and empty name of God in our minds rather than the true God. So that no one thinks of a threefold God, or imagines that the one essence of God is divided into three persons, we need a brief and clear definition to free us from error. Many people make a great fuss over the word 'person' as something invented by human beings, so it is worth examining how justified that objection really is. When the apostle calls the Son the exact imprint of the Father's nature, he clearly means that the Father has a distinctive existence that sets Him apart from the Son. To take this as referring to essence — as some interpreters have done, as if Christ were like a wax seal pressing

out the substance of the Father — is not only a strained reading but an absurdity. Since the essence of God is single and indivisible, the one who contains it wholly and completely — not partially or by derivation — would be described very wrongly, even foolishly, as its imprint. But because the Father, though distinctly Himself, has fully expressed Himself in the Son, it is rightly said that He has allowed His nature to be seen in Him. This agrees well with what follows immediately: that the Son is the radiance of the Father's glory. From the apostle's words we gather that the Father has a distinctive nature that shines in the Son — and from this it is also easy to see the Son's own distinctive nature that sets Him apart from the Father. The same order holds for the Holy Spirit, for we will shortly prove that He is God, and yet He must be distinct from the Father. Yet this distinction is not a distinction of essence, which it would be wrong to multiply. Therefore, if the apostle's testimony is to be believed, there are three distinct persons in God. The Latins expressed this term as 'person,' and it would be stubborn pride to quarrel over such a clear matter. If we translate word for word, we might render it 'subsistence.' Many have used the word 'substance' in the same sense. The word 'person' has not been used only among the Latins — the Greeks as well, perhaps to show agreement, have taught that there are three *prosopa* (that is, persons) in God. Whether Greek or Latin, those who differ on the word agree very well on the substance of the matter.

Now, however much heretics may rail against the word 'person,' or overly scrupulous people complain that they dislike a term invented by human beings — since they cannot get us to say either that there are three beings each of whom is wholly God, or that there are many gods — how unreasonable is it to object to words

that express nothing other than what Scripture itself testifies and confirms? It would be better, they say, to confine not only our thoughts but our words within the limits of Scripture, rather than inventing new terms that breed disagreement and argument — so that we exhaust ourselves in word-fights, truth is lost in the quarrel, and charity is broken by bitter strife. If they call a term 'foreign' simply because it cannot be found letter-for-letter in Scripture, they bind us to a severe law that would condemn every explanation that is not pieced together from direct Scripture quotations alone. But if they mean by 'foreign' something that is curiously invented, stubbornly defended, more useful for stirring controversy than for building up the church, used carelessly or pointlessly, or that draws people away from the simplicity of God's word — then I wholeheartedly embrace their caution. I believe we ought to speak of God with no less reverence than we think of Him, since whatever we devise about Him on our own is foolish, and whatever we say is empty. But there is a proper measure to observe. We ought to draw from Scripture a rule for both thinking and speaking, by which to test every thought of the mind and every word of the mouth. What prevents us, then, from expressing in plainer words those things that seem obscure and tangled when read in Scripture — provided those words faithfully and reverently serve the truth of Scripture, and are used sparingly, modestly, and only when needed? There are plenty of examples of this. When it is demonstrated that the church was compelled by genuine necessity to use the terms Trinity and persons, anyone who still objects to those words as novelties would rightly be seen as troubled that the truth has been made so plain and clear.

New terminology of this kind comes chiefly into use when the truth must be defended against those who mock it with clever evasions. We have experienced this very much in our own day, having great trouble defeating the enemies of true and sound doctrine. These slippery opponents twist and dodge with such cunning that they cannot be pinned down unless they are firmly seized and held when caught. So the ancient fathers, burdened with fighting false doctrines, were forced to state their meaning with precise clarity, so they would leave no crooked back roads for the wicked to hide their errors in. Arius confessed that Christ was God and the Son of God — because he could not deny the plain words of Scripture — and as if that were sufficient, he pretended to agree with everyone else. But all the while he kept spreading the idea that Christ was created and had a beginning like other creatures. To draw his slippery cunning out into the open, the ancient fathers went further and declared that Christ is the eternal Son of the Father and consubstantial with the Father. Then the wickedness of the Arians began to boil over, as they attacked and despised the word 'homoousian' — consubstantial. But if from the beginning they had sincerely confessed Christ to be God, they would never have denied that He is consubstantial with the Father. Who could justly accuse these faithful men of being quarrelsome and contentious for disputing so intensely over a single word — when that word was the one that exposed the whole conflict and troubled the peace of the church? That one word revealed the difference between true Christians and the Arians who robbed God of His honor. Later Sabellius arose, who treated the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as nearly meaningless — claiming in argument that these names did not point to any real distinction but were merely differ-

ent titles for God, of which there are many. In debate he would confess his belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But then he would slip away by saying he had spoken no differently than if he had called God 'strong God,' 'just God,' or 'wise God' — and so he sang a different tune: that the Father is the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the Father, with no order or distinction. The faithful teachers who cared for godliness in that day spoke out against his error, insisting that one God must be acknowledged in three persons. To guard against his twisted evasions with plain and simple truth, they affirmed that within the one God — or, to say the same thing differently — within the unity of God there truly subsists a Trinity of persons.

Since these names were not invented without reason, we should take care that in rejecting them we are not rightly accused of proud presumption. I wish these names could be set aside entirely, if all people would simply agree on this faith: that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God, and yet the Father is not the Son, nor is the Holy Spirit the Son — but each is distinct by a certain property. Yet I am not so insistent that I would fight over bare words. I notice that the ancient fathers, who otherwise spoke very carefully on these matters, did not always agree with one another — nor did every writer always agree with himself. How many of the councils' forms of speech does Hilary excuse? To what lengths of free expression does Augustine sometimes go? How different are the Greek writers from the Latin ones? One example will be enough for now. When the Latins wanted to express the Greek word *homousios*, they used 'consubstantial,' declaring the substance of the Father and the Son to be one — using 'substance' to mean 'essence.' And so Jerome writes to

Damasus that it is sacrilege to speak of three substances in God — and yet you will find Hilary saying there are three substances in God more than a hundred times. How troubled Jerome is by the word hypostasis! He suspects there is poison hidden in speaking of three hypostases in God. Even if someone uses the word in a godly sense, Jerome says plainly that it is improper speech — though he may have said this insincerely, looking for an unjust excuse to charge the Eastern bishops. His claim that in all non-Christian schools *ousia* and *hypostasis* mean exactly the same thing is simply not true, as common usage shows. Augustine is more gentle on this point: though he says the word *hypostasis* sounds strange to Latin ears, he is far from denying the Greeks their customary way of speaking — he also graciously accepts the Latins who had followed the Greek usage. What Socrates writes in the sixth book of the *Tripartite History* suggests that the term had been misapplied through ignorance. Hilary himself charges it as a serious fault against the heretics that their stubbornness compelled him to put matters into human language that should have remained in the reverence of the mind — openly confessing that it means doing what is not lawful, speaking what ought not to be spoken, and attempting what is not permitted. A little later he apologizes at length for daring to use new terms. After using the natural names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he adds that whatever is sought beyond these is beyond the reach of speech, beyond the grasp of sense, and beyond the capacity of understanding. In another place he says: 'Happy are you, bishops of Gaul, who have had, received, and known no confession other than the old and simple one received in all churches from the time of the apostles.' Augustine's explanation is similar: the word 'person' was wrung out of neces-

sity by the inadequacy of human language in so great a matter — not to fully express what God is, but so that there would be some answer to the question of how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three. This humility of the holy men should warn us not to act as harsh judges and condemn as infamous those who refuse to subscribe to our chosen words — provided they are not acting out of pride, stubbornness, or malicious cunning. But let those who resist consider how pressing the necessity is that drives us to speak this way, so they may gradually grow accustomed to this useful language. They should also be careful: since we must on one side oppose the Arians and on the other the Sabellians, if they are offended that we cut off every opening for both to twist the truth, they may bring themselves under suspicion of being disciples of Arius or Sabellius. Arius says Christ is God, but mutters that He was created and had a beginning. He says Christ is one with the Father, but secretly whispers to his followers that He is one as other believers are one — though by a special privilege. Say once that Christ is consubstantial with the Father, and you strip the mask from the deceiver — without adding anything to Scripture. Sabellius says the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indicate nothing separately distinct in God. Say that they are three, and he will cry out that you are naming three gods. Say that within one essence there is a Trinity of persons, and in one phrase you both express what Scripture says and silence their empty chatter. Now, if anyone is so cautious about these terms that they cannot accept them, no one can honestly deny this: when we hear of one, we must understand a unity of substance; when we hear of three in one essence, we mean the persons of the Trinity. If this is sincerely confessed, we need not quarrel further over words. But I have

found repeatedly, over a long time, that whoever stubbornly quarrels about words is hiding a secret poison within — so it is better to draw them out openly than to speak vaguely just to please them.

Setting aside the dispute over words, I will now address the matter itself. I define a person as a subsistence within the essence of God, which — having a relation to the others — is distinguished from them by an incommunicable property. By 'subsistence' we mean something distinct from 'essence.' For if the Word had simply been God, with nothing distinctly its own, John would have been wrong to say it was with God. Then when he immediately adds that the Word itself was God, he calls us back to the single, unified essence. But because the Word could not be with God without resting in the Father, from this arises that subsistence which, though bound to the essence by an inseparable bond, yet has a distinguishing mark by which it differs from it. So of the three subsistences I say that each, in relation to the others, is distinguished by its own property. This relation is expressly important. When God is spoken of simply and without qualification, the name belongs no less to the Son and the Holy Spirit than to the Father. But when the Father is compared with the Son, the distinct property of each distinguishes one from the other. Third, whatever is proper to each of them is incommunicable: what is given to the Father as His distinguishing mark cannot belong to or be applied to the Son. I also accept the definition of Tertullian — rightly understood — that there is in God a certain arrangement or distribution that does not change the unity of the essence in any way.

But before going further, I should first prove the Godhead of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then show how they differ from one another. Surely when the Word of God is spoken of in

Scripture, it would be absurd to imagine it as merely a fleeting sound sent into the air — as if it were simply God's voice behind the oracles given to the fathers and all the prophecies. Rather, the Word is the perpetual wisdom abiding with the Father, from which all oracles and prophecies came. As Peter testifies, the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as the apostles did, and all who later proclaimed the heavenly teaching. But because Christ had not yet appeared openly, we must understand that the Word was begotten of the Father before all worlds. If the Spirit of the Word was the one whose instruments the prophets were, we can clearly conclude that He was true God. Moses teaches this plainly enough in the creation of the world, where he presents the Word as the means of creation. Why does Moses expressly record that God said 'Let this be made' or 'Let that be done' for each of His creative works — if not so that the unsearchable glory of God might shine through His handiwork? Clever and argumentative people easily dismiss this by saying that 'word' there simply means God's command or decree. But better interpreters are the apostles, who teach that the worlds were made through the Word, and that He upholds all things by His powerful word. Here we see that 'word' is used for the command of the Son, who is Himself the eternal and essential Word of the Father. Nor is it obscure to the thoughtful reader that Solomon, when he brings in Wisdom begotten of God before all worlds — presiding over creation and all God's works — means the same thing. To say that this was merely a temporary command of God would be foolish and empty, since God's purpose here was to reveal His eternal and steadfast plan — indeed, something still more profound. To the same end Christ said: 'My Father and I have been working until now.' By saying He had been working con-

tinually with His Father from the beginning of the world, He makes more explicit what Moses had stated more briefly. We therefore gather that the meaning of God's speaking was this: the Word had an active role in the work of creation, and both shared in a common work together. But John speaks most plainly of all, showing that the same Word who was from the beginning God with God was together with God the Father the cause of all things. He gives the Word a complete and abiding existence, assigns to it something distinctly its own, and shows clearly how God in speaking was the creator of the world. Therefore, while all revelations from God rightly bear the name 'word of God,' we must place above all these the substantial Word — the source of all oracles — which, subject to no change, remains eternally one and the same with God, and is God Himself.

Here many opponents bark against us who, not daring to openly deny His Godhead, secretly steal away His eternity. They claim the Word first came into existence when God opened His holy mouth at the creation of the world. But they foolishly imagine some kind of change in the substance of God. While names that relate to God's outward works — such as 'creator of heaven and earth' — were given to Him after those works existed, true godliness does not admit any name suggesting that something new has happened within God Himself. For if something could come to Him from outside Himself, then James's statement would fail — that every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Therefore nothing is more unacceptable than to imagine a beginning for the Word, who both always was God and afterward was creator of the world. But they argue very cleverly that when

Moses says God first spoke at that moment, it secretly implies there was no Word in Him before. This is a completely trivial argument. It does not follow that because something first appears openly at a certain moment, it therefore had no prior existence. I conclude quite differently: since the power of the Word appeared and showed itself the very moment God said 'Let there be light,' that same Word existed long before. And if you ask how long before, you will find no beginning. Christ Himself pointed to no fixed starting point when He said: 'Father, glorify Me with the glory I had with You before the world existed.' John also touches on this, for he first establishes that in the beginning the Word was with God — before he ever comes to the creation of the world. We therefore say again that the Word, conceived of God before any beginning of time, continually remained with Him — which proves His eternity, His true essence, and His Godhead.

Although I am not yet addressing the person of the Mediator — reserving that for where we will specially treat of redemption — it should be held without controversy among all people that Christ is the same Word clothed in flesh. It is therefore fitting here to gather all the testimonies that prove Christ is God. When Psalm 45 says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,' the Jews object that the name Elohim is also applied to angels and rulers. But nowhere else in all of Scripture is an eternal throne raised to any creature. He is not merely called God here — He is also called the eternal Lord. Furthermore, this title is elsewhere only given with a qualifying phrase, such as 'Moses shall be as a god to Pharaoh.' Some read it in the genitive, which is very far-fetched. I grant that something may be called divine or 'of God' when it is distinguished by some remarkable excellence. But here the plain reading of the text shows

that such a meaning is strained and forced, and does not fit. And if their stubbornness still refuses to yield, Isaiah makes it entirely clear that Christ and God are one and the same — adorned with sovereign power that belongs to God alone. 'This,' he says, 'is the name by which they shall call Him: Mighty God, Everlasting Father,' and so on. The Jews object here too and twist the text to mean: 'This is the name the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, shall call Him' — leaving the Son only the title 'Prince of Peace.' But why would so many titles be piled up here for God the Father, when the prophet's clear purpose is to adorn Christ with special marks that ground our faith in Him? It is therefore beyond doubt that He is here called Mighty God in the same way that He is called Immanuel just a few lines before. Nothing could be plainer than the passage in Jeremiah where he says the name by which the Branch of David shall be called is 'the Lord our righteousness.' The Jews themselves teach that all other names of God are merely descriptive titles, and that the name 'Jehovah' alone — which they consider unutterable — is the substantive name expressing His very essence. From this we conclude that the Son is the one and eternal God, who said elsewhere that He would not give His glory to another. But the Jews try to escape by pointing out that Moses gave that same name to the altar he built, and Ezekiel gave it to the new city Jerusalem. Yet who does not see that the altar was built as a monument to testify that God was the source of Moses's victory? And Jerusalem is not said to bear the name of God in order to share His divine essence, but only to testify to God's presence among His people. The prophet says: 'The name of the city from that day shall be: The Lord is there.' And Moses says: 'He built an altar and called the name of it: The Lord is my banner.' A further

difficulty arises from another passage in Jeremiah where the same title is applied to Jerusalem: 'This is the name by which she shall be called: The Lord our righteousness.' But this testimony actually confirms the truth we are defending rather than opposing it. For having already declared that Christ is the true Jehovah from whom righteousness flows, Jeremiah now says the church will experience this reality so fully that she may gloriously bear that very name herself. So the first passage sets forth the source and cause of righteousness, and the second sets forth its effect.

If the Jews are not satisfied by the fact that Jehovah is so often presented in the person of an Angel, I do not see what objection they can raise against it. Scripture says the Angel appeared to the holy fathers, and this same Angel claims for Himself the name of the eternal God. If someone objects that this is said only in reference to the person He represents, that answer does not resolve the difficulty. If He were merely a servant, He would not have allowed sacrifice to be offered to Him, since that would take from God what belongs to Him alone. But the Angel, refusing to eat bread, commanded that sacrifice be offered to Jehovah. Then He made clear that He Himself was indeed that same Jehovah — and Manoah and his wife concluded from this that they had seen not merely an angel but God. From this came Manoah's fear: 'We will surely die, for we have seen God.' And when his wife answered, 'If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering from our hands,' she was confessing that the one formerly called the Angel was in fact God. The Angel's own words remove all remaining doubt: 'Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?' All the more detestable was the wickedness of Servetus, who claimed God never appeared to Abraham and the other fathers,

but that an angel was worshipped in God's place. But the faithful teachers of the church rightly and wisely explained that this chief Angel was the Word of God, who even then was beginning to carry out the office of Mediator. Though He had not yet been clothed in flesh, He came as a mediator between God and humanity to draw near to the faithful in a more accessible way. This close self-communication caused Him to be called an Angel, yet all the while He retained what was truly His own — being the God of unspeakable glory. Hosea means the same thing when, after recounting Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, he says: 'The Lord, the God of hosts — the Lord is His name.' Here again Servetus objects that God merely assumed the role of an Angel. But this is precisely what the prophet was confirming from what Moses had said: 'Why do you ask my name?' And the holy patriarch's own confession makes clear that it was not a created angel but one in whom the full Godhead dwelt, when he said: 'I have seen God face to face.' For this reason Paul says that Christ was the guide of the people in the wilderness. Though the time of His humiliation had not yet come, the eternal Word displayed a preview of the office appointed to Him. If Zechariah chapter 2 is read without bias, the Angel who sent another Angel is immediately declared to be the God of hosts, and sovereign power is ascribed to Him. I will pass over the countless other testimonies on which our faith securely rests, even though they carry less weight with the Jews. For when Isaiah says, 'Behold, this is our God; this is the Lord, we have waited for Him, and He will save us,' those with eyes to see can recognize that this refers to God rising up for the salvation of His people. These emphatic declarations, repeated twice, cannot be pulled in any other direction than toward Christ. Still plainer and fuller is the passage

in Malachi, where he promises that the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His own temple. But the temple was dedicated to the one sovereign God alone — and the prophet claims this very temple for Christ. It follows, therefore, that Christ is the same God who was always worshipped among the Jews.

The New Testament overflows with testimonies, so rather than heap them all up I will briefly select a few. Although the apostles speak of Christ as He who had already become the Mediator in flesh, everything I will cite serves to prove His Godhead. One thing is especially worth noting: the apostles show that things said of the eternal God in the Old Testament are either already fulfilled or yet to be fulfilled in Christ. Where Isaiah prophesied that the Lord of hosts would be to Jews and Israelites a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, Paul says this was fulfilled in Christ. He is therefore declaring Christ to be the Lord of hosts. Likewise in another place Paul writes: 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, for it is written, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' Since God says this of Himself in Isaiah, and Christ fulfills it in Himself, it follows that He is the same God whose glory cannot be transferred to another. What Paul quotes from the Psalms and applies to Christ in his letter to the Ephesians — 'He ascended on high and led captivity captive' — could apply to no one but God alone. Paul explains that this ascent was foreshadowed when God displayed His power in striking victories over foreign nations, but it was more fully accomplished in Christ. John also testifies that it was the glory of the Son that appeared to Isaiah in a vision, whereas the prophet himself wrote that the majesty of God appeared to him. And it is evident that what the apostle in Hebrews applies to the Son are the plain titles

of God — 'You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,' and so on. Likewise: 'Let all God's angels worship Him.' Yet he does not misuse these titles by applying them to Christ. For Christ alone has fulfilled everything spoken of in those Psalms. It was He who rose up and had mercy on Zion. It was He who claimed the kingdom over all nations and islands. Why would John hesitate to apply the majesty of God to Christ, when he had already declared in his opening that the Word was always God? Why would Paul hesitate to seat Christ on the judgment throne of God, having already proclaimed His Godhead so openly — calling Him 'God blessed forever'? And to show how consistent he is on this point, in another place Paul writes that Christ is God manifested in the flesh. If He is God to be praised forever, then He is the same one to whom Paul elsewhere says all glory and honor are due. Paul states plainly that Christ did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but willingly humbled Himself. And so the wicked will not claim He is merely some secondary or derived God, John goes further and says: 'He is the true God and eternal life.' It ought to satisfy us completely that He is called God — especially by the one who explicitly declares that there are no more gods but one. That same witness is Paul, who says: 'Although there are many so-called gods in heaven or on earth, for us there is one God, from whom are all things.' When we hear from the same mouth that God was manifested in the flesh, and that God purchased the church with His own blood, why would we imagine a second God whom Paul himself does not acknowledge? There is no doubt all the faithful held the same view. Likewise Thomas, declaring Christ to be his Lord and his God, was professing that He is the one and only God he had always worshipped.

His Godhead becomes still more evident when we consider the works Scripture ascribes to Him. When He said that from the beginning He had been working continuously with His Father, the Jews — slow to grasp His other sayings — understood immediately that He was claiming the power of God. And so, as John tells us, they sought all the more to kill Him: not only because He broke the Sabbath, but because He called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. How dull must we be, then, if we cannot see that His Godhead is plainly affirmed here? To govern the world with providence and power, and to rule all things by His own authority — which the apostle ascribes to Him — belongs to none but the Creator. And He does not merely share the government of the world with His Father; He also holds all other offices that God does not share with His creatures. The Lord declares through the prophet: 'I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake.' When the Jews accused Christ of dishonoring God by forgiving sins, Christ not only affirmed in words but proved by miracle that this power belonged to Him. We see therefore that He holds not the ministry but the authority of forgiveness — the very thing the Lord says He will not pass on to any other. What shall we say of searching and knowing the secret thoughts of the heart? Is this not the property of God alone? Yet Christ possessed it — from which it is clear that He is God.

How plainly and clearly does His Godhead appear in His miracles! I grant that the prophets and the apostles performed miracles equal to His — but there is a crucial difference: they distributed God's gifts through their ministry, while He displayed His own power. He sometimes prayed, in order to give glory to His Father. But most often we see His own power at work. How could it be

otherwise, since He was the very author of miracles — the one who by His own authority gave others the power to perform them? The Evangelist records that He gave the apostles power to raise the dead, heal lepers, cast out demons, and so on. They exercised this ministry in a way that made clear the power came from Christ alone. 'In the name of Jesus Christ,' said Peter, 'rise up and walk.' It is no wonder, then, that Christ pointed to His miracles to answer the unbelief of the Jews — for these were miracles performed by His own power, bearing clear testimony to His Godhead. If salvation, righteousness, and life exist nowhere except in God, and Christ contains all these things in Himself, then He is declared to be God. No one can object that life and salvation were simply poured into Him by God, for Scripture does not say He received salvation — it says He is salvation itself. And if none is good but God alone, how can He be merely a man, when He is not just good and just but goodness and justice itself? From the very beginning of creation, as the Evangelist testifies, life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. Supported by such evidence, we boldly place our faith and hope in Him — knowing full well that it is ungodliness for any person to fasten their confidence on a creature. 'You believe in God,' He says. 'Believe also in Me.' Paul expounds this in line with two passages from Isaiah: 'Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.' And again: 'The Root of Jesse will rise to rule the nations; in Him the nations will hope.' Why search for more testimonies when we so often encounter this one? 'Whoever believes in Me has eternal life.' Furthermore, the invocation that flows from faith also belongs to Him — and invocation is proper to God's majesty alone. One prophet says: 'Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' Another says: 'The name of the

Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.' The name of Christ is called upon for salvation — therefore He is the Lord. We have an example of this invocation in Stephen, who said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And again in the whole church, as Ananias testifies in the same book: 'Lord, I have heard from many people about this man and how much harm he has done to Your saints who call on Your name.' And so that it may be understood even more plainly that the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ, the apostle confesses that he brought no other teaching among the Corinthians but the knowledge of Christ, and that he preached nothing else. How vast and how great is this — that the Son alone is proclaimed, and He wills that we glory only in the knowledge of Him? Who would dare say He is merely a creature, when the knowledge of Him alone is our whole glory? Moreover, the greetings at the beginning of Paul's letters wish the same blessings from the Son as from the Father — teaching us not only that what the Father gives comes to us through Christ's intercession, but also that He is, by shared power, the author of those blessings. This knowledge gained through experience is without doubt more certain and complete than any mere speculation. For it is there that the godly mind most directly perceives God — and in a sense touches Him — when it feels itself quickened, enlightened, saved, justified, and sanctified.

We must draw proof for the Godhead of the Holy Spirit from the same sources. Moses gives clear testimony in the creation account: the Spirit of God was hovering over the formless void. This shows that not only is the present beauty of the world preserved by the power of the Spirit, but even before that beauty was added, the Spirit was already at work sustaining that shapeless mass. Isaiah's

statement cannot be dismissed: 'And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.' Here the Holy Spirit shares the chief authority of sending the prophets — which reveals His divine majesty. But our best proof, as I said, comes through practical experience. What Scripture attributes to the Spirit is far beyond what belongs to any creature, and we learn this through the reliable experience of godliness. He is poured out everywhere, sustaining and giving growth and life to all things in heaven and on earth. This proves He is no creature, for He is not contained within any limits. By pouring His living power into all things and breathing life and motion into them, He does the very work of God. Moreover, if regeneration into an incorruptible life is higher and more excellent than any present quickening of life, what shall we think of the One from whose power regeneration comes? Scripture teaches in many places that He is the author of regeneration — not by borrowed power but by His own — and not of regeneration only, but also of the immortality to come. Finally, as with the Son, so with the Spirit: all the offices that belong most properly to the Godhead are applied to Him. He searches the deep secrets of God, into which no creature is admitted. He gives wisdom and skill to speak — the very work that the Lord declared to Moses belongs to Him alone. Through Him we come to share in God, so that we feel His power working life within us. Our justification is His work. From Him come power, sanctification, truth, grace, and every good thing — for it is from the Holy Spirit alone that all kinds of gifts proceed. Paul's words on this are especially worth noting. Though there are many diverse gifts and varied distributions of them, there is but one Holy Spirit — for Paul presents Him not merely as their origin but as their author. This is expressed more plainly a little later:

'One and the same Spirit distributes all things as He wills.' If He were not a subsistence within God, Paul would not ascribe to Him the exercise of will and choice. Paul therefore most clearly attributes divine power to the Holy Spirit and shows that He is substantially resident in God.

Scripture itself does not hesitate to call Him God. Paul reasons from this that we are the temple of God because His Spirit dwells in us — a point not to be passed over lightly. For when God repeatedly promises to choose us as His temple, that promise is fulfilled in no other way than through His Spirit dwelling in us. As Augustine wisely observed: if we were commanded to build a temple of wood and stone for the Holy Spirit — worship that is due to God alone — that would be clear proof He is God. How much clearer is it, then, that we ourselves are to be His temple? The apostle himself calls us sometimes the temple of God and sometimes the temple of the Holy Spirit, meaning the same thing in both cases. When Peter rebuked Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit, he said he had lied not to men but to God. Where Isaiah presents the Lord of hosts as speaking, Paul identifies the speaker as the Holy Spirit. And where the prophets commonly say that their words are the words of the Lord of hosts, Christ and the apostles refer these same words to the Holy Spirit. It follows, therefore, that He is the true Lord who is the chief author of the prophecies. Again, where God complains of being provoked to anger by the stubbornness of His people, Isaiah says in that same context that His Holy Spirit was grieved. Finally, if blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven in this world or the next — while the one who blasphemes against the Son may obtain pardon — His divine majesty is plainly proved here, since any offense against Him is an

unpardonable crime. I am intentionally omitting many testimonies used by the ancient writers. They found it very fitting to quote from the Psalms — 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth' — to prove that the world was as much the work of the Holy Spirit as of the Son. But since the Psalms commonly repeat one thing twice in parallel lines, and in Isaiah 'the breath of His mouth' is simply another way of saying 'His word,' that argument is rather weak. I therefore thought it better to point to a few passages on which godly minds can rest with confidence.

As God revealed Himself more fully through the coming of Christ, so He has also become more familiarly known in three persons. Of all the testimonies, let this one suffice for now. Paul binds together three things — God, faith, and baptism — and reasons from one to the other in this way: because there is but one faith, he shows there is but one God; and because there is but one God, he proves there is but one faith. Therefore, if we are brought into the faith and religion of one God through baptism, we must regard as the true God the one in whose name we are baptized. There is no doubt that in His solemn command, Christ intended to declare that the complete light of faith had been given, when He said: 'Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' This is equivalent to being baptized in the name of the one God, who has appeared in full brightness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is therefore clear that within the essence of God there abide three persons, in whom the one God is known. Since our faith must not wander here and there but must look to the one God, cling to Him, and rest in Him, it easily follows that if there were different kinds of faith, there would also have to be many

gods. Since baptism is a sacrament of faith, and there is only one baptism, it confirms the unity of God. And from this it follows that it is not lawful to be baptized into any but the one God, because we embrace the faith of the one in whose name we are baptized. What did Christ mean, then, when He commanded baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, if not that we are to believe with one faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Since it remains certain that there is one God and not many, we conclude that the Word and the Spirit are nothing other than the very same essence of God. The Arians argued foolishly when, while confessing the Godhead of the Son, they stripped Him of the substance of God. A similar rage infected the Macedonians, who wanted the Spirit to mean only the gifts of grace poured out on people. For as wisdom, understanding, prudence, strength, and the fear of God all proceed from Him, He alone is the Spirit of wisdom, prudence, strength, and godliness. Yet He is not divided according to the distribution of His gifts — however variously those gifts are spread abroad, He remains one and the same, as the apostle says.

Scripture also reveals a certain distinction between the Father and the Word, and between the Word and the Spirit. The greatness of this mystery itself warns us how much reverence and care we must bring to the discussion. I greatly appreciate the saying of Gregory of Nazianzus: 'I cannot think of the one without immediately being surrounded by the brightness of the three, and I cannot distinguish the three without being suddenly carried back to the one.' Therefore let us never imagine a Trinity of persons that pulls our minds into separate identities, without at once drawing us back to the unity. The names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit prove a

real distinction — so no one should think them mere titles assigned to God according to His various works. Yet it is a distinction, not a division. The passages already cited show that the Son has a property distinct from the Father: the Word could not have been with God if He were not something other than the Father, nor would He have had His glory with the Father apart from being distinct from Him. Likewise the Son distinguishes Himself from the Father when He says there is another who bears witness to Him. The same point is made where Scripture says the Father created all things through the Word — which would be impossible unless the Word were in some manner distinct from Him. Furthermore, the Father did not come down to earth — the one who came out from the Father did. The Father did not die or rise again — the one sent by Him did. Nor did this distinction begin when He took on flesh: it is clear that He was already the only begotten in the bosom of the Father before that. Who could accept the idea that the Son entered the bosom of the Father only when He descended from heaven to take on human nature? No — He was already in the bosom of the Father, already enjoying glory with Him. As for the distinction of the Holy Spirit from the Father, Christ speaks of it when He says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. And how often does He show the Spirit to be distinct from Himself — as when He promises to send another Comforter, and in many other places.

I am uncertain whether it is wise to borrow illustrations from human affairs to explain the nature of this distinction. The ancient fathers did so occasionally, but they also admitted that whatever comparison they brought forward differed greatly from the reality. For this reason I am reluctant to venture any such comparison, for

fear that an ill-chosen one might give the malicious occasion to scoff or lead the uninformed astray. Yet the distinction that Scripture sets out should not go unspoken. It is this: the Father is given the beginning of all action, as the fountain and source of all things; the Son is given wisdom, counsel, and the ordering of all that is done; to the Holy Spirit is assigned power and effective action. Although eternity belongs equally to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — since God could never have existed without His wisdom and power, and in eternity there is no first or last — this ordering is not pointless or unnecessary. Every person naturally thinks first of God, then of the wisdom that proceeds from Him, and finally of the power by which He carries out the purposes of His will. That the Son is said to be of the Father alone, and the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son, is shown in many places, but nowhere more clearly than in Romans 8, where the same Spirit is called interchangeably the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the one who raised Christ from the dead. This is not without reason, for Peter also testifies that it was the Spirit of Christ by whom the prophets prophesied, even though Scripture so frequently teaches that it was the Spirit of God the Father.

Yet this distinction does not stand against the unity of God in such a way as to prevent us from affirming that the Son is one God with the Father, because He shares one Spirit with Him, and that the Holy Spirit is not something separate from the Father and the Son. For in each person the whole substance is understood, while each person possesses His own distinct property. The Father is wholly in the Son, and the Son is wholly in the Father, as He Himself declares: 'I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me.' The church's writers do not allow one person to be separated from an-

other by any difference of essence. Augustine explains it this way: by the names that denote distinction, what is meant is their relation to one another, not the substance in which they are all one. By this interpretation the sayings of the ancient writers — which would otherwise seem to conflict — can be brought into agreement. For sometimes they say the Father is the source of the Son, and at other times they say the Son has both Godhead and essence from Himself and shares one source with the Father. Augustine explains the reason for this difference clearly in another place: Christ, considered in Himself, is called God; considered in relation to His Father, He is called the Son. Similarly, the Father considered in Himself is called God, but considered in relation to His Son, He is called the Father. Where He is considered as Father, He is not the Son; where He is considered as Son, He is not the Father; but where each is named in relation to Himself, it is all one God. Therefore, when we speak of the Son simply and without reference to the Father, we rightly say He is of Himself — and so we call Him one source. But when we speak of the relation between Him and His Father, we rightly call the Father the source of the Son. The entire fifth book of Augustine on the Trinity is devoted to working out exactly this point. It is far safer to rest in the relational terms he describes than to wander into pointless speculation by trying to probe this great mystery too deeply.

Those who are content with sober and measured faith should briefly learn this much, which is all that needs to be known: when we confess belief in one God, by 'God' we understand the one single essence in which we comprehend three persons or hypostases. Therefore whenever we speak of God without qualification, we mean no less the Son and the Holy Spirit than the Father. But

when the Son is named alongside the Father, relation enters the picture, and we then distinguish between the persons. Because the properties of the persons bring an order with them — so that the beginning and source is in the Father — whenever the Father and the Son, or the Holy Spirit, are mentioned together, the name 'God' is used in a particular sense of the Father. In this way the unity of the essence is preserved and the order is honored, without diminishing the Godhead of the Son or the Holy Spirit. Since the apostles have already shown that the Son of God is the one whom Moses and the prophets testify to be the Lord, we must always return to the unity of essence. It would therefore be a detestable sacrilege to call the Son a separate God from the Father, because the simple name 'God' admits no such relational distinction — God considered in Himself cannot be called 'this' or 'that.' That the name Lord, when used without qualification, applies to Christ, is clear from Paul's words: 'Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this.' For after receiving the answer of Christ — 'My grace is sufficient for you' — Paul immediately says, 'that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' The name Lord there clearly stands for Jehovah, and to restrict it to the person of the Mediator in a qualified sense would be foolish, since the statement compares no one to anyone else. We also know that the apostles, following the common practice of the Greeks, regularly use the word *Kyrios* (Lord) in place of Jehovah. And to take a nearby example: Paul prayed to the Lord in exactly the same sense that Peter quotes from Joel: 'Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' When the name is given to the Son in a particular sense, there is another reason for it — which we will examine in the appropriate place. For now it is enough to keep in mind that when Paul prayed to God

without qualification, he immediately brought in the name of Christ. In the same way, God is called 'Spirit' by Christ Himself. There is no reason why the whole essence of God — in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are comprehended — should not be called spiritual. This is plain in Scripture: just as we hear God described as Spirit, so we also hear the Holy Spirit — being a hypostasis of the whole essence — called both God and proceeding from God.

But since Satan has always stirred up great controversies to undermine our faith — controversies about the divine essence of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and about the distinction of persons — and has in nearly every age provoked wicked spirits to trouble faithful teachers on this point, it is now fitting to respond to some perverse errors. Our purpose up to this point has been to lead willing learners gently by the hand, not to wrestle with the obstinate and argumentative. But now the truth we have set out peacefully must be defended against the schemes of the wicked. My chief aim, however, remains this: that those who open their ears willingly to the word of God may have firm ground on which to stand. On this subject, more than almost any other in the hidden mysteries of Scripture, we must reason soberly and with great restraint, taking great care that neither our thoughts nor our words go beyond what God's word sets out. How could the human mind grasp the immeasurable essence of God, when it cannot even determine with certainty the size of the sun it sees daily with its own eyes? How could the mind, left to itself, explore the substance of God, when it cannot even fully know its own substance? Let us therefore willingly leave the knowledge of Himself to God. He alone, as Hilary says, is a proper witness to Himself — one who is known by no one but

Himself. We yield the knowledge of God to Him by conceiving of Him only as He has revealed Himself, and by seeking to know Him nowhere other than in His own word. Chrysostom wrote five homilies to this purpose, directed against the Anomeans. Yet not even these could restrain those bold speculators from speaking without restraint. They showed no more modesty here than they typically show everywhere else. The unhappy results of such reckless overconfidence should warn us to approach this question with teachable willingness rather than sharpness of intellect, never seeking God anywhere other than in His holy word, never thinking anything of Him without His word to guide us, and never saying anything that is not drawn from that same word. The distinction within the one Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is very difficult to understand and creates more confusion in some minds than is helpful. Let those people remember that the human mind enters a maze when it follows its own curiosity — and let them submit to the guidance of the heavenly oracles, even when they cannot fully grasp the height of the mystery.

To catalog all the errors that have attacked the purity of faith on this doctrine throughout history would be tediously long, and most heretics have also tried to overwhelm the glory of God with such crude and foolish errors that they were satisfied merely to shake and confuse the uninformed. From just a few men have sprung many sects — some tearing apart the essence of God, others confusing the distinction between the persons. But if we hold firmly to what Scripture has already shown clearly — that the essence of the one God, which belongs equally to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is single and undivided, and that the Father is distinguished from the Son by a certain property, and the Son

from the Holy Spirit — we will shut the gate not only against Arius and Sabellius but also against the other ancient authors of error. But because in our own time certain frenzied men have arisen — Servetus and others like him — who have tangled everything up with new deceptions, it is worth briefly exposing their falsehoods. The name Trinity was so hateful, indeed so detestable, to Servetus that he declared all who held to it — whom he called 'Trinitarians' — to be completely godless. I will pass over the insulting words he invented. The substance of his position was this: that God is made into three parts when we say three persons abide in His essence, and that this Trinity is merely an imaginary construct that conflicts with the unity of God. At the same time, he wanted the persons to be certain outward appearances or forms — not truly subsisting within the essence of God, but representing God to us in one way or another. He taught that in the beginning there was nothing distinct in God, since the Word and the Spirit were originally all one — but that since Christ arose as God from God, the Holy Spirit also sprang forth as another God from Him. Sometimes he covered his errors with allegories, as when he called the eternal Word the Spirit of Christ with God, and the radiance of His form. And again, that the Holy Spirit was the shadow of the Godhead. But in the end he reduces the Godhead of both to nothing, claiming that according to some system of distribution, there is in the Son and in the Holy Spirit only a portion of God — and that this same Spirit is substantially a portion of God in us, and also in wood and stones. What he says about the person of the Mediator we will address in the appropriate place. But this monstrous invention — that a person is nothing other than a visible form of the glory of God — needs no lengthy refutation. For John declares that the Word was

God before the world was ever created, making it something far different from a mere outward form. If the Word that was God existed with the Father from all eternity and had His own proper glory with the Father, He could not be a mere external or figurative radiance. It necessarily follows that He was a hypostasis inwardly abiding in God. And although the Spirit does not appear until the account of creation, He is not brought in there as a shadow but as an essential power of God — when Moses shows that the unformed mass itself was sustained in Him. It is evident, then, that the eternal Spirit was always in God, for He preserved and sustained the formless matter of heaven and earth until beauty and order were added to it. He could not at that point have been merely an image or representation of God, as Servetus imagines. But elsewhere Servetus is forced to reveal his error more openly, when he says that God, by eternally ordaining for Himself a visible Son, thereby made Himself visible. If that were true, Christ would have no Godhead other than what comes from being appointed Son by God's eternal decree. Moreover, Servetus so transforms these imagined forms that he freely invents new changing attributes within God. But worst of all is his error of confusedly mixing both the Son of God and the Holy Spirit with all created things. He plainly claims that the essence of God has parts and portions, of which every portion is God. Specifically, he says that the spirits of the faithful are coeternal and consubstantial with God — and elsewhere he assigns substantial deity not only to the human soul but to other creatures as well.

From this same source came another similar error. Certain men, wanting to escape the shame of Servetus's wickedness, did confess that there are three persons — but added this qualification:

that the Father, who is truly and properly the one and only God, poured His Godhead into the Son and Holy Spirit when He formed them. They even used this shocking expression: that the Father is distinguished from the Son and the Holy Spirit by this mark alone — that He is the sole 'essentiator,' or maker of the essence. Their first argument is that Christ is called the Son of God throughout Scripture, from which they conclude that the Father alone is properly God. But they fail to notice that although the name 'God' is common to the Son as well, it is sometimes given to the Father alone on account of His preeminence — because He is the fountain and origin of the Deity — and this is done to underscore the single unity of the essence. They object: if the Son truly is the Son of God, it is improper to call Him the Son of a person. My answer is that both are true: He is the Son of God because He is the Word begotten of the Father before all worlds — we are not yet discussing the person of the Mediator — and yet for the purpose of clarification we must also look at the person, so that the name 'God' is not taken absolutely as referring to the Father alone. For if we mean that only the Father is God, we plainly strip the Son of His divine rank. Therefore whenever the Godhead is under discussion, we must not allow a comparison between the Son and the Father as though the name 'God' belonged only to the Father. For the God who appeared to Isaiah was the true and only God — and yet John affirms that this was Christ. He who declared through Isaiah that He would be a stumbling stone to the Jews was the only God — and yet Paul identifies this as Christ. He who declares through Isaiah, 'As I live, every knee shall bow to Me,' is the only God — and yet Paul expounds this as referring to Christ. To this end the apostle cites these words: 'You, O God, laid the foundation of the

earth' — and again: 'Let all God's angels worship Him' — things that belong to none but the only God. And yet he says these are the proper titles of Christ. The objection is worthless that these divine titles are applied to Christ only because He is the radiance of the Father's glory. For since the name Jehovah is used in each of these passages, it follows that He is so called because He is God from Himself. For if He is Jehovah, it cannot be denied that He is the same God who elsewhere cries out through Isaiah: 'I, I am He, and there is no God besides Me.' It is also worth considering the saying of Jeremiah: 'The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth.' Against this we must confess that the Son of God is the very one whose Godhead Isaiah repeatedly proves by His creation of the world. And how can it be that the Creator, who gives existence to all things, does not exist from Himself but must borrow His being from another? Whoever says the Son was given essence or brought into being by the Father denies that He is from Himself. But the Holy Spirit says the contrary, calling Him Jehovah. Now if we grant that the whole essence belongs to the Father alone, it must either be made divisible or it must be taken away from the Son — and the Son would be stripped of His essence and be God only in name and title. According to these triflers, the essence of God belongs solely to the Father, since He alone is God and is the maker of the Son's essence. The Godhead of the Son would then be merely an abstraction drawn from God's essence, or a derivative portion taken from the whole. By their own principle they must also grant that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father alone. For if He is a derivation from the first essence that belongs only to the Father, He cannot rightly be called the Spirit of the Son — which is refuted by Paul's testimony

where he treats the Spirit as common to both Christ and the Father. Moreover, if the Father's person is removed from the Trinity, how would He differ from the Son and the Holy Spirit — except only in that He alone is God? They confess Christ to be God, and yet they say He differs from the Father. There must be some distinguishing mark to ensure that the Father is not the Son. Those who locate that distinction in the essence plainly destroy the true Godhead of Christ — which cannot exist without essence, and indeed without the whole essence. The Father differs from the Son only if He has something distinctly His own that is not common to the Son. What will they find to distinguish them? If the distinction is in the essence, let them explain whether He has or has not communicated that essence to the Son. It could not have been only a partial communication — for to say He made Christ half a God would be wicked. Moreover, this view would tear apart the essence of God in a shameful way. It therefore remains that the essence is whole and perfectly common to both the Father and the Son. If that is true, then as far as essence is concerned, there is no difference between them. If they say that the Father, in giving His essence, remains nevertheless the only God in whom the essence resides — then Christ is a figurative God, a God only in appearance and name but not in reality, since nothing is more proper to God than simply to be, as in the saying: 'I AM has sent me to you.'

It is easy to prove from many passages that their claim is false — that whenever Scripture refers to God absolutely, only the Father is meant. In the very passages they themselves cite, they reveal their lack of careful reading, since the name of the Son also appears there. This shows that the name 'God' in those places is used relationally, and therefore restricted to the person of the

Father. Their objection — that if the Father were not the only true God, He would be His own Father — is answered in a single word. There is nothing inconsistent in calling Him peculiarly 'God' on account of order and degree — since He not only of Himself begat His wisdom, but is also the God of the Mediator, which I will explain more fully in the appropriate place. For since Christ was revealed in the flesh, He is called the Son of God not only because He was the eternal Word begotten of the Father before all worlds, but also because He took on the person and office of Mediator to unite us to God. Since they so boldly exclude the Son from the honor of God, I would like to know: when the Son declares that none is good but God (Matthew 19:17), does He thereby strip goodness from Himself? I am not speaking of His human nature — perhaps they would object that whatever goodness it had came by free gift. I ask: is the eternal Word of God good or not? If they say no, we have exposed their ungodliness plainly enough. If they say yes, they contradict themselves. Yet the fact that Christ seems at first glance to distance Himself from the title 'Good' actually strengthens our case. Since goodness is the singular title of God alone, and since He was greeted with that word in the ordinary way, He rejected the false honor in order to remind them that the goodness He truly possessed was the goodness that belongs to God. I also ask: when Paul declares that God alone is immortal, wise, and true (1 Timothy 1:17), does that reduce Christ to the number of those who are mortal, foolish, and false? Will He not be immortal — He who from the beginning was life itself, giving immortality to angels? Will He not be wise — He who is the eternal wisdom of God? Will truth itself not be true? I ask further: do they think Christ ought to be worshipped? He claims for Himself that every knee shall bow

before Him (Philippians 2:10), and it follows that He is the God who in the law forbade the worship of any other. If they want to limit to the Father alone what Isaiah says — 'I am He; there is no other' (Isaiah 44:6) — I turn that very testimony against them, since we see that whatever belongs to God is given to Christ. Their objection has no force — that Christ was exalted in the flesh in which He had been humbled, and that in respect to the flesh all authority in heaven and earth was given to Him. For although the majesty of King and Judge extends to the whole person of the Mediator, if He had not been God manifested in flesh, He could not have been raised to such height without God contradicting Himself. Paul settles this controversy, teaching that Christ was equal with God before He humbled Himself in the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). How could this equality have existed unless He were the same God whose name is Lord and Jehovah — who rides upon the cherubim, who is king of all the earth and Lord of the ages? However they may argue against it, they cannot take from Christ what Isaiah says elsewhere: 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him' (Isaiah 25:9) — for in these words Isaiah describes the coming of God the Redeemer, who would not only bring the people back from exile in Babylon but fully restore the church in every way. Their other objection — that Christ was God only in His Father — gains them nothing. We confess that in terms of order and degree, the beginning of the Godhead is in the Father. But we say it is a detestable invention to claim that the essence belongs only to the Father, as though He alone were the maker of the Son's deity. For that would mean either that there is more than one essence, or that they are calling Christ God only in title and imagination. If they grant that Christ is God, but secondary to the

Father, then His essence would be begotten and derived — whereas in the Father it is unbegotten and underived. I know that many clever people mock the idea of drawing a distinction of persons from Moses's words, where God says, 'Let us make man in our image' (Genesis 1:26). But godly readers can see how pointless it would be for Moses to record this as a conversation between distinct persons if there were not more than one person in God. It is certain that those to whom the Father spoke were uncreated — and nothing is uncreated but God Himself, the one only God. Therefore, unless they grant that the power of creating and the authority of commanding were common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it would follow that God was not speaking within Himself but was addressing some outside workers. Finally, one passage answers two of their objections at once. When Christ Himself declares that God is Spirit (John 4:24), this cannot be restricted to the Father alone, as if the Word Himself were not of a spiritual nature. If then the name 'Spirit' belongs equally to the Son as to the Father, I conclude that the Son is also included under the unqualified name 'God.' When Christ adds immediately after that only those who worship the Father in Spirit and truth are acceptable worshippers, something else follows: since Christ is speaking in the role of a teacher, He gives the name 'God' to the Father not to deny His own Godhead, but to lead us step by step toward it.

But they are mistaken in imagining certain separate individual things, each possessing a portion of the divine essence. Scripture teaches that there is one God in essence, and therefore that the essence of both the Son and the Holy Spirit is unbegotten. But inasmuch as the Father is first in order and has of Himself begotten

His wisdom, He is rightly counted, as stated above, the origin and fountain of all the Godhead. So God, spoken of without qualification, is unbegotten; and the Father, with respect to His person, is also unbegotten. They foolishly think they can accuse us of making a quaternion — a God-plus-three — because they falsely and craftily attribute to us a device of their own invention, as though we imagined that three persons derive from one essence. But it is clear from our writings that we do not draw the persons out of the essence; rather, though they abide within the essence, we draw a distinction between them. If the persons were separated from the essence, their reasoning might carry some weight. But then it would be a Trinity of gods and not of persons contained within the one God. So their absurd question — whether the essence itself enters into the Trinity as if we imagined three gods descending from it — is answered. Their further objection, that then the Trinity would be without God, comes from the same confusion. For although the essence does not enter into the distinction as a part or a member, the persons are neither without it nor outside of it. The Father could not be the Father if He were not God, and the Son is the Son only because He is God. We therefore say that the Godhead is absolutely of itself. From this we grant that the Son, insofar as He is God, is from Himself — without regard to His person; but insofar as He is the Son, we say He is from the Father. So His essence is without beginning, but the beginning of His person is God Himself. The faithful ancient writers who spoke of the Trinity applied the term of distinction only to the persons, since to include the essence in the distinction would be not only an absurd error but a gross ungodliness. For those who want to count three things — the essence, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — plainly de-

stroy the essence of the Son and the Holy Spirit, since otherwise the parts joined together would fall apart, which is a defect in any scheme of distinction. Finally, if the Father and Son were simply different names for the same thing, the Father would be the God-maker, nothing would remain in the Son but a shadow, and the Trinity would be nothing other than the joining of one God with two creatures.

When they object that if Christ is properly God He cannot rightly be called the Son, we have already answered this: in those passages, because one person is being compared to another, the name 'God' is not used absolutely but is restricted to the Father — inasmuch as He is the beginning of the Godhead, not in the sense of making the essence (as these confused minds imagine), but in terms of order. In this sense we are to understand Christ's words to the Father: 'This is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.' Speaking in the person of the Mediator, He holds the position between God and humanity — and yet His majesty is not diminished by this. For though He humbled Himself, He did not thereby surrender with the Father the glory that was hidden before the world began. So the apostle in Hebrews 2, though he acknowledges that Christ was for a short time made lower than the angels, does not hesitate to also affirm that He is the same eternal God who laid the foundations of the earth. We must therefore hold that whenever Christ, speaking as Mediator, addresses the Father, the name 'God' includes the Godhead that belongs to Christ as well. So when He said to the apostles, 'It is to your advantage that I go away, for the Father is greater than I,' He is not assigning Himself a second rank of Godhead — as if His eternal essence were inferior to the Father.

Rather, because in obtaining heavenly glory He draws the faithful into sharing in it, He places His Father in the higher position — inasmuch as the glorious fullness of brightness that shines in heaven differs from the measure of glory that was seen in Him when clothed in flesh. In a similar way, Paul says in another place that Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father, so that God may be all in all. Nothing is more absurd than to deny the eternal continuance of the Godhead of Christ. If He will never cease to be the Son of God but will always remain what He was from the beginning, then under the name 'the Father' is comprehended the one essence common to them both. And surely Christ descended to us precisely so that, lifting us up to His Father, He might also lift us up to Himself — since He and His Father are one. It is therefore neither lawful nor right to restrict the name 'God' so exclusively to the Father as to take it away from the Son. John declares that Christ is the true God for this very reason: so no one would suppose He occupies a second rank of Godhead beneath His Father. And I am amazed at what these inventors of new gods intend: while they confess Christ to be true God, they immediately exclude Him from the Godhead of His Father. As if anyone could be a true God other than the one God, or as if a Godhead poured from one to another were not simply a newly invented fiction.

When they pile up passages from Irenaeus in which he affirms that the Father of Christ is the only and eternal God of Israel, this is done either out of shameful ignorance or extreme dishonesty. They ought to have noticed that Irenaeus in those writings was arguing against people who denied that the Father of Christ was the same God who spoke through Moses and the prophets — people who imagined an unknown deity produced from the corruption of

the world. His entire effort was to make plain that no other God is proclaimed in Scripture but the Father of Christ, and that inventing any other is wrong. It is no wonder, then, that he so often concludes that there was no other God of Israel but the one spoken of by Christ and the apostles. Likewise, when today we must oppose a different kind of error, we can rightly say that the God who appeared to the fathers in ancient times was none other than Christ. But if anyone objects that it was the Father, our answer is ready: in defending the Godhead of the Son, we do not exclude the Father. If readers keep Irenaeus's purpose in mind, all that controversy will dissolve. And also from the sixth chapter of book three, the whole dispute is settled — for there Irenaeus labors entirely to prove that the one who is called God absolutely and without qualification in Scripture is truly the one only God, and that Christ is called God in exactly that absolute sense. Let us remember that this was the central point of his entire argument, as the whole work makes clear — and especially in chapter 46 of book two, where he says that the one who is not truly God is not called Father in any plain and direct sense. Moreover, in another place he says that both the Son and the Father are jointly called God by the prophets and apostles. He then explains how Christ — who is Lord of all, King, God, and Judge — received power from the God of all, that is, in the sense of His subjection, because He humbled Himself even to death on the cross. And a little later he affirms that the Son is the maker of heaven and earth, who gave the law through Moses and appeared to the fathers. Now if anyone insists that Irenaeus means only the Father is the God of Israel, I will turn back against him what the same author plainly teaches: that Christ is one and the same, applying to Him the prophecy of Habakkuk, 'God will come from the

South.' The passage in chapter 9 of book four serves the same purpose: 'Christ Himself, along with the Father, is the God of the living.' And in chapter 12 of the same book, he explains that when Abraham believed God, it was because Christ is the maker of heaven and earth and the only God.

They have no better success in citing Tertullian as their defender. Though his style is sometimes rough and difficult, he plainly teaches the same doctrine we are defending. That is: while God is one, He is also His Word by disposition and order; that there is one God in unity of substance, yet that unity is arranged by the mystery of ordered distribution into a Trinity; that there are three — not in condition but in degree, not in substance but in form, not in power but in order. He says he holds the Son to be second to the Father, but he means that He is not other than the Father — only distinct by way of distinction. In some places he says the Son is visible. But after examining the question from both sides, he defines the Son as invisible insofar as He is the Word.

Finally, where he affirms that the Father is defined in His own person, he proves himself far from the error we are refuting. Though he acknowledges no other God but the Father, in the very next part of his writing he explains himself by saying he does not mean this exclusively with respect to the Son — because he denies that the Son is some other God alongside the Father, and holds therefore that their sole sovereignty is not broken by the distinction of persons. Through the consistent flow of his argument it is easy to understand his meaning. He is arguing against Praxeas that although God is distinguished into three persons, this does not make many gods or divide the unity. Because according to Praxeas's thinking, Christ could not be God without also being the

Father, Tertullian labors so much on the distinction. When he calls the Word and the Spirit 'a portion of the whole,' it is a difficult expression, but excusable — for it refers not to the substance but only to the disposition and order that belongs to the persons, as Tertullian himself makes clear. From this comes his pointed question: 'How many persons do you think there are, O most perverse Praxeas, if not as many as there are names?' And a little after: 'They are to believe in the Father and the Son, each in their own name and person.' I think this should be sufficient to expose the impudence of those who try to deceive simple readers under the guise of Tertullian's authority.

Whoever carefully compares the writings of the ancient authors will find nothing in Irenaeus different from what was taught by those who came after him. Justin is among the most ancient, and in everything he agrees with us. Let them object that he, like the others, calls the Father of Christ the only God. Hilary teaches the same thing — indeed he says it more boldly, that eternity is in the Father. But does he say this in order to strip the essence of God from the Son? Not at all — he is throughout a defender of the same faith we hold. Yet they are not ashamed to pick out isolated fragments from his writings to try to make him a supporter of their error. When they bring in Ignatius, if they want his writings to carry any authority, let them first prove that the apostles made rules for Lent and similar corruptions of religion. Nothing is more distasteful than those foolish trifles published under the name of Ignatius. Their impudence in hiding behind such a disguise to deceive is all the less tolerable for it. The agreement of the ancient fathers is also clearly seen in this: at the Council of Nicaea, Arius never dared to cite the authority of a single accepted writer in his support. And

none of the Greek or Latin fathers excused himself by claiming to depart from those who came before him. There is no need to explain how Augustine — whom these scoundrels hate most of all — diligently examined the writings of all the fathers and reverently embraced them. Even in minor matters, he regularly shows what compels him to disagree with them. And in this matter, where he found anything doubtful or obscure in earlier writers, he did not hide it. But the doctrine these men fight against, he treats as having been received without controversy from the remotest antiquity. One phrase reveals that he was well aware of what earlier writers had taught: in the first book of his work on Christian teaching, he says that unity is in the Father. Will they say he forgot himself at that point? In another place he clears himself of such a charge when he calls the Father the beginning of the whole Godhead, because He is from no one — wisely recognizing that the name 'God' is especially ascribed to the Father because without placing the beginning there, the simple unity of God cannot be properly understood. I trust the godly reader will see from all this that every objection by which Satan has tried to pervert or obscure the pure truth of doctrine has been answered. And I trust the whole body of doctrine on this point has been fully laid out — provided readers restrain their curiosity and do not seek out endless and tangled disputes more eagerly than is fitting. I do not aim to please those who delight in excessive speculation. I have intentionally omitted nothing that I thought would count against our position. But in seeking to build up the church, I judged it best to leave many things untouched that would bring little benefit and only burden readers with unnecessary tedium. What purpose would it serve to

debate whether the Father is always in the act of begetting? It is foolish to imagine a continuous act of begetting when it is evident that there have been three persons in God from eternity.

¶ THE .XIIII. CHAPTER. THAT THE
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GOD, AND [•]AYNED▪ GODS.



Although Isaiah rightly rebukes the worshippers of false gods for their laziness — for not recognizing the true God from the very foundations of the earth and the arc of the heavens — our minds are so dull and sluggish that something more was needed. To keep the faithful from drifting into the inventions of the pagans, God needed to be more clearly painted before them. The philosopher's best description of God as 'the mind of the world' is empty — we must know Him more personally, or we will always waver in uncertainty. It was therefore His pleasure to leave a history of creation on which the faith of the church might rest, and to seek no other God than the one Moses declared to be the maker and builder of the world. First, a timeline is provided, so that through the succession of years the faithful might trace their way back to the original beginning of humanity and all things. This knowledge is very necessary — not only to refute the monstrous

myths once spread in Egypt and elsewhere, but also so that once the beginning of the world is known, the eternity of God may shine all the more clearly and fill us with wonder. We should not be troubled by the godless taunt: why did it not occur to God sooner to make heaven and earth? Why did He sit idle through such an immeasurable span of time, when He could have created everything thousands of ages earlier — since the entire history of the world, now nearing its end, has not yet reached six thousand years? Why God delayed so long is neither lawful nor wise for us to inquire. If the human mind strives to reach that answer, it will fail a hundred times along the way, and it would do us no good to know what God Himself has deliberately hidden in order to test the humility of our faith. That godly old man answered well when a mocking questioner asked what God had been doing before He created the world: he replied that God had been building hell for curious fools. Let that sharp and sobering rebuke restrain the restlessness that tickles many people — indeed, the restlessness that drives them into harmful speculation. Finally, let us remember that the same invisible God whose wisdom, power, and justice are beyond comprehension has set before us the history of Moses as a mirror in which His living image appears. Just as eyes dimmed by age or disease cannot see clearly without the help of spectacles, so our weakness is such that without Scripture to guide us in seeking God, we immediately run off into worthless imaginings. Those who follow their own wandering thoughts have been warned in vain, and will discover far too late — in horrible destruction — how much better it would have been to receive God's hidden counsels with reverence than to pour out blasphemies and darken the heavens with them. Augustine rightly complains that wrong is done to God when

any other reason for things is sought beyond His will alone. The same man wisely warns elsewhere that it is no less wrong to raise questions about immeasurable spans of time than about immeasurable spans of space. However vast the circuit of the heavens is, it still has a measure. If someone were to quarrel with God because the emptiness containing nothing is a hundred times larger, would not all godly people be horrified at such insolence?

Those who busy themselves with God's supposed idleness — demanding to know why He did not create the world countless ages sooner — fall into the same madness. To satisfy their craving minds, they press beyond the boundaries of the world, as though within so vast a circuit of heaven and earth they could not find enough to overwhelm all our senses with its inestimable splendor — as though God has not given us six thousand years of continuous evidence to occupy our minds. Let us therefore willingly remain within the bounds with which God has been pleased to enclose us, and as it were to fence in our minds so they do not wander freely. For the same reason Moses declares that God's work was not completed in a single moment but in six days. By this detail we are drawn away from invented speculation to the one only God who divided His work into six days — so that we would not grudge spending our whole lives contemplating it. However our eyes turn, they cannot help seeing the works of God — yet how restless our understanding is, and how quickly any godly thought that touches us fades away. Here again human reason murmurs, as though such a gradual process were beneath the power of God — until it is brought under the obedience of faith and learns to keep that rest to which the hallowing of the seventh day calls us. In the very order of creation we should carefully observe the fatherly love of God to-

ward humanity: He did not create Adam until He had filled the world with every good thing in abundance. If He had placed Adam on the earth while it was still barren and empty, if He had given him life before there was any light, He would have seemed insufficiently attentive to Adam's well-being. But as it was, He first set the motions of the sun and the stars for humanity's use, furnished the earth, the waters, and the air with living creatures, and brought forth abundant fruit for food — taking up the role of a careful and provident head of household, showing His marvelous generosity toward us. Whoever considers more carefully what I am only briefly touching here will see that Moses was the faithful witness and herald of the one God the Creator. I omit here what I have already said: that Moses speaks not only of the bare essence of God, but also presents His eternal wisdom and Spirit — so that we would not imagine God to be anything other than what He has revealed of Himself in that image.

Before I begin to speak more fully about the nature of humanity, I need to say something about angels. Moses, writing for ordinary people, only recounts in his creation account the works visible to our eyes. But when he later brings in angels as ministers of God, we can easily conclude that their Creator is the same one in whose service they carry out their work. Though Moses, accommodating himself to the people's level of understanding, does not at the very beginning list the angels among God's creatures, that is no reason we cannot speak plainly about what Scripture elsewhere consistently teaches about them. If we desire to know God through His works, so noble an example as the angels must not be overlooked. Moreover, this part of the teaching is very necessary for refuting many errors. The excellence of the angels' nature so dazzled the

minds of many that they thought it dishonored the angels to subject them to the authority of one God and place them, as it were, in obedience. From this came the fiction that they were gods. Then came Mani with his sect, who invented two original principles — God and the devil — assigning to God the beginning of good things and to the devil the authorship of everything evil. If our minds were entangled in this error, God would not retain His full glory as creator of the world. For since nothing is more proper to God than eternity and self-existence, those who attribute these qualities to the devil are effectively giving him the title of divinity. And where does the almightiness of God go, if such power is granted to the devil that he can carry out whatever he wishes, even against God's opposition? As for the Manichees' only foundation — that it is wrong to ascribe to the good God the creation of anything evil — this does not harm true faith at all. True faith does not admit that anything in the whole created order is evil by nature, since the perverseness and malice of both humanity and the devil, and the sins that flow from them, are not of nature but of the corruption of nature. From the beginning, there was nothing in which God had not displayed both His wisdom and His justice. To answer these perverse notions, we must lift our minds higher than our eyes can reach. This is likely why the Nicene Creed, in calling God the creator of all things, specifically includes things invisible. Yet we will take care to stay within the measure that the rule of godliness sets, so that readers, by reaching beyond what is fitting, do not wander away from the simplicity of faith. Since the Holy Spirit always teaches what benefits us and what builds us up, He either leaves

unprofitable things entirely unspoken or touches them only briefly and in passing. It is therefore our duty to be content not knowing the things that do not profit us.

That the angels — being God's ordained ministers to carry out His commands — are also His creatures should be beyond all question. To argue about the time and order in which they were created would be pointless troublemaking rather than genuine inquiry. Moses declares that the earth was made, and the heavens and all their hosts — so what is the point of carefully searching out on which day the unseen hosts of heaven, apart from the stars and planets, first came into existence? To be brief: just as in all matters of religion, let us here remember two rules of modesty and restraint. First, concerning obscure things, we should neither speak, nor think, nor seek to know anything beyond what God's word has taught us. Second, in reading Scripture, let us constantly focus on what serves to build up faith, and not give ourselves to curiosity or study of things that do not profit. Since it was God's pleasure to teach us not in trivial questions but in sound godliness, the fear of His name, true confidence, and the duties of holiness — let us rest in such knowledge. If we want to be truly wise, we must leave behind the worthless speculations that idle minds have taught without the authority of God's word — about the nature, ranks, and number of angels. I know that such matters are more eagerly seized upon by many, and more entertaining to them than the things of daily practice. But if we do not mind being students of Christ, let us not mind following the order of learning He has appointed. Then we will find that, being content with His instruction, we will not merely restrain ourselves from excessive speculation, but will be repelled by it — for He is the one who calls us away

from it. No one can deny that the same Dionysius, whoever he was, has argued many things both cleverly and wittily in his *Celestial Hierarchy*. But if one examines it more closely, he will find that most of it is mere chatter. The proper work of a teacher of God's things is not to delight ears with speculation but to establish consciences by teaching what is true, certain, and useful. A reader of that book would think the author had come down from heaven and was describing not things heard by rumor but things seen with his own eyes. But Paul, who was caught up to the third heaven, said nothing of that kind — and actually declares that it is not lawful for a man to speak the secrets he saw there (2 Corinthians 12:2). Therefore, setting aside that trifling wisdom, let us consider from the plain teaching of Scripture what the Lord would have us know about His angels.

Scripture commonly describes the angels as heavenly spirits whose ministry God uses to carry out what He has decreed. The name 'angel' is given to them because God uses them as messengers to make Himself known to people. Their other names are derived from the same reasoning. They are called 'hosts' because they surround their Prince like a royal guard, adorning and displaying the honor of His majesty — and like soldiers, they are always assembled under their captain's standard, ever prepared and ready to carry out His commands, so that at the first signal they are already at work. The prophets describe this image of God's throne in its majesty, but especially Daniel, who says that when God took His seat on the throne of judgment, a thousand thousands stood before Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand. Because God marvelously displays His power through them, they are called 'strengths'; because He exercises His authority in the world

through them, they are sometimes called 'principalities,' sometimes 'powers,' sometimes 'dominions.' And because the glory of God dwells in them, as it were, they are also called 'thrones' — though on this last name I will not be definitive, since another interpretation fits as well or better. Setting that name aside, the Holy Spirit frequently uses the other names to honor the dignity of the angels' ministry. It is only fitting that those instruments by which God especially displays the presence of His majesty should not pass without honor. Indeed, for this reason they are sometimes called gods — because in their ministry, as in a mirror, they partly reflect the Godhead to us. Though I accept the interpretation of the ancient writers that the Angel was Christ, when Scripture says the angel of God appeared to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and others, yet the name is also given to all the angels in many places. This should not surprise you. If the title 'god' is given to earthly princes and rulers, who stand in God's place as the sovereign king and judge, there is all the more reason for it to be given to the angels, in whom the brightness of God's glory shines far more abundantly.

But Scripture puts its greatest emphasis on what most comforts us and confirms our faith: that the angels are the distributors and administrators of God's goodness toward us. Scripture tells us they watch for our safety, take up our defense, direct our paths, and care that no harm comes to us. The general promises apply first to Christ, the head of the church, and then to all the faithful: 'He will give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways.' 'They will bear you up in their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' And again: 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them.' By these words God shows that He appoints His angels as protectors of those He

has taken under His care. In this manner the angel of the Lord comforted Hagar when she fled, and commanded her to return to her mistress. God promised Abraham His servant that an angel would be the guide of his journey. Jacob, in blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, prayed that the angel of God who had delivered him from all evil would make them prosper. An angel was set to guard the camp of the people of Israel. And as often as God was pleased to rescue Israel from their enemies, He raised up deliverers through the ministry of angels. Even Christ Himself was ministered to by angels and had their ready assistance in all His needs. They brought news of His resurrection to the women, and told the disciples of His glorious return. And in fulfilling their role as our defenders, they fight against the devil and all enemies and execute God's vengeance on those who come against us — as we read that the angel of God, to deliver Jerusalem from siege, struck down a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the king of Assyria in a single night.

Whether a separate angel is assigned to each believer for their protection, I will not say with certainty. When Daniel mentions the angel of the Persians and the angel of the Greeks, he seems to indicate that certain angels are appointed over kingdoms and nations as governors. And when Christ says that the angels of little children always behold the face of the Father, He seems to imply that certain angels are assigned the care of them. But I am not sure whether we should conclude from this that every individual person has their own guardian angel. What is certain is this: not merely one angel watches over each of us, but all the angels together by common agreement watch for our safety. For it is said of all the angels collectively that they rejoice more over one sinner who repents

than over ninety-nine righteous people who have not strayed. More than one angel is said to have carried the soul of Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. It was not without reason that Elisha revealed to his servant the many fiery chariots appointed specially for him. One passage seems more directly to bear on this point than the rest. When Peter was freed from prison and knocked at the door of the house where the brothers were gathered, they could not believe it was him and said it must be his angel. This seems to have come from the common belief that each believer is assigned a guardian angel. Yet it could equally mean that God had appointed a particular angel to guard Peter for that occasion without being his permanent keeper — as common people imagine that two contrasting spirits are assigned to each person, a good and an evil one. But it is not worth laboring over a question that does not greatly matter. If it does not satisfy a person to know that all the ranks of the heavenly host are watching over his safety, I do not see what benefit he gains from knowing that one angel is specifically assigned to him. Those who restrict God's care for each of us to a single angel do great wrong both to themselves and to all members of the church — as if the promise of power to help us were pointless, when we should instead be fighting all the more boldly, surrounded and defended by it.

Those who presume to define the number and ranks of angels should consider carefully what foundation they have. I grant that Michael is called the Great Prince in Daniel, and the Archangel in Jude. Paul also says it will be an Archangel whose trumpet call summons people to the judgment. But who can use this to assign ranks of honor among the angels, distinguish them from one another by specific marks, and assign each one a position? The two

names found in Scripture — Michael and Gabriel — and if you wish to add the third from the book of Tobit — may by their meanings be names given to the angels according to our limited capacity, though I prefer to leave that interpretation open. As for their number: Christ speaks of many legions, Daniel of many companies of ten thousands, Elisha's servant saw many chariots full — and this shows they are a great multitude. The statement that they encamp around those who fear God confirms this. As for form: spirits obviously have no visible shape, yet Scripture is not without purpose when, to suit our understanding, it depicts angels under the symbols of cherubim and seraphim with wings. The intent is that we should not doubt they will always be ready to help us with incredible swiftness the moment need arises — as if lightning sent from heaven were to flash toward us at its customary speed. Whatever more might be sought beyond this on either point, let us regard it as among those mysteries whose full disclosure is reserved for the last day. Let us therefore remember to guard against both excessive curiosity in searching and excessive boldness in speaking.

One thing that many contentious people question should be held with certainty: the angels are ministering spirits, whose service God uses for the defense of His own people, distributing His benefits among humanity and carrying out His other purposes through them. In ancient times the Sadducees held that by 'angels' Scripture means nothing more than the impulses God stirs in people, or the signs of His power that He shows. But so many testimonies of Scripture cry out against this error that it is remarkable such gross ignorance could have persisted among that people. Setting aside the passages already cited — where thousands and legions of angels appear, where joy is ascribed to them, where it is

said they support the faithful with their hands and carry their souls to rest, that they see the face of the Father, and so on — there are other passages that clearly prove the angels are truly spirits with real substance. When Stephen and Paul say the law was given by the hand of angels, when Christ says the elect after the resurrection will be like the angels, when the day of judgment is said to be unknown even to the angels, when He says He will come with His holy angels — however one might try to twist these passages, they must be understood in the plain sense. Likewise, when Paul charges Timothy before Christ and His chosen angels to keep his commandments, he means not mere qualities or inspirations without substance, but real spirits. Otherwise the statements in the letter to the Hebrews would not hold together: that Christ has become more excellent than angels, that the world is not made subject to them, that Christ took on not their nature but the nature of humanity. If we do not mean blessed spirits by 'angels,' to whom could these comparisons apply? The author of that letter explains himself when he places together in the kingdom of heaven the souls of the faithful and the holy angels. Add to this what we already noted: that the angels of little children always behold the face of God, that they rejoice at our safety, that they marvel at the manifold grace of God in the church, and that they are subject to Christ the head. The same point is made by the fact that angels so often appeared to the holy fathers in the form of men, spoke with them, and even stayed with them. And Christ Himself, in the pre-eminent role He holds as Mediator, is called an Angel. I thought it good to mention this in passing to equip simple readers with a defense against those foolish and groundless opinions that Satan stirred up long ago and that still occasionally resurface.

Now we must address the superstition that commonly creeps in when we speak of angels as ministers and distributors of God's good gifts to us. Human reason immediately concludes that angels should therefore receive all honor — and so the things that belong only to God and Christ get transferred to angels. We can see that in past ages the glory of Christ was greatly obscured in this way, as angels were heaped with immense titles of honor that had no warrant from God's word. Of all the errors we speak against, this one is among the most ancient. It is clear that Paul himself had serious conflict with people who so elevated the angels that they would have effectively reduced Christ to a lower position. This is why he presses so carefully in the letter to the Colossians that Christ is not only to be preferred above all angels, but is also the author of all the good things the angels themselves have — so that we would not forsake Him and turn to them, who cannot fully supply even their own needs but must draw from the same fountain as we do. Since a certain brightness of God's majesty shines in the angels, there is nothing we are more naturally inclined to do than to fall down before them in worship with a kind of admiration, and to give them what belongs to God alone. John confesses in Revelation that this very thing happened to him — but he records the answer he received: 'You must not do that. I am a fellow servant with you. Worship God.'

We will avoid this danger well if we consider why God chooses to display His power, provide for the safety of the faithful, and distribute His gifts through the angels rather than acting entirely without them. He does not do this out of necessity, as if He could not manage without them — for whenever He pleases, He sets them aside and accomplishes His work by a single word. Far from

being any aid to ease His labor, the angels' ministry exists for the comfort of our weakness, so that we may have whatever our minds need to rise in hope and be confirmed in assurance. The Lord's declaration that He is our protector ought to be more than enough for us. But seeing ourselves surrounded by so many dangers, so many harmful things, so many kinds of enemies — such is our weakness and frailty — we may sometimes be filled with trembling fear or fall into despair, unless the Lord, in proportion to our capacity, makes His presence real to us. And so He not only promises to care for us, but also tells us that He has an innumerable guard to whom He has given the task of laboring for our safety — so that as long as we are surrounded by their garrison and support, no danger can reach us. I grant that it shows our weakness when, even after God's simple promise of His own protection, we still look around for help from other sources. But since it pleased the Lord in His infinite kindness and gentleness to accommodate this weakness of ours, there is no reason for us to neglect so great a benefit. We see an example of this in the servant of Elisha: when he saw the hill surrounded by the Syrian army and no way of escape, he was struck down with fear, as if both he and his master were utterly doomed. Then Elisha prayed God to open his servant's eyes, and immediately he saw the hill filled with horses and fiery chariots — that is, a multitude of angels appointed to guard both him and the prophet. Encouraged by this sight, he took heart again and was able to face his enemies with a steady mind — the same enemies who had nearly driven him out of his senses.

Therefore, whatever is said about the ministry of angels, let us use it for this purpose: to overcome all distrust and establish our hope more firmly in God. These helps are provided by God so that

we would not be overwhelmed by the number of our enemies, as if they could prevail against His help — but would instead take hold of Elisha's word: those who are with us are more than those who are against us. How contrary to reason, then, for the angels to draw us away from God, when they were appointed precisely to confirm that His help is present among us? They do draw us away from God, if they do not lead us directly to Him — if they do not guide us as by the hand to look to Him, call on Him, and declare Him our only helper. They draw us away if we do not regard them as His hands that move only at His direction. They draw us away if they do not hold us firmly in the one Mediator Christ, so that we depend entirely on Him, lean wholly on Him, are brought to Him, and rest in Him. The vision of Jacob should be fixed in our minds: how angels descended to the earth and ascended from earth to heaven by a ladder on which the Lord of hosts stood. The meaning is that it is only through the intercession of Christ that the ministry of angels reaches us — as He Himself says: 'From now on you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man' (John 1:51). So when Abraham's servant was entrusted to the care of an angel, he did not call on the angel for help — rather, strengthened by that assurance, he prayed to the Lord and asked Him to show His mercy to Abraham. For just as God does not make the angels ministers of His power and goodness in order to share His glory with them, so He does not promise us help through their ministry in order for us to divide our confidence between Him and them. Let us therefore abandon that Platonic philosophy of seeking access to God through angels and honoring them in hopes of making God more favorable to us — a

superstition that curious and misguided people have tried from the beginning to introduce into the true religion, and still try to this day.

What Scripture teaches about devils is directed almost entirely toward this end: that we should be forewarned of their ambushes and preparations, and arm ourselves with weapons strong and reliable enough to repel even the most powerful enemies. When Satan is called the god and prince of this world, the strong man in armor, the ruler of the power of the air, and a roaring lion — all these descriptions serve to make us more alert and watchful, and more ready to enter into battle with him. This is also sometimes stated in direct terms. Peter, after saying that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, immediately adds the exhortation to resist him firmly in faith. Paul, after warning that we wrestle not with flesh and blood but with the rulers of the air, the powers of darkness, and spiritual forces of evil, immediately commands us to put on armor suited for so great and dangerous a conflict. Let us therefore apply all of this to this end: knowing that an enemy is constantly pressing upon us — an enemy fearless in courage, mighty in strength, subtle in strategy, tireless in energy and speed, well equipped with every kind of weapon, and expert in warfare — let us not allow ourselves to be caught off guard through laziness and cowardice. Rather, let us plant our feet and resist him with bold and courageous hearts. And since this war ends only in death, let us encourage ourselves to endure to the finish. Especially knowing our own weakness and inexperience, let us call on God's help and undertake nothing except in trust of Him — for it is from Him alone that we receive strategy, strength, courage, and armor.

To stir us up all the more, Scripture warns us that our enemies are not one or two or a handful, but vast armies making war against us. We read that Mary Magdalene was delivered from seven demons who possessed her. Christ says it is the normal pattern that when a demon is driven out and finds its former house left empty, it returns with seven spirits more wicked than itself. Indeed, a whole legion is said to have possessed a single man. We are taught by all this that we must fight against an immense multitude of enemies — so that we will neither dismiss the threat as too small to deserve full effort nor assume we have some breathing space and give way to idleness. When Satan or the devil is spoken of in the singular, this refers to the power of wickedness standing opposed to the kingdom of righteousness. Just as the church and the community of the saints has Christ as their head, so the faction of the wicked is depicted with its prince, who holds chief authority among them. This is the sense of the words: 'Depart, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

This too should drive us to unceasing war against the devil: he is everywhere called the enemy of God and of us. If we care about the glory of God, as we rightly should, we must throw all our strength against the one who works to extinguish it. If we are committed to upholding the kingdom of Christ, we must maintain an unceasing war against the one who conspires to destroy it. If any care for our own safety moves us, we must have neither peace nor truce with the one who is constantly scheming for our destruction. Such is the devil described in Genesis 3, where he leads humanity away from obedience to God — robbing God of His due honor and plunging humanity headlong into ruin. Such is he described in the Gospels, where he is called the enemy, said to sow weeds, and to

corrupt the seed of eternal life. In short, what Christ testifies of him — that from the beginning he was a murderer and a liar — we confirm by experience in everything he does. He attacks the truth of God with lies, obscures the light with darkness, tangles human minds in errors, stirs up hatred, ignites conflicts and strife — all to overthrow the kingdom of God and drag humanity down with him into eternal destruction. This reveals that his very nature is perverse, hostile, and malicious. For great wickedness must fill any mind that is bent on assaulting the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. John speaks to this in his letter when he writes that the devil has been sinning from the beginning — meaning that he is the originator, captain, and chief craftsman of all malice and wickedness.

But since the devil was created by God, let us remember that the malice we attribute to his nature does not come from creation but from corruption. Whatever is damnable in him, he brought upon himself by his own rebellion and fall. Scripture warns us of this so that we would not ascribe to God what is entirely foreign to Him, by thinking the devil came from God's hand already in that condition. This is why Christ says that when Satan speaks lies, he speaks from his own nature — and gives the reason: he did not stand in the truth. By saying he did not stand in the truth, Christ shows that he once had been in the truth. And by calling Satan the father of lies, Christ makes clear that Satan cannot blame God for a fault he brought upon himself. These things are stated briefly and not very fully, but they are enough for our purpose: to defend the majesty of God from all blame. What does it matter to us to know more about devils, or to know it for any other reason? Many are perhaps frustrated that Scripture does not set forth in an orderly

and detailed way the fall of the angels — its cause, manner, time, and circumstances. But since these things do not concern us, it was better that they be either left unspoken entirely or only briefly touched on. This is because it was not fitting for the Holy Spirit to feed curiosity with useless stories that bear no fruit — and we can see that the Lord's purpose was to put nothing in His holy word that we should not learn for edification. Therefore, rather than linger on superfluous matters, let us be content to know this much about the nature of devils: at their first creation they were angels of God, but by falling away from what they were made to be, they both destroyed themselves and became instruments of destruction for others. This much, being profitable to know, is plainly taught in Peter and Jude: 'God did not spare the angels who sinned, who did not keep their original state but abandoned their proper dwelling.' And Paul, by naming the 'elect angels,' without doubt implicitly sets the reprobate angels in contrast to them.

As for the conflict we say exists between God and Satan, we must understand it in a way that still holds firmly to this: Satan can do nothing except by the will and permission of God. In the account of Job, we read that Satan presented himself before God to receive his assignments, and did not dare proceed with any enterprise until he had obtained permission. When Ahab was to be deceived, Satan took on the task of becoming a lying spirit in the mouths of all the prophets — and being sent by God, he carried it out. For this reason he is called the evil spirit from the Lord that tormented Saul, because through him the sins of the wicked king were punished as with a scourge. In another place we read that the plagues on Egypt were inflicted by evil angels. In line with these specific examples, Paul speaks more generally when he calls the

blinding of the wicked the work of God, even though earlier he had called it the work of Satan. It is therefore clear that Satan is under the power of God and so governed by His authority that he is compelled to serve Him. When we say that Satan resists God, and that Satan's works are contrary to God's works, we are affirming that this conflict and opposition exists only within what God permits. I am speaking here not of Satan's will or his desires, but only of what he is actually able to accomplish. Since the devil is wicked by nature, he has no inclination to obey God's will but is wholly driven by stubbornness and rebellion. It is from himself and his own wickedness, therefore, that he desires and intends to oppose God. This wickedness drives him to undertake whatever he knows to be most against God. But because God holds him firmly restrained with the bridle of His power, Satan can only carry out what God permits him. And so he obeys his Creator whether he will or not, because he is compelled to place his service wherever God forces him.

Because God directs the unclean spirits wherever He pleases, He governs them in this way: they try the faithful with battle, ambush them, assault them, press them in combat, and often weary them, trouble them, terrify them, and sometimes wound them — but they never overcome or crush them. The wicked, however, they subdue and drag away, reigning over their souls and bodies and using them as slaves for every kind of evil. Because the faithful are harassed by such enemies, they receive these exhortations: 'Give no opportunity to the devil.' 'Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour — resist him, firm in your faith.' Paul himself confesses he was not free from this kind of conflict, saying that a messenger of Satan was

given to him to afflict him and keep him from becoming proud. This struggle is therefore common to all God's children. But since the promise of crushing Satan's head belongs to Christ and to all His members, I say that the faithful can never be finally overcome or crushed by him. They are often knocked down, but never so stunned that they cannot recover. They fall many times under the force of blows, but they are raised up again. They are wounded, but not fatally. In the end, through all the course of their lives, they obtain the victory — though I am not speaking of every individual act of theirs. For we know that by God's just judgment, David was for a time given over to Satan and moved by him to number the people. And Paul does not say without reason that there is still hope of recovery for those who have been caught in the devil's traps. In another place Paul says that the promise of victory is begun in this life — where we must wrestle — and completed after the wrestling is over: 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.' This victory has always been fully present in our head, Christ, for the prince of this world had no hold on Him. In us who are His members it now begins to appear, and will be completed when we are freed from the flesh, in which we are still subject to weakness, and filled with the full power of the Holy Spirit. In this way, as the kingdom of Christ is built up and advanced, Satan falls — as the Lord Himself says: 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.' With this answer He confirmed what the apostles had reported about the power of His preaching. And again: 'When the strong man, fully armed, guards his palace, his possessions are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him, he is overcome and his armor taken away.' To this end Christ in His death conquered Satan, who had the power of death, and triumphed over all his armies so

that they could not harm the church — for otherwise they would destroy it a hundred times over every moment. Considering our weakness and the devil's furious strength, how could we stand even briefly against his many and relentless assaults if we were not upheld by our captain's victory? Therefore God does not allow the devil to reign over the souls of the faithful, but delivers only the wicked and unbelieving into his governance — those whom God does not count among His flock. For the devil is said to possess this world without opposition until Christ drives him out. He blinds all who do not believe the gospel, carries out his work in the disobedient, and does so fittingly — for all the wicked are vessels of wrath. To whom should they more fittingly be subject than to the minister of God's vengeance? Finally, they are said to be children of the devil — just as the faithful are known as children of God by bearing His image, so the wicked, by bearing the image of Satan into which they have been transformed, are rightly identified as his children.

Just as we earlier refuted the trifling philosophy that the holy angels are nothing but good impulses or impressions God stirs in human minds, so here we must refute those who foolishly claim that devils are nothing but evil passions or disturbances of the mind produced by our flesh. We can do this briefly, since the Scripture testimony on this point is both plentiful and plain. First, when unclean spirits are called apostate angels who have departed from their original nature, the very names are enough to show that they are not mental impulses or emotions but are truly — as they are called — minds or spirits possessing sense and understanding. Likewise, when Christ and John compare children of God with children of the devil, would that comparison make any sense if 'the

devil' meant nothing more than evil impulses? John states it still more plainly: the devil has been sinning from the beginning (1 John 3:8). When Jude records Michael the archangel contending with the devil, he is clearly setting an evil and rebellious angel against the good angel. This matches what we read in the account of Job, where Satan appeared among the holy angels before God (Job 1:6). But most plain of all are those passages that speak of the punishment the devils are already beginning to experience by God's judgment, and especially what they will experience at the resurrection. 'Have You come to torment us before the time?' 'Depart, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 8:29; Matthew 25:41; Jude 1:9). 'He did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.' How pointless would these statements be — that devils are ordained to eternal judgment, that fire is prepared for them, that they are already tormented and troubled by the glory of Christ — if there were no devils at all? But since this matter needs no debate among those who believe God's word, and Scripture testimony does little good with those idle speculators who are satisfied only with what is novel, I believe I have accomplished what I set out to do: furnish godly minds against the foolish errors by which restless people trouble both themselves and simpler souls. It was important to address this so that no one entangled in that error, believing they have no real adversary, might grow careless and unprepared to resist.

In the meantime, let it not weary us to take godly delight, on this beautiful stage of creation, in the plain and ordinary works of God. As I said elsewhere, though this is not the chief point of faith,

it is in order the first: to remember that wherever we turn our eyes, all we see are the works of God, and to reflect with godly thought on the purpose for which He made them. So that we may grasp by faith what is necessary for us to know about God, it is good first to learn the account of creation as Moses briefly narrates it, and as holy men — especially Basil and Ambrose — have set it out more fully. From it we learn that God by the power of His word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing, and from them brought forth all living creatures and lifeless things, arranging their limitless variety in a wonderful order. To every thing He gave its proper nature, assigned its function, and appointed its place and home. And though all things are subject to decay, He has so provided that of every kind some will be preserved to the last day — some He sustains by hidden means, renewing their vitality from time to time, and to others He has given the power to multiply through reproduction so that the whole species does not perish with any one creature. In this way He has adorned heaven and earth with a full, varied, and beautiful abundance of all things — like a magnificent house furnished and stocked with the finest goods. And finally, in forming humanity and endowing him with such noble dignity and so many great gifts, God displayed in him the most excellent example of all His works. But since it is not my purpose here to set out the creation of the world at length, let these brief touches suffice. For it is better — as I have already advised the readers — to seek a fuller understanding of this from Moses and those who have faithfully and diligently committed the history of the world to permanent record.

There is no point in arguing at length about what purpose our study of God's works should serve, or what goal it should aim at. Much of this question has already been addressed elsewhere, and what remains for our present purpose can be settled briefly. If we truly wanted to describe how God's immeasurable wisdom, power, justice, and goodness appear in the creation of the world, no eloquence or beautiful language could do justice to so great a subject. God clearly wants us to be continually occupied in this holy meditation. As we behold in His creatures, as in mirrors, the infinite riches of His wisdom, justice, generosity, and power, we should not rush past them with a fleeting glance or a careless, wandering look. Instead, we should rest on them thoughtfully, turn them over earnestly and faithfully in our minds, and often recall them to memory. But since we are now following a teaching order, it is fitting that we set aside matters requiring long speeches. To be brief, let readers know that they have truly grasped by faith what it means that God is the Creator of heaven and earth when they follow this general rule: first, do not carelessly overlook or forget the qualities that God displays in His creatures; and second, learn to apply what they see in a way that deeply moves their hearts. We do the first of these when we consider what an excellent craftsman's work it was to arrange the vast multitude of stars in the heavens in such beautiful order that nothing more magnificent could be imagined. He fixed some stars in their positions so they cannot move, and granted others a free course, yet so that in moving they do not wander beyond their appointed space. He balanced the motion of all the stars so that they measure out days and nights, months, years, and seasons. He brought the changing lengths of days that we observe daily into such a well-ordered pattern that there is no

confusion. Likewise, we see His power when we consider how He sustains so great a mass, governs the swift spinning of the heavens, and so on. These few examples are enough to show what it means to ascribe creative power to God. If I tried to express it all in words, I would never finish, since there are as many miracles of God's power, as many signs of His goodness, and as many examples of His wisdom as there are forms of things in the world -- indeed, as many as there are things either great or small.

Now comes the other part, which is closer to faith. When we consider that God has arranged all things for our protection and safety, and when we feel His power and grace in ourselves and in the great blessings He has given us, we should stir ourselves to trust, prayer, praise, and love for Him. As I said before, God Himself showed in the very order of creation that He made all things for humanity's sake. It was not without reason that He divided the making of the world into six days, since He could just as easily have finished the entire work in a single moment as He could complete it piece by piece over time. It pleased Him to show His providence and fatherly care for us by preparing everything He foresaw would be useful and necessary for humanity before He created human beings. How ungrateful it would be to doubt whether this good Father cares for us, when we see that He was caring for us before we were even born! How wicked it would be to tremble with distrust, fearing that His goodness might someday leave us without what we need, when we see it was already poured out in great abundance for us before we existed! Beyond this, we hear from Moses that by God's generosity, everything in the world has been made subject to us. He certainly did not do this to mock us with an empty gift in name only. Therefore, we will never lack

anything that serves our well-being. Finally, to conclude: whenever we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us remember that the management of all things He has created is in His hand and power. We are His children, whom He has taken into His own care and keeping to nourish and raise. We should look to Him for all good things and confidently trust that He will never allow us to lack what we need for our safety. Our hope should rest on no one else. Whatever we desire, our prayers should be directed to Him. Whatever benefit we receive, we should acknowledge it as His gift and confess it with thanksgiving. Drawn by the great sweetness of His goodness and generosity, we should devote ourselves to loving and honoring Him with all our heart.

¶ THE .xv. CHAPTER. WHAT A ONE
MAN WAS CREATED: WHEREIN THERE
IS ENTREATED OF THE POWERS OF
THE SOULE, OF THE IMAGE OF GOD,
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Now we must speak of the creation of humanity — not only because among all God's works humanity is the most noble and excellent display of His justice, wisdom, and goodness, but also because, as stated at the beginning, we cannot know God clearly and completely without also knowing ourselves. This self-knowledge is of two kinds: first, what we were at the original creation, and second, what our condition became after the fall of Adam. It would profit us little to understand our creation without also understanding, in this sorrowful fall, the corruption and deformity of our nature. Yet for now we will be content with a description of our nature as it was when it was pure. Before we descend to the miserable condition in which humanity now lives in bondage, it is good to learn what kind of being was created in the beginning. We must take care that in precisely describing humanity's natural evils, we do not appear to charge them against

the Author of nature. For ungodliness always thinks it has a sufficient defense if it can claim that whatever fault it has somehow originated with God — and when accused, it does not hesitate to turn the charge back on God. Those who want to sound more respectful of God's majesty yet still try to excuse their own wickedness by blaming nature — not realizing that in doing so, though not openly, they also blame God, since any fault found in nature would ultimately reflect on its Creator. Since we see that our flesh is always looking for every possible escape from its own blame, we must earnestly cut off this maneuver. We must therefore handle the calamity of humanity in such a way that all excuses are removed and the justice of God is defended against every accusation. In a fitting place we will see how far people have now fallen from the purity given to Adam. First, let us remember that in being made from earth and clay, humanity received a check on its pride — for nothing is more absurd than for those who dwell not only in a house of clay but are themselves in part earth and ashes to boast of their own excellence. Yet since God was pleased not only to give life to an earthen vessel but also to make it the dwelling of an immortal Spirit, Adam could justly glory in the great generosity of his Maker.

It is beyond question that humanity consists of soul and body. By 'soul' I mean an immortal though created essence, which is the nobler part of a person. It is sometimes also called the spirit. When 'soul' and 'spirit' appear together, they carry somewhat different meanings, but when 'spirit' stands alone it means the same as 'soul.' Solomon says that at death the spirit returns to the one who gave it. When Christ commended His spirit to the Father, and Stephen his spirit to Christ, both meant simply that when the soul

is freed from the prison of the body, God is its eternal keeper. As for those who imagine the soul is called a spirit merely because it is a breath or power God breathes into bodies without any real essence — both experience and all of Scripture show them to be grossly mistaken. It is true that when people are more earthbound than they ought to be, they grow dull — estranged from the Father of lights, they are blinded and do not think about surviving after death. Yet that light is not so fully extinguished by darkness that they feel nothing of immortality. The conscience — which distinguishes good from evil and answers to God's judgment — is an unmistakable sign of an immortal spirit. For how could something without essence come before God's judgment seat and throw itself into fear at the discovery of its own guilt? The body is not troubled by the fear of spiritual punishment — that falls on the soul alone. It follows therefore that the soul has genuine existence. Moreover, the very knowledge of God proves that souls are immortal, since they ascend above the world — and a vanishing breath would be incapable of reaching the fountain of life. Finally, the many excellent gifts with which the human mind is endowed testify to something divine engraved within it, and are so many evidences of an immortal essence. The awareness found in animals does not extend beyond the body, or at least does not reach further than what is immediately before it. But the agility of the human mind — which surveys heaven and earth and the secrets of nature, comprehends all ages in thought and memory, arranges everything in order, and infers the future from the past — plainly shows that something separate from the body is hidden within humanity. We understand the invisible God and angels through the mind — something the body cannot do. We know what is right, just, and honor-

able — things hidden from the bodily senses. The spirit must therefore be the seat of this understanding. Even sleep itself — which stupefies a person and seems to take away life — is a clear witness to immortality, since in dreams we receive not only thoughts of things that never happened but sometimes foreknowledge of things to come. I touch these things briefly, which secular writers have treated more elaborately and eloquently. For godly readers, a simple reminder will be sufficient. If the soul were not a thing distinct from the body, Scripture would not teach that we dwell in houses of clay, that death means departing from the tabernacle of the flesh, that we put off what is corruptible, and that at the last day every person will receive what he deserves for what he did in the body. These and many other passages commonly found throughout Scripture not only clearly distinguish the soul from the body but, by giving the soul the name 'man,' show that it is the principal part. When Paul urges the faithful to cleanse themselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, he identifies two parts of a person in which the corruption of sin dwells. Peter, by calling Christ the Shepherd and Guardian of souls, would have spoken foolishly if there were no souls over whom He could exercise that office. Nor would his other statements hold together — about the eternal salvation of souls, about cleansing our souls, about evil desires warring against the soul, about pastors watching to give account for souls — unless souls had real existence. Paul calling God as witness over his own soul confirms this, since it would have no standing before God unless it were subject to judgment. Christ says it still more plainly when He commands us to fear the one who, after killing the body, can throw the soul into hell. The author of Hebrews, by distinguishing earthly fathers from God who is the

Father of spirits, could not have more clearly affirmed the real existence of souls. Moreover, if souls did not continue living after leaving their bodily prisons, Christ would have spoken nonsensically when He depicted the soul of Lazarus resting in Abraham's bosom and the soul of the rich man suffering terrible torment. Paul confirms the same when he teaches that while we are in the flesh we wander from God, but out of the flesh we enjoy His presence. And not to linger on a matter that is not obscure, I will add only this from Luke: it is counted among the errors of the Sadducees that they did not believe in the existence of spirits and angels.

Strong proof of the soul's reality can also be drawn from the statement that humanity was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). For though God's glory appears in the outward form of a person, there is no doubt that the proper seat of the image of God is in the soul. I do not deny that in our outward form — which distinguishes and separates us from animals — we also approach God more closely than they do. Nor will I argue strongly against those who think something of the image of God is seen in the fact that while all other creatures look down at the ground, humanity is given an upright stance and directed to look toward the heavens — provided it remains clear that the image of God which appears in these outward signs is spiritual in nature. Osiander — whose writings show him to have been cleverly unstable in his imaginings — applied the image of God without distinction to both body and soul, mixing heaven and earth together. He claimed that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit established their image in humanity because, even if Adam had never fallen, Christ would still have become human. On this view, the body appointed for Christ

was merely the pattern for the bodily form that Adam received. But where does Osiander find that Christ is the image of the Spirit? I grant that in the person of the Mediator the glory of the whole Godhead shines. But how can the eternal Word, who precedes the Spirit in order, be called the Spirit's image? Furthermore, calling the Son the Spirit's image destroys the distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit. I would also like to know how Christ resembles the Holy Spirit in the flesh He took on, and by what marks He expresses that likeness. And since the words 'Let us make man in our image' also involve the person of the Son, it would follow that He is His own image — which is contrary to all reason. Beyond that, if Osiander's invention were true, humanity was formed only after the pattern of Christ as a man, making Christ the template from which Adam was taken, whereas Scripture teaches in an entirely different sense that humanity was created in the image of God. A more plausible but still unsound view is that Adam was created in the image of God because he was made to resemble Christ, who is the only image of God. Some interpreters also make a great deal of the distinction between 'image' and 'likeness,' finding a difference between the two words where there is none. Likeness is added simply to explain image. We know that the Hebrew language commonly repeats the same idea in two different words, and the meaning is simply that humanity is called the image of God because it resembles God. The arguments about whether 'zelem' (image) refers to the substance of the soul and 'demuth' (likeness) to its qualities deserve only to be laughed at. When God determined to create humanity in His own image, He expressed the same idea a second time by saying 'in His likeness,' as if to say He would make a creature who would reflect Him — as in a mirror — because

of the marks of resemblance engraved in him. This is confirmed by Moses, who a little later, when repeating the same account, uses 'image of God' twice and drops the word 'likeness' altogether. The objection raised by Osiander — that it is not a part of humanity, or the soul alone with its gifts, that is called the image of God, but the whole Adam who received his name from the earth — is trivial. All sound-minded readers will judge it so. For when whole man is called mortal, this does not make the soul subject to mortality.

When a person is called a rational creature, this does not mean that the body possesses reason and understanding. Although the soul is not the whole person, it is perfectly appropriate to call a person the image of God with respect to the soul — while I still maintain the principle established above: that the image of God extends to the entire excellence by which human nature is elevated above all other created kinds. That word, then, points to the integrity humanity possessed when endowed with right understanding, with affections shaped by reason, with all the senses ordered rightly, and with such excellent gifts that humanity truly reflected the excellence of its Creator. Though the principal seat of the image of God was in the mind and heart — in the soul and its powers — there was no part of humanity, not even the body, in which some sparks of that image did not appear. It is certain that throughout all parts of creation there shine some reflections of God's glory. From this we gather that when humanity is called the image of God, there is an implied comparison that elevates humanity above all other creatures and sets it apart from the common order. Nor is it to be denied that the angels were also created in the likeness of God, since — as Christ Himself testifies — our ultimate perfection will be to become like them (Matthew 22:30).

But Moses was not without good reason in using this particular title to set forth the special grace of God toward us — especially when he is comparing only the visible creatures with humanity.

Yet a full definition of the image of God requires us to understand more plainly in what qualities humanity excels — that is, by what features humanity ought to be regarded as a mirror reflecting God's glory. This is best understood by looking at the restoration of humanity's corrupted nature. It is certain that when Adam fell from his original state, he became estranged from God by that departure. Therefore, although the image of God was not entirely obliterated in him, it was so corrupted that what remains is nothing but ugly deformity. The beginning of our recovery and safety lies in the restoration we receive through Christ, who for this very reason is called the second Adam — because He restores us to true and complete integrity. When Paul compares the life-giving Spirit that Christ gives to the faithful with the living soul in which Adam was created, he sets forth the greater measure of grace in regeneration. But he does not set aside the other foundational point: that the goal of our regeneration is for Christ to remake us in the image of God. In another place Paul teaches that the new man is renewed according to the image of the one who created him. This agrees with the command: 'Put on the new man, created according to God.' Now we must see what Paul chiefly includes under this renewal. First he speaks of knowledge, and then of pure righteousness and holiness. From this we gather that the image of God was chiefly seen in the light of the mind, the uprightness of the heart, and the soundness of all the parts. Though I grant that this is a figure of speech — using part for the whole — the principle cannot be overthrown: what is most central in the renewal of the image of

God was also most central in its original creation. To the same purpose, Paul teaches elsewhere that we, beholding the glory of God with unveiled face, are transformed into the same image. We now see how Christ is the most perfect image of God, and how we, being fashioned after Him, are restored so that in true godliness, righteousness, purity, and understanding we bear the image of God. With this principle in place, Osiander's notion of a bodily image falls apart by itself. When Paul alone calls the man the image and glory of God, and seems to exclude the woman from that dignity, the context makes clear this applies only to civil and social order. That the image of God — as we are speaking of it — encompasses everything belonging to spiritual and eternal life, I believe has already been sufficiently proved. John confirms the same in different words, saying that the light which was from the beginning in the eternal Word of God was the light of men. His purpose was to honor the singular grace of God by which humanity excels all other creatures — set apart from the common order because it attained not merely physical life but life joined with the light of understanding — and by this he shows how humanity was made in the image of God. Therefore, the image of God is the uncorrupted excellence of human nature that shone in Adam before the fall, and was afterward so corrupted and nearly defaced that only disordered, mangled, and deeply stained remnants remain. Yet it appears in part among the elect insofar as they are regenerated, and it will attain its full brightness in heaven. To know what this image consists of, we must consider the powers of the soul. Augustine's speculative idea that the soul is a reflection of the Trinity because it has understanding, will, and memory is not sound. Nor should we accept the view that locates the image of God in the power of

dominion given to humanity — as if the resemblance to God consisted only in being appointed lord and ruler over all things — for the image of God must be sought properly within a person, not outside, as an inward spiritual gift of the soul.

Before going further, I must address the foolish error of the Manichees, which Servetus attempted to revive in our own time. Where Scripture says that God breathed the breath of life into man's face, they concluded that the soul conveyed the very substance of God into humanity — as if some portion of the infinite God had entered into man. It is easy, even briefly, to show how many gross and foul absurdities this devilish error produces. If the soul were by derivation a part of God's essence, then God's nature would be subject not only to change and emotional disturbance, but also to ignorance, evil desires, weakness, and every kind of vice. Nothing is more unstable than a human being — contradictory impulses toss and pull the soul in different directions. People are often blinded by ignorance, often defeated by even small temptations, and the soul itself is the reservoir of all kinds of filth. If the soul is of the essence of God, all of this must be attributed to God's own nature. Who would not recoil from such a monstrous idea? Paul rightly quotes Aratus that we are God's offspring — but this is in quality and character, not in substance, inasmuch as God has adorned us with godlike gifts. To tear apart the essence of the Creator by saying that every person possesses a piece of it is utter madness. We must therefore firmly hold that the souls of human beings, though the image of God is engraved in them, were created no less than the angels were. And creation is not the pouring out of one substance into another — it is the origination of existence out of nothing. Although the human spirit came from God and returns

to God when it departs from the flesh, it does not follow that it was taken from His substance. Osiander also entangled himself in an ungodly error at this point, while boasting in his illusions. He refused to recognize the image of God in humanity apart from an essential union with God's justice — as if God, by the power of His Holy Spirit, were unable to make us like Himself without Christ substantially infusing Himself into us. However cleverly many may try to disguise these deceptions, they will never so blind the eyes of sound-minded readers that they fail to see the Manichean flavor of these ideas. And when Paul speaks of the restoration of this image, his words make clear that humanity was made in God's likeness — not by an infusion of His substance, but by the grace and power of His Spirit. Paul says that by beholding the glory of Christ we are transformed into that same image by the Spirit of God — who works in us so powerfully as to make us sharers in God's nature, without making us one substance with God.

It would be folly to borrow a definition of the soul from the philosophers, since almost none of them — except Plato — clearly affirmed it to be an immortal substance. Some others, including the Socratics, touched on this, but in such a way that none of them clearly taught what he himself was not fully convinced of. Plato is wiser in this, because he does recognize in the soul the image of God. Others so tie the powers and activities of the soul to this present life that they leave it nothing once it is outside the body. We have already established from Scripture that the soul is an incorporeal substance. We must add that although it is not contained within physical space, it is placed in the body and dwells there as in a house — not only to give life to all parts of the body and make its organs fit instruments for their appointed functions, but also to

hold the chief governing role in human life. This governance extends not only to earthly duties but also to stirring us toward the service of God. Though this latter purpose is barely visible in our current corruption, even in our vices some traces of it remain. Where does it come from but from shame that people care so much about their reputation? And where does shame come from but from a sense of what is honorable? The source of that sense is the understanding that people are naturally born to pursue justice — and within that conviction lies the seed of religion. For just as it is beyond question that humanity was made for the contemplation of the heavenly life, so it is certain that the knowledge of this was engraved in the soul. Indeed, a person would lack the chief use of his understanding if he were ignorant of his own true happiness — which consists in being joined to God, and toward which it is the chief work of the soul to aspire. So the more any person strives to draw near to God, the more he thereby proves himself truly endowed with reason. As for those who would assign multiple souls to a person — a sensitive soul and a rational soul — although they seem to offer some reasons for this, their arguments lack firm ground, and we should set them aside rather than get entangled in trivial and unprofitable disputes. There is, they say, a great conflict between the physical impulses and the rational part of the soul. But reason itself is often at war with itself, with one idea struggling against another as if they were opposing armies. Since this inner conflict comes from the corruption of nature, it would be wrong to conclude from the discord between the soul's powers that there are therefore two souls. As for the more detailed analysis of the soul's powers, I leave that to the philosophers. A simple description will serve our purpose of building up godliness. I grant that what they

teach is true and not only interesting but also useful and well-reasoned, and I do not forbid those who are eager to learn from studying it. I acknowledge the five senses, which Plato preferred to call instruments — through which all impressions are gathered into common sense as into a receiving center. Then follows imagination, which distinguishes the impressions that common sense has received. Next comes reason, which renders universal judgments about things. Finally there is the mind's understanding, which with focused and quiet attention contemplates all that reason deliberates and considers. Corresponding to these three knowing powers — understanding, reason, and imagination — there are three powers in the realm of desire: the will, which reaches toward what understanding and reason present to it; the passion of anger, which seizes what reason and imagination offer it; and the power of appetite, which grasps what imagination and sense present to it. Even if these things are true, or at least plausible, I think it best to pass over them here for fear they will entangle us in obscurity more than help us. If someone prefers to divide the powers of the soul differently — calling one the appetitive power, which though without reason in itself can obey reason when guided from outside, and the other the understanding power, which participates in reason by its own nature — I will not object or argue against it. Nor will I dispute the view that there are three principles of action: sense, understanding, and appetite. But let us choose instead a division within reach of all people — one we cannot get from the philosophers. When the philosophers want to speak most plainly, they divide the soul into appetite and understanding, each of which they further subdivide. Understanding, they say, is sometimes contemplative — content with knowledge alone, without

moving to action — and sometimes practical, which moves the will by evaluating what is good or evil. Appetite they divide into will and lust: will is when appetite, which they call *horme*, obeys reason; lust is when appetite shakes off reason's restraint and runs into excess. In their view, reason is always the faculty by which a person rightly governs himself.

We are compelled to depart somewhat from the philosophers' approach here, because they did not know the corruption of human nature that came as the punishment of the fall, and so they wrongly combine what are in fact two very different states of humanity. For our present purpose, let us understand the soul as having two parts: understanding and will. Let it be the function of understanding to discern between objects presented to it — judging what deserves approval or disapproval. Let it be the function of will to choose and pursue what understanding judges to be good, and to reject and flee what understanding condemns. We need not be held back here by Aristotle's subtle argument that the mind has no motion of its own but is moved by choice, which he calls '*desiring understanding*.' To avoid getting entangled in unnecessary questions, let it be enough to say this: understanding is the guide and governor of the soul, and will always looks to understanding's direction and awaits its judgment before reaching out for anything. Accordingly, Aristotle himself said truly that fleeing and following in appetite corresponds to affirming and denying in the understanding mind. How reliable understanding's government of the will actually is — that we will consider in another place. Here we only mean to show that every power in the soul can be assigned to one of these two parts. Under understanding we also include sense, which some distinguish from it by saying that sense is in-

clined toward pleasure while understanding pursues the good — so that the appetite of sense is desire and lust, while the affection of understanding is will. In place of their preferred term 'appetite,' I use 'will,' which is more commonly understood.

God therefore furnished the human soul with an understanding mind, by which a person could discern good from evil and right from wrong — with the light of reason as a guide to show what is to be followed or avoided. The philosophers called this guiding faculty the 'ruler' of the soul. To this God added the will, which belongs the power of choice. The original state of humanity excelled in these noble gifts: not only was there sufficient reason, understanding, wisdom, and judgment for governing earthly life, but also the capacity to rise to God and to eternal happiness. Choice was added to direct the appetites and govern all the physical impulses, so that the will would be entirely in agreement with the guidance of reason. In this integrity, humanity possessed free will, by which it could have attained eternal life if it had chosen to. This is not the place to raise the question of God's secret predestination — we are not discussing what might or might not have happened, but what human nature actually was at that time. Adam could have stood firm if he had chosen to, for he fell only by his own will. But because his will was flexible in either direction and he was not given the constancy to remain firm, he fell so easily. Yet his choice between good and evil was genuinely free. Not only that — his understanding mind and will were both marked by great uprightness, and all his physical faculties were orderly framed for obedience, until by destroying himself he corrupted the good things within him. This is why all the philosophers were so misled: they went looking for a sound structure in the ruins, and for solid joints in a

collapsed building. Their principle was that a human being could not be a rational creature unless there were in him a free choice of good and evil — and they reasoned that without this, the difference between virtues and vices would disappear, since a person could not be held responsible for the ordering of his own life. So far they reasoned correctly — if humanity had never changed. But because they did not know about that change, it is no wonder they confused everything together. As for those who call themselves disciples of Christ yet go looking for free will in humanity — a will that has been lost and drowned in spiritual ruin — they are plainly deceived by trying to split the difference between the philosophers and heavenly teaching, and they land on neither. But we will speak of these things better in their proper place. For now let us hold to this: humanity at the original creation was far different from all its descendants, who, taking their beginning from corrupted Adam, have received from him a corruption handed down as an inheritance. At the beginning all the parts of the soul were rightly ordered, the soundness of the understanding mind stood safe, and the will was free to choose the good. If anyone objects that this state was precarious because the power was only weak, I answer that even so it was sufficient to remove all excuse. Nor was it reasonable to require God to create a person who could not or would not sin at all. I grant such a nature would have been superior — but to quarrel with God as though He were under obligation to give that to humanity is far too presumptuous. How much He gave was His own choice to make. Why He did not uphold Adam with the strength of steadfast perseverance remains hidden in His own secret counsel — it is our part only to be as wise as sobriety allows. Humanity received the ability to stand firm if it chose to, but not

the will that would have produced the standing firm. Yet humanity is not excusable — it received enough, and by its own will it worked its own destruction. And God was under no obligation to give more than a weak and pliable will, so that from humanity's fall He might draw material for His own glory.

¶THE .XVI. CHAPTER. THAT GOD BY
HIS POWER DOOTH MONISHE AND
MAINTEYNE THE WORLDE, WHICHE
HYM SELFE HATH CREATED, AND BY
HIS PROUIDENCE DOETH GOUERNE
AL THE PARTES THEROF.



It would be very foolish and empty to make God merely a creator for a moment — one who does nothing after completing His work. This is precisely where we must distinguish ourselves from irreligious people: God's presence and power should shine to us no less in the ongoing sustaining of the world than in its first creation. Even the most wicked minds, simply looking at heaven and earth, are compelled to acknowledge a Creator. But faith has its own distinct way of giving God the full credit for creation. This is the point of the apostle's statement we cited earlier — that it is by faith we understand the world was made by the word of God. For unless we go further and grasp His providence, we have not yet rightly understood what it means to call God the Creator, however much we may think we understand it or confess it with our lips. When the physical mind first perceives God's power in creation, it stops there. At most it goes on to consider the

wisdom, power, and goodness of the Maker displayed in such a work — qualities that press themselves on people's attention whether they want to see them or not — along with some general idea of God's ongoing role in preserving and governing the world, on which the power of motion depends. Finally the physical mind concludes that the life-force God placed in all things at the beginning is sufficient to sustain them on its own. But faith must go deeper: having learned that God is the Creator of all things, it must immediately conclude that He is also their perpetual governor and sustainer — not by driving the whole frame of the world and all its parts with a single general motion, but by caring for, sustaining, and providing for each and every thing He created with individual providence, down to the smallest sparrow. So David, after first affirming that the world was created by God, immediately moves to His ongoing providence: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth.' He then adds: 'The Lord looks down upon the sons of men.' And what follows continues in the same direction. While it might not seem obvious that God cared for human affairs unless He first made the world, nor would any person seriously believe God made the world without being persuaded that He also cares for His works — for this reason David rightly moves from one truth to the other. Philosophers generally teach, and most minds agree, that all parts of the world are stirred by God's hidden impulse. But they do not go as far as David goes, and leads all the godly with him: 'All things wait on You, to give them their food in due season. You give to them, and they gather it. You open Your hand, and they are satisfied with good things. But if You hide Your face, they are troubled. If You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When You send forth Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth.' Even those who agree with Paul's statement that in God we live and move and have our being are far from the earnest sense of grace he commends to us — for they do not taste God's particular care for individuals, through which alone His fatherly love becomes known.

To make this distinction clearer, note that the providence of God as taught in Scripture is presented as the opposite of fortune and random chance. Since it has been commonly believed in every age — and the same opinion still prevails among nearly all people today — that all things happen by chance, the true teaching about providence has been not only obscured but effectively buried by that false assumption. If a man falls among thieves or wild animals; if he suffers shipwreck in a sudden storm at sea; if he is killed by a falling house or tree — or on the other side, if a wanderer in the desert finds relief for his poverty, if a storm-tossed sailor reaches the harbor safely, if someone miraculously escapes death by the width of a finger — human reason ascribes all these events, both good and bad, to fortune. But whoever has been taught by Christ's own words that every hair of his head is numbered will look further for a cause, and will firmly believe that all such events are governed by the secret counsel of God. As for lifeless things: although each has its own natural properties, these properties exert their effect only as far as the present hand of God directs them. Created things are therefore nothing but instruments through which God continually pours out as much effect as He pleases, bending and turning them at His will to this purpose or that. No creature's power is more marvelous or more glorious than the sun's. Beyond filling the whole world with its light, how great a

thing it is that it warms and quickens all living creatures with its heat! That it breathes fruitfulness into the earth through its rays! That from seeds warmed in the lap of the ground it draws out tender shoots of green, sustains them with fresh nourishment, strengthens them as they rise into stalks! That it feeds them continually until they reach flower, and from flower to fruit! That it then ripens that fruit with its warmth! That trees and vines, warmed by it, first bud and shoot forth branches, then send out blossoms, and from blossoms bring forth fruit! Yet because the Lord willed to keep all glory of these things for Himself, He created light and filled the earth with every kind of plant and fruit before He made the sun. A godly person will therefore not make the sun either the primary or the necessary cause of what existed before the sun was created — only an instrument God uses because it pleases Him, though He could just as easily do everything Himself without it. And when we read that the sun stood still for two days at Joshua's prayer, and that its shadow went back ten degrees for the sake of Hezekiah, God by those few miracles declared that the sun does not rise and set each day by a blind law of nature — but that He Himself governs its course to continually remind us of His fatherly care. Nothing seems more natural than spring following winter, summer following spring, and harvest following summer in due order. Yet within that regular sequence there is such variety and unevenness that it easily appears that every year, month, and day is governed by a fresh and specific act of God's providence.

God claims for Himself — and wants us to ascribe to Him — an almightiness that is not the empty, idle, sleeping kind the speculators imagine, but a waking, effective, active power busy in continual action. Not the kind that is merely the general origin of some

disorderly motion — as if He had simply commanded a river to flow within channels He appointed — but a power that is engaged and ready in every particular event. He is called almighty not because He could act but chooses to sit idle, or merely maintains through a general impulse the order of nature He once established — but because, governing both heaven and earth by His providence, He orders all things so that nothing happens except by His deliberate purpose. When the Psalm says He does whatever He wills, a fixed and definite will is meant. It would be very wrong to interpret the prophet's words in the philosophical sense — that God is the first Cause because He is the origin and source of all motion — when in fact the faithful are meant to ease their distress in adversity with this comfort: that they suffer nothing except by the ordinance and command of God, because they are under His hand. If God's government extends to all His works in this way, it is a childish quibble to confine it within the workings of nature. Yet those who restrict God's providence to so narrow a scope — as if He allowed all things to run their course by an unguided law of nature — do no less damage to themselves than they do dishonor to God, for they rob themselves of the most useful doctrine. Nothing would be more miserable than humanity if it were left subject to every movement of sky, air, earth, and water. Beyond that, such a view shamefully diminishes the singular goodness of God toward each individual person. David declares that infants still nursing at their mothers' breasts are eloquent enough to magnify God's glory — for as soon as they come from the womb, they find food prepared for them by His heavenly care. This is generally true, and yet our eyes and senses should not overlook what experience plainly shows: that some mothers have full and plentiful milk while others

have almost none — as it pleases God to feed one more generously and another more sparingly. Those who give God's almightiness its proper honor receive a double benefit: first, they know He has more than enough power to do them good, since heaven and earth are in His possession and all creatures stand ready at His command. Second, they can rest safely in His protection — for under His authority are all the threatening and fearful things, and by His command Satan and all his fury and schemes are restrained, and everything that threatens our safety hangs on His word. Only in this way can the overwhelming and superstitious fears that frequently come upon us in times of danger be corrected and calmed. We are superstitious in our fear when, faced with threatening creatures or fearful circumstances, we act as if they have power to harm us on their own, or as if they strike us without foreknowledge or purpose, or as if God's help were not sufficient against the harm they bring. For example: the prophet forbids God's children to fear the stars and signs in the heavens as unbelievers do. He does not forbid every kind of fear. But when unbelievers, in transferring the government of the world from God to the planets, imagine that their happiness or misery depends on the decrees and omens of the stars rather than on God's will, their fear is drawn away from the one they should regard and fixed instead on stars and comets. Whoever will avoid this unfaithfulness, let him always keep in mind that there is no wandering power, action, or motion in created things — they are all governed by the secret counsel of God, so that nothing can happen that He has not both foreknown and willed.

First, let readers understand that providence is not the idle observation with which God watches from heaven what happens in the world — it is the active governing by which He, holding the helm, steers and directs all that comes to pass. It therefore belongs to His hands no less than to His eyes. When Abraham said to his son, 'God will provide,' he did not merely mean that God foresaw the outcome — he was casting the care of an unknown matter onto God's will, which is accustomed to bring uncertain and tangled things to a sure end. From this it follows that providence consists in doing: many err foolishly in reducing it to mere foreknowledge. Less gross — though still intolerable — is the error of those who grant God a government of sorts, but without deliberate purpose: a government that drives and swirls the whole frame of the world in a general motion without specifically directing the actions of each individual creature. Even this error cannot be accepted. For on that view, all creatures may still move by chance despite this so-called universal providence, and a person may turn himself in whatever direction he chooses by free will. So they divide government between God and humanity: God by His power gives humanity a general impulse to act according to planted nature, while the person manages his own actions by his own voluntary decision. In short, they hold that the world, human affairs, and human beings are governed by the power of God, but not by His appointment. I am not speaking of the Epicureans — a plague the world has always been full of — who imagine a God who is idle and indifferent, nor of others equally deluded who in ancient times imagined God ruled only the middle region of the air and left everything below to fortune. Even dumb creatures cry out loudly enough against such obvious madness. My purpose here is to refute the opinion that is

almost universally held — which, by attributing to God some blind and uncertain motion I cannot quite describe, strips Him of the central thing: His incomprehensible wisdom by which He directs and orders all things toward their ends. In name it calls God the ruler of the world, but in reality it takes away His actual government. For what is it to govern, if not to be over those beneath you in such a way that you rule them by set order? I do not entirely reject talk of universal providence, provided people will also grant me this: that God rules the world not only by maintaining the order of nature He established, but also by exercising particular care over each of His works. It is true that all kinds of things move by a hidden impulse of nature, as if obeying God's eternal command, and that what God has once determined proceeds forward on its own. To this may be applied Christ's words that He and His Father have always been working from the beginning. And Paul's teaching that in God we live, move, and have our being. And what the author of Hebrews says — intending to prove the Godhead of Christ — that by His powerful word all things are sustained. But those who use this as a cover to conceal the doctrine of special providence do wrong — which is confirmed by such clear and certain Scripture testimony that it is remarkable anyone could doubt it. Even those who draw that veil are eventually compelled by their own inconsistency to admit that many things happen by God's particular care — but then they wrongly limit this only to extraordinary events. We must therefore establish that God attends so closely to the ordering of all outcomes that all things proceed from His deliberate counsel, and nothing happens by chance.

If we grant that the beginning of motion belongs to God, but that all things afterward are carried wherever the inclination of nature drives them — on their own or by chance — then the alternation of days and nights, of winter and summer, would be the work of God only insofar as He gave each its appointed role by setting a regular law: that days follow nights, months follow months, years follow years in steady proportion. But when scorching heat and drought burn up the grain, when unseasonable rains ruin the crops, when sudden harm comes through hail and storms — these would not be God's work, except perhaps in the sense that clouds and weather and cold and heat have their origins in planetary conjunctions or other natural causes. This leaves no room for either God's fatherly favor or His judgments. If they say God is generous enough to humanity by pouring an ordinary power into heaven and earth through which people find nourishment — that is a vain and irreverent invention, as if a fruitful year were not the singular blessing of God, and scarcity and famine were not His curse and judgment. But rather than gather all the arguments that bear on this, let God's own authority be sufficient. In the law and the prophets He repeatedly declares that whenever He waters the earth with dew and rain, He is showing His favor — and that when He makes the sky as hard as iron, when the grain is blighted and damaged, when the fields are struck with hail and storms, it is a sign of His specific and particular judgment. If we grant these things, then it is certain that not a single drop of rain falls except by God's direct command. David praises the general providence of God, who gives food to the ravens that cry to Him (Psalm 146:9). And when God Himself threatens famine to living creatures, does He not make clear that He feeds all living things — sometimes with

a sparse portion, sometimes with an abundant one — as He sees fit? It is childish, as I said before, to limit this to special cases, when Christ says without exception that not even the smallest sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of His Father (Matthew 10:29). If the flight of birds is governed by God's purpose, then we must confess with the prophet that though He dwells on high, He humbles Himself to watch over everything that happens in heaven and on earth (Psalm 113:5-6).

Since we know the world was made principally for humanity's sake, we must consider this purpose in the governance of human life. The prophet Jeremiah cries out: 'I know, Lord, that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his steps' (Jeremiah 10:23). And Solomon says: 'A man's steps are ordered by the Lord; how then can man understand his own way?' (Proverbs 20:24). Now let those say that God moves a person according to the inclination of his nature, but that the person himself turns this movement wherever he pleases. But if that were true, then a person would have free direction over his own ways. Perhaps they will deny this by saying he can do nothing without God's power. But since it is certain that the prophet and Solomon assign to God not only power but also choice and appointment, they cannot escape that way. Solomon also finely rebukes that rashness of people who plan their own path without regard for God, as if they were not led by His hand: 'The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord' (Proverbs 16:1). It is foolish madness for people to presume to do things without God — when they cannot even speak except what He wills. And to show even more plainly that nothing at all happens in the world except by His appointment, Scripture shows that

even the things that seem most accidental are under His control. What could you more easily ascribe to chance than a broken branch falling from a tree and killing a traveler passing underneath? But the Lord speaks otherwise, confessing that He delivered that person into the hand of the slayer (Exodus 21:13). And who would not leave the outcome of a lot to the blindness of chance? But the Lord will not allow it — He claims the judgment of lots for Himself. Scripture says it is not by human power that lots are cast and drawn from the lap; what seems to come from chance, He declares comes from Himself (Proverbs 16:33). Solomon's saying serves the same purpose: 'The poor man and the oppressor meet together; the Lord gives light to the eyes of both.' Though the poor and the rich are mingled together in the world, each having his condition assigned by God, Solomon reminds us that God — who gives light to all — is not blind. He thus calls the poor to patience, since those who are not content with their condition are in effect trying to shake off the burden God has placed on them. Another prophet rebukes the wicked who attribute it to human diligence or fortune that some sink into misery while others rise to honor: 'For promotion comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south; but God is the Judge — He puts down one and exalts another' (Psalm 75:6-7). Since God cannot set aside His role as judge, the prophet demonstrates that by His secret purpose some are honored and others remain lowly.

The particular events of history are also general witnesses to God's individual providence. God raised up a south wind in the desert to bring the people an abundance of quail. When He willed Jonah to be thrown into the sea, He sent a wind to stir up a storm. Those who deny that God governs the world will say these were de-

partures from the common order. But from them I conclude that no wind ever rises or builds strength except by the specific command of God. Otherwise it would not be true that He makes the winds His messengers and flaming fire His ministers, that He makes the clouds His chariots and rides on the wings of the wind — unless He actually drives the clouds and winds by His will and displays in them the singular presence of His power. So we are taught elsewhere that whenever the sea swells with blasts of wind, those violent waves testify to a unique display of God's presence: 'He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves', and then 'He makes the storm be still, and the waves of the sea are hushed.' In another place He says He punished the people with scorching east winds. Likewise, although the power of reproduction is naturally given to humanity, God wills that it be attributed to His special grace — for He leaves some in barrenness while choosing to grant offspring to others; the fruit of the womb is His gift. Therefore Jacob said to his wife: 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?' To come to a conclusion: nothing is more ordinary in nature than being fed with bread. Yet the Holy Spirit declares not only that the growth of the earth's fruits is God's special gift, but also that people do not live by bread alone — because it is not the food itself that nourishes, but the secret blessing of God. On the other side, God threatens to break the staff of bread. Nor could we pray earnestly for our daily bread if God did not give us food with His fatherly hand. The prophet therefore, to assure the faithful that God in feeding them fulfills the office of a good household father, reminds them that He gives food to all flesh. Finally, on one side we have: 'The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayer.'

On the other: 'The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.' From this we understand that all creatures, above and below, are ready to serve whatever use He chooses to apply them to — from which we gather that not only does His general providence continue the order of nature in His creatures, but by His marvelous counsel it is also directed toward each particular and fitting end.

Those who want to make this doctrine unpopular object that it is the same teaching as the Stoics' doctrine of fate or destiny — a charge that was once leveled at Augustine as well. We are not eager to argue over words, yet we do not accept the word 'fate' — both because it is one of those profane novelties Paul tells us to avoid, and because some people use its offensive associations to make God's truth seem odious. As for the Stoic opinion itself, the comparison is falsely applied to us. The Stoics imagined a necessity formed by a perpetual knot and tangled chain of causes woven into the fabric of nature itself. We do not do this. Rather, we make God the judge and governor of all things, who in His wisdom has decreed from the farthest reach of eternity what He would do, and now by His power carries out what He has decreed. We therefore affirm that not only heaven and earth and other lifeless creatures, but also the purposes and wills of human beings are so governed by His providence that they are directly carried to the end He appoints. What then — will someone say that nothing happens by fortune or chance? I answer, as Basil the Great truly said, that fortune and chance are pagan words, whose meaning should not occupy the minds of the godly. For if every good success is the blessing of God and every calamity is His curse, there is no room left for fortune or chance in human affairs. We should also be moved by

this statement from Augustine. In his books against the Academics he says: 'It displeases me that I have so often named fortune, though I did not intend any goddess by it, only the chance occurrence of external events, good or evil. From that word fortune are derived the common expressions we use without religious scruple — perhaps, by chance, possibly — yet all of these must be referred to God's providence. I did not leave this unsaid when I wrote, for perhaps even what is commonly called fortune is also governed by hidden order.' 'What we call chance in things is nothing other than that whose reason and cause is unknown to us.' 'I said this, but I regret having used the word fortune there, since I see that people have the very bad habit of saying 'thus it pleased fortune' where they ought to say 'thus it pleased God.'" He also consistently teaches throughout his books that the world would be in disordered chaos if anything were left to fortune. And though in another place he holds that all things are done partly by the free will of humanity and partly by the providence of God, a little later he clearly shows that people are subject to and ruled by providence. His principle is that nothing is more contrary to reason than to say that anything happens except by the ordinance of God — since otherwise it would happen without cause or order. By this reasoning he also excludes events that seem to depend on human will. And a little later he says even more plainly that we should not seek a cause for the will of God. When he speaks of God's permission, how that is to be understood becomes very clear from one passage where he proves that the will of God is the supreme and first cause of all things — since nothing happens except by His command or permission. He certainly does not imagine God sitting idle in a watch-

tower when He chooses to permit something. Rather, God exercises an active will — as one might say — which could not otherwise be called a cause.

Since our limited understanding cannot reach the full height of God's providence, we need a distinction to help raise it. I say, then, that while all things are ordered by the purpose and certain decree of God, they yet appear to us as chance events — not that we think fortune rules the world and tosses everything around blindly (such a view should be far from a Christian heart), but because the order, means, end, and necessity of events mostly lie hidden in God's purpose and are beyond human comprehension. To us, therefore, events that will certainly come to pass by God's will appear as though they might happen by chance — whether we consider them in their own nature or judge them by our knowledge. Here is an example: suppose a merchant, traveling through a forest with honest companions, unwisely wanders away from them and stumbles into a den of robbers, falls among thieves, and is killed. His death was not only foreseen by God's eye but was also determined by His decree. For it is not said merely that God foresaw how long each person's life would last, but that He has set and appointed bounds that cannot be crossed. Yet as far as our minds can grasp the situation, everything appears to have happened by chance. What should a Christian conclude? This: in such a death, he will recognize something that in its nature came about by fortune, as it appears — yet he will not doubt that God's providence directed that fortune toward its appointed end. The same is true for things yet to come. Since everything still ahead of us is uncertain to us, we hold events in suspense, as if they might turn out either way — yet this remains settled in our hearts: nothing will happen that God has not already

foreknown. This is the sense in which the word 'chance' is often used in Ecclesiastes — because at first sight people do not perceive the first cause, which lies far beyond their view. Yet the truth of God's secret providence was never so completely erased from human hearts that not even in the darkness some sparks of it remained. Even the priests of the Philistines, though they wavered in uncertainty, attributed their adversity partly to God and partly to chance. 'If the ark goes that way,' they said, 'we will know that God has struck us; but if it goes the other way, then a chance has fallen upon us.' It was foolish of them to retreat to fortune when their divination failed them — yet we see they were still constrained from concluding that the disaster that fell on them had come from fortune alone. How God with the bridle of His providence turns all outcomes wherever He pleases is shown by one remarkable example. At the very moment when David was discovered and nearly captured in the wilderness of Maon, the Philistines invaded the land and Saul was compelled to withdraw. If God, intending to protect His servant, placed this obstacle in Saul's way, we cannot say it happened by chance — even though the sudden Philistine attack was completely unexpected. But what appears to us as chance, faith will acknowledge to have been a secret movement of God's hand. I grant that the reason does not always appear as clearly as in this case, but we must undoubtedly believe that whatever changes are seen in the world come through the hidden working of God's hand. Yet what God purposes must come to pass — but not necessarily by an absolute or inherent necessity of nature. A plain example: since Christ took on a body like ours, no sensible person will deny that His bones were naturally capable of being broken. Yet it was impossible for them to be broken. Here we see why the

distinction between consequent necessity and absolute necessity was rightly invented in the schools. God subjected the bones of His Son to the natural possibility of being broken, while at the same time exempting them from actually being broken — and so brought it about by His own purpose that what was naturally possible became, by His decree, impossible.

CHAPTER 17: WHERE TO AND TO WHAT END THIS DOCTRINE IS TO BE APPLIED, THAT WE MAY BE CERTAIN OF THE PROFIT THEREOF



Since human minds tend toward idle and curious speculation, those who do not know the true and proper use of this doctrine will almost certainly become entangled in knotty doubts. It is therefore useful to say briefly what purpose Scripture has in teaching that all things are ordered by God. First, note that God's providence must be considered both for the future and the past. Second, it governs all things in such a way that it sometimes works through means, sometimes without means, and sometimes against all means. Finally, it aims at this: to show that God cares for all humanity, but especially that He watches over the governance of His church, which He is pleased to oversee more closely. We must also add this: although God's fatherly favor and generosity, or at other times the severity of His judgment, shines clearly throughout the course of His providence, the causes of particular events are sometimes hidden. This can lead us to think that human affairs are tossed and driven by the blind sway of fortune — or it stirs the flesh to grumble, as if God were amusing Himself by

bouncing people about like tennis balls. If we were willing to learn with quiet and receptive minds, the very outcomes would in time make plain that God has a sure and good reason for His purpose — whether to train His people in patience, to correct their evil inclinations and tame their willfulness, to bring them to self-denial, or to awaken their spiritual drowsiness. On the other side, His purpose may be to overthrow the proud, to foil the schemes of the wicked, or to confound their plans. But however hidden and unknown those causes may be to us, we must hold firmly that they are stored in God's hidden counsel — and therefore we should cry out with David: 'O God, Your thoughts toward us are more than can be counted. I would declare and speak of them, but they are more than I am able to express.' Although in our miseries we should always reflect on our sins, so that the very punishment may move us to repentance, we see that Christ points to the secret purpose of His Father more than to a strict punishment proportioned to each person's desert. Of the man born blind He says: 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.' Here natural instinct murmurs when calamity strikes even before birth — as if God were harshly punishing a poor innocent who had done nothing to deserve it. But Christ declares that in this very case the glory of His Father shines before us, if only we have clear eyes to see it. Yet we must observe restraint: we must not drag God before us to give account for His actions, but must reverence His hidden judgments, holding His will to be the most just cause of all things. When thick clouds cover the sky and a violent storm breaks out, a heavy darkness shuts off our view, thunder fills our ears, and all our senses are stunned with terror — we think everything is in chaos. Yet all the while the sky

above remains as calm and clear as it was before. So we must understand that while the troubling course of earthly events clouds our judgment, God by the pure light of His righteousness and wisdom governs and orders even those very turbulent movements toward a right end. It is a monstrous arrogance for many people to call God's works to account and presume to examine His hidden intentions — pronouncing judgment rashly on things they do not know — while they would never dare to treat the actions of other people so boldly. For what is more disordered than this: to be so careful with our equals that we would rather withhold judgment than be accused of rashness, and yet to triumph proudly over God's judgments — which ought to be held in reverence.

Therefore no one will weigh the doctrine of God's providence rightly and profitably unless, recognizing that he has to do with his Creator and the maker of the world, he submits himself with fitting humility to fear and reverence. This explains why so many people today attack this doctrine with venomous biting, or at least with barking — because they will not allow God any more authority than their own reason approves. They also rail at us with all the spite they can muster, because — not content with the commandments of the law in which God's will is set out — we also say that the world is governed by His hidden counsels. As if what we teach were an invention of our own minds, and as if the Holy Spirit did not say the same thing everywhere, repeating it in countless ways. But because some sense of shame keeps them from pouring out their blasphemies openly against heaven, they pretend to argue with us — so they can behave more freely as madmen. If they will not grant that whatever happens in the world is governed by the incomprehensible purpose of God, let them explain why Scripture

says His judgments are a deep abyss. For when Moses cries out that God's will is not to be sought far off in the clouds or in the depths — since it is set before us plainly in the law — it follows that His other, hidden will is like an unfathomable deep. Of which Paul also says: 'Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?' It is true that the gospel and the law contain mysteries far above the reach of our minds. But since God, for the understanding of the mysteries He has been pleased to open in His word, illumines the minds of His own with the Spirit of understanding — there is in those things no unfathomable depth, but a path to walk safely, a lamp to guide our feet, the light of life, and the school of certain and clearly discernible truth. But His marvelous order of governing the world is rightly called an abyss — because it is hidden from us, and we must worship it with reverence. Moses expressed both sides well in a few words: 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.' We see how he calls us both to meditate on the law and to look up with reverence to God's hidden providence. In the book of Job one aspect of this depth is recounted to humble our minds. After surveying the whole frame of the world and treating God's works with great dignity, the author finally adds: 'Behold, these are but the fringes of His ways — how small a whisper do we hear of Him!' In keeping with this, elsewhere he distinguishes between the wisdom that remains with God and the measure of wisdom He has appointed for human beings. After speaking of the secrets of nature, he says that wisdom is known to God alone and hidden from the eyes of all living crea-

tures. But then he adds that wisdom has been made known to humanity in this way: it is said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord — that is wisdom.' Augustine's statement serves the same purpose: 'Because we do not know all that God does for us in perfect order, we must in simple good will follow the law — for His providence is an unchanging law.' Therefore, since God claims for Himself the power to govern the world in a way that remains unknown to us, let this be our law of sobriety and modesty: to yield quietly to His sovereign authority, and to let His will be to us the only rule of justice and the most just cause of all things. I do not mean that 'absolute will' about which the speculators babble — who wicked divide His justice from His power — but that providence which governs all things, from which nothing proceeds but what is right, even though its causes are hidden from us.

Whoever is shaped by this humility will neither grumble against God for past adversities nor blame Him for wicked deeds — as Agamemnon does in Homer, saying, 'I am not the cause, but Jupiter and Destiny.' Nor will they, as if swept away by fate, throw themselves into destruction in despair — like that young man in Plautus who says: 'The chances of things are unstable; the Fates drive men as they please; I will go find some cliff and end my possessions and my life together.' Nor will they, like another character in a comedy, use God's name to cover their own wickedness: as Lyconides says, 'God was the mover. I believe it was the will of the gods; for if it had not been their will, I know it would not have come to pass.' Rather, they will search and learn from Scripture what pleases God, so that led by the Holy Spirit they may strive to attain it. And being ready to follow wherever God calls, they show by their lives that nothing is more useful than the knowledge of

this doctrine. Worldly people throw themselves into foolish confusion with their objections, nearly turning everything upside down, as the saying goes. They argue: 'If God has fixed the hour of our death, we cannot escape it — so all caution about our safety is wasted effort. Therefore, when one man refuses to take a dangerous road for fear of being murdered by thieves, another calls for physicians and exhausts himself with medicines to preserve his life, another avoids rich food for fear of ruining his frail health, another will not live in a crumbling house — and when people in general devise every means and apply all their ingenuity to get what they desire — either all these remedies are pointless, as if people were trying to override God's will, or else life and death, health and sickness, peace and war, and all the other things people strive to gain or avoid, are not actually determined by His fixed decree.' They further conclude that the prayers of the faithful are disordered, or at least superfluous, since they petition God to provide what He has already decreed from eternity. In short, they sweep aside all human planning for the future as something contrary to God's providence, which has already determined what will happen without consulting anyone. And when it comes to what has already happened, they ascribe everything to God's providence in a way that lets the actual human perpetrator go unnoticed. Has a violent man murdered an honest citizen? 'He carried out God's purpose,' they say. Has someone stolen or committed fornication? 'He did only what the Lord had foreseen and ordained — he was an instrument of His providence.' Has a son carelessly waited for his father's death without seeking any remedy? 'He could not resist what God had appointed from eternity.' And so every evil act is called a virtue, because it obeys the ordinance of God.

As for things to come, Solomon rightly brings together human planning and God's providence without contradiction. On one hand, he mocks the folly of those who boldly undertake anything without the Lord, as if they were not guided by His hand. On the other hand he says: 'The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps' (Proverbs 16:9). His meaning is that God's eternal decrees do not prevent us from making provision for ourselves and ordering our affairs under His will. The reason for this is plain. He who has set the boundaries of our life has also left us the responsibility of caring for it. He has given us the means and resources to preserve it. He has given us the ability to see dangers ahead so they do not overwhelm us without warning, and He has provided us with remedies. It is therefore plain what our duty is: if God has entrusted us with the care of our own life, we must defend it. If He offers us helps, we must use them. If He shows us dangers in advance, we must not rush recklessly into them. If He provides us with remedies, we must not neglect them. No danger will harm us unless it is fatal — that is, unless it cannot be overcome by any remedy. But what if a danger is not fatal precisely because God has provided you with remedies to repel and overcome it? Notice how your own reasoning contradicts the order of God's arrangement. You conclude that a danger need not be heeded because, since it is not fatal, you will escape it without any care at all. But God commands you to take heed of it precisely because He has not appointed it to be fatal for you. These confused thinkers do not see what is plain before them: that God Himself inspires prudence and foresight into human beings, so that they may serve His providence in preserving their own lives — just as on the other side, through negligence and carelessness, they bring upon themselves

the evils He has appointed for the careless. Why does a careful person, by making provision for himself, escape the dangers that threaten him, while the fool perishes by reckless impulsiveness? Because both wisdom and folly are instruments of God's ordering on each side. Therefore it pleased God to hide all things to come from us precisely so that we would meet them as uncertain, and would not stop making ready preparations against them — until those dangers are either overcome or beyond all power to address. This is why I said earlier that God's providence does not always appear in the open, but — in using means — clothes itself, as it were.

These same people also wrongly and carelessly apply the events of the past to God's bare providence. Since all things hang on it, they argue, no robberies, adulteries, or murders are committed without God's will. Why then, they ask, should a thief be punished for robbing the one whom the Lord willed to punish with poverty? Why should the murderer be punished for killing the one whose life the Lord had brought to its end? If all such men serve the will of God, why should they be punished? But I deny that they serve the will of God. We cannot say that a person driven by evil intent serves God as though God commanded it, when in reality the person is only obeying his own wicked desires. The person who obeys God is the one who, knowing His will, works toward the end to which God's will calls him. And by what are we informed of His will? By His word. Therefore in what we do, we must look to that will of God which He declares in His word. God requires of us only what He commands. If we do anything against His commandment, it is not obedience but stubbornness and transgression. But without His will, we would not do it. I grant that. But do we do evil things in order to obey Him? No — He does not command us to do

them. Rather, we rush forward blindly, paying no attention to His will, raging with the intemperance of our own lust, bending our efforts deliberately against Him. And in doing evil in this way, we nonetheless serve His just order — because His infinite wisdom knows how to use evil instruments for good purposes. Notice how foolish their argument is. They would have evildoers go unpunished for wicked acts on the grounds that these acts do not happen apart from God's ordering. I will grant even more: that thieves, murderers, and other evildoers are instruments of God's providence, whom the Lord uses to execute the judgments He has determined. But I deny that their evil deeds are therefore excusable. Why? Can they pull God into the same wickedness with them? Can they cover their guilt with His righteousness? They can do neither. Since they have no excuse, they stand condemned by their own conscience. Since they cannot blame God, all the evil lies in themselves — and in God there is nothing but a lawful use of their wickedness. But He works through them, you say. Where, then, does the stench come from when a dead carcass lies rotting in the sun? Everyone sees that the sun's heat raises it. Yet no one says the sunbeams stink. So when the matter and guilt of evil reside in an evil person, what reason is there to think God is defiled by it if He makes use of their service as He pleases? Away, then, with that stubborn insolence, which may bark at the justice of God from a distance but can never reach it.

But these arguments — or rather the raving errors of frantic minds — will be easily swept away by the godly and holy meditation on providence that the rule of true faith teaches us, producing in us a rich and deeply satisfying fruit. Therefore a Christian heart, being firmly persuaded that all things come to pass by God's order-

ing and that nothing happens by chance, will always look to God as the principal cause of things, while still considering secondary causes in their proper place. He will not doubt that God's particular providence watches for his preservation — a providence that will allow nothing to happen except what will turn to his good and salvation. Since he has to do first with people, and then with other creatures, he will be assured that God's providence reigns over both. Regarding other people, whether good or evil, he will recognize that all their counsels, wills, enterprises, and powers are under God's hand — so that it is in God's will to bend them wherever He pleases and to restrain them whenever He chooses. That God's individual providence keeps watch for the safety of the faithful is attested by many very clear promises. 'Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be moved' — for He cares for us. 'He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.' 'Whoever touches you touches the apple of My eye.' 'I will be your shield, a wall of bronze; I will be an enemy to your enemies.' 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast? Yet I will not forget you.' Moreover, it is the principal purpose of the biblical histories to teach that the Lord guards the ways of His saints so carefully that they do not so much as stumble against a stone. Therefore, just as we rightly rejected the view of those who imagine only a universal providence that does not stoop to care for each creature specifically, so it is especially important to recognize that same special care toward ourselves. Accordingly, after Christ affirmed that not even the least valuable sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father's will, He immediately applies it to this conclusion: since we are worth far more than sparrows, God provides for us with proportionally

nearer care — and He extends that care so far that we may confidently trust that the very hairs of our head are numbered. What more could we want, if not even a single hair can fall from our head without His will? I am speaking not only of all humanity in general, but since God has chosen His church as a dwelling for Himself, He undoubtedly shows His care in governing it through particular and unmistakable examples.

Strengthened by these promises and examples, God's servant will also take hold of the testimonies that teach all people are under God's power — whether to bend their minds toward goodwill toward him, or to restrain their malice so it cannot do harm. For the Lord grants us favor not only with those who already wish us well, but even in the eyes of the Egyptians — and as for the malice of our enemies, He knows many ways to subdue it. Sometimes He takes away their sound judgment, so they cannot form any reliable plan — as He sent a lying spirit to fill the mouths of all Ahab's prophets. He drove Rehoboam to foolishness through the advice of young men, so that he was stripped of his kingdom by his own stupidity. At other times, though God grants enemies clear thinking, He fills them with such fear and confusion that they cannot will or carry out what they have planned. Sometimes He allows them to pursue what their lust and rage have driven them to, then at the right moment breaks off their violence before they reach the end they intended. So He foiled Ahithophel's counsel in advance — counsel that would have been David's destruction. So He also governs all His creatures for the benefit and safety of His own people — and governs the devil himself, who as we see dared not touch Job without God's permission and command. From this knowledge necessarily follows gratitude in times of prosperity, patience

in adversity, and an extraordinary confidence about the future. Whatever comes to him successfully and according to his desire, the servant of God will ascribe to God — whether God's goodness reaches him through other people or through lifeless things. He will think: 'It is the Lord who inclined their hearts toward me and made them instruments of His goodness to me.' When the earth produces abundant fruit, he will think: 'It is the Lord who commands the heavens, and the heavens obey the earth, and the earth brings forth her fruit.' In all other things he will not doubt that it is the Lord's blessing alone by which all things prosper — and being reminded by so many causes, he will not be able to remain ungrateful.

If any adversity comes upon him, he will immediately lift his mind to God — whose hand is most effective in producing patience and a calm, measured heart. If Joseph had dwelt on his brothers' treachery, he could never have regained a brotherly spirit toward them. But because he bent his mind to the Lord, he forgot the injury and inclined toward kindness and mercy — so much so that he comforted his brothers of his own accord and said: 'It was not you who sent me here, but God, who sent me ahead of you to save your lives. You intended evil against me, but God intended it for good.' If Job had focused on the Chaldeans who attacked him, he would immediately have burned with the desire for revenge. But because he recognized it as God's work, he comforted himself with that magnificent saying: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' So with David: when Shimei was cursing him and throwing stones, if he had been looking at the man, he would have urged his soldiers to repay the insult. But because he understood that Shimei did not act without the Lord's

prompting, he held them back instead: 'Leave him alone, for the Lord has told him to curse.' With the same restraint he held back the overflow of his grief in another place: 'I kept silent and became mute, for it was You who did it.' If there is any more effective remedy against anger and impatience, he has certainly profited greatly who has learned to think about God's providence in this way — always bringing his mind back to this point: 'It is the Lord's will, and therefore it must be endured' — not only because resistance is not lawful, but because He wills nothing but what is both just and good. In short, the goal is this: when we are wrongfully hurt by people, setting aside their malice — which would only deepen our sorrow and sharpen our desire for revenge — we should remember to rise up to God and firmly believe that whatever our enemy has wickedly done against us was both permitted and sent by God's ordering. Paul, to keep us from repaying injury, wisely reminds us that our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the spiritual enemy, the devil, so that we would prepare ourselves to wrestle with him. But the most useful lesson for calming all outbursts of anger is this: God arms both the devil and all wicked people to test us, and He sits as judge to train our patience. If the misfortunes and miseries pressing on us happen without any human involvement, let us remember the teaching of the law: whatever is good flows from the fountain of God's blessing, and all adversity is His cursing. And let the most solemn warning make us afraid: 'If you walk stubbornly against Me, I will also walk stubbornly against you.' This rebukes our laziness — the laziness that, following the common instinct of the flesh and writing everything off as chance, is neither encouraged by God's blessings to worship Him nor driven forward by His disciplines to repentance. This is also why

Jeremiah and Amos sharply rebuked the Jews: because they thought both good and evil came to pass without God's command. To the same purpose is the word of Isaiah: 'I am the Lord who creates light and makes darkness, who makes peace and creates calamity — I, the Lord, do all these things.'

Yet the godly person will not overlook secondary causes. Nor will he, because he regards those people as ministers of God's goodness through whom he has received benefit, pass over them without thought as if they deserved no thanks for their kindness. He will feel genuinely indebted to them, will freely acknowledge that debt, and will endeavor as far as he is able and opportunity allows to repay it. In short, in benefits received he will honor and praise God as the principal author — while honoring the people involved as His instruments. He will rightly understand that by God's will he is bound to those through whose hands God chose to show him goodness. If he suffers loss through negligence or lack of foresight, he will conclude in his mind that the loss came to pass by God's will — but he will also hold himself responsible for it. If someone dies from an illness that he handled carelessly, when he should have given the matter careful attention, he will not excuse himself by pointing out that the person had reached his appointed time beyond which he could not pass. Because he did not faithfully discharge his duty toward that person, he will take it as though the person perished through his own negligence. Still less, when fraud and deliberate malice are involved in murder or theft, will he excuse these things under the cover of God's providence. In one and the same evil act he will see distinctly both the righteousness of God and the wickedness of man, as both are plainly visible. Especially in future matters he will take careful account of sec-

ondary causes. He will count it among God's blessings if he is not deprived of the human help he may use for his safety. So he will neither be careless in taking counsel nor slow to seek help from those who have the means to assist him. But recognizing that whatever creatures can do to benefit him is placed in his hand by God, he will use them as the lawful instruments of God's providence. Since he cannot know for certain how the matter he is undertaking will turn out — knowing only that in all things the Lord will provide for his good — he will diligently pursue what he judges best for himself as far as his mind and understanding can see. Yet in making plans he will not be driven along by his own cleverness, but will commit himself to God's wisdom and be directed by it to the right end. Nor will his confidence rest so heavily on outward help that he becomes careless when he has it, or afraid as if abandoned when he lacks it. His mind will always be fixed on God's providence, and he will not allow himself to be pulled away from steadily resting on it by whatever present circumstances surround him. So although Joab acknowledged that the outcome of battle is in the will and hand of God, he did not give himself to idleness but diligently carried out what belonged to his calling — leaving the final outcome to the Lord: 'Let us be courageous for our people and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to Him.' This knowledge will strip us of rashness and false confidence, and will drive us to unceasing prayer. It will also uphold our minds with good hope, so that we may confidently and boldly face down the dangers that surround us.

It is in this that the inestimable happiness of a godly mind shows itself. Countless evils besiege human life and threaten it with countless forms of death. Without even looking beyond our-

selves: since the body is a receptacle for a thousand diseases — indeed, it carries within itself and nourishes the very seeds of those diseases — a person cannot carry himself through life without also carrying with him many forms of his own destruction, drawing out a life that is, as it were, tangled up with death. What else can we call a life in which neither cold nor heat comes without danger? Wherever you turn, all that surrounds you is not only an unreliable friend but seems to openly threaten you with death at every moment. Step into a ship: only a foot of timber separates you from death. Mount a horse: the slip of one hoof puts your life at risk. Walk through city streets: there are as many dangers as there are roof tiles above you. If there is an iron tool in your hand or your friend's, injury is already possible. Every wild animal you see is armed for your destruction. If you seek the peace of a well-fenced garden, where nothing seems present but pleasant air and ground, a serpent may still be lurking there. The house constantly exposed to fire threatens you with poverty by day and collapse by night. Your field, lying open to hail, frost, drought, and storms, warns you of crop failure, and through that, of famine. I say nothing of imprisonments, betrayals, robberies, and outright violence — some of which threaten us at home and some pursue us abroad. In these straits, must not a person be utterly miserable — dragging out a strained and failing breath in the midst of life, as if a sword were perpetually hanging over his neck? But you will say: these things happen rarely, or at least not always, not to everyone, and never all at once. I grant this. But since the examples of others remind us that the same things can happen to us — and our lives are no more exempt from them than theirs — we cannot help dreading and fearing them as things that may fall upon us. What more miserable

condition can anyone imagine than to live in such fear? Beyond that, it is a disgraceful reproach against God to say that He has exposed humanity — the noblest of all His creatures — to the blind and random blows of fortune. But here my purpose is only to speak of the misery a person would feel if he were placed under fortune's dominion.

But when the light of God's providence has once shone upon a godly person, he is relieved and set free not only from the extreme anguish and fear that previously pressed down on him, but from all anxious care. For as justly as he once feared fortune, he now boldly commits himself to God. This is his comfort: to understand that the heavenly Father so holds all things with His power, so rules them with His authority, so orders them with His wisdom, that nothing comes to pass except by His appointment. He knows he has been taken into God's protection, committed to the care of angels, and cannot be touched by any harm from water, fire, or weapon except insofar as God in His governance allows it. This is what is sung in the Psalm: 'He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His wings, and you will find refuge under His feathers. His faithfulness will be your shield and armor. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.' From this comes the boldness with which the saints declare: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do to me.' 'The Lord is my strength; why should I be afraid?' 'Though a whole army encamp against me, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not cease to hope.' Where does such unshakeable confidence come from? From this: that while the world appears out-

wardly to be spinning in chaos, they know that God is at work in everything — and they trust that His work will be for their preservation. If their safety is threatened by the devil or by wicked people, they would immediately be overwhelmed if they were not strengthened by the remembrance and meditation of providence. But when they recall that the devil and the entire company of the wicked are held everywhere by God's hand as with a bridle — that they can neither conceive any evil against us, nor pursue it once conceived, nor stir even a finger to carry it out, except as far as God permits, indeed commands — and that they are not merely held in chains but also compelled and directed to serve: they have abundant reason for comfort. For as it is the Lord's work to arm the fury of the wicked and to turn and direct it wherever He pleases, so it is also His work to appoint the measure and end, preventing them from triumphing as freely as they wish. Grounded in this persuasion, Paul — in one place blocked by Satan from his intended journey — went ahead and planned it in another place by the permission of God. Had he said only that Satan had blocked him, he would have given Satan too much power, as if it were within Satan's hand to overturn the very purposes of God. But by making God the judge, on whose permission every journey depends, he shows that Satan can accomplish nothing except by God's will. For the same reason David — because of the constant changes by which human life is tossed and whirled about — fled to this refuge, saying that his times are in God's hand. He could have said the course of his life, or time in the singular. But by using 'times' he meant to express that however unstable the human condition may be, whatever changes occur now and then, they are all governed by God. For this reason, when Rezin and the king of Israel joined

their forces to destroy Judah, appearing like blazing torches set to burn and consume the land, the prophet calls them 'smoking stumps of firebrands' — able to do nothing but breathe out a little smoke. So when Pharaoh was fearsome to everyone on account of his wealth, strength, and numbers, he is compared to a sea monster and his army to fish — and God declares that He will take the captain and his army with a hook and draw them wherever He pleases. Finally, not to linger long on this point: anyone who reflects carefully will easily see that the depth of all misery is ignorance of God's providence, and the chief happiness lies in the knowledge of it.

What has been said about God's providence would be enough for the thorough instruction and comfort of the faithful — for filling the vain curiosity of human beings nothing is ever sufficient, nor should it be — were it not for certain passages that seem to suggest something different from what has been set out above: that God does not have a fixed and stable purpose, but one that changes according to the circumstances of events below. First, in some places Scripture speaks of God repenting — such as that He repented of making humanity, and of raising Saul to the kingship. And that He would relent from the evil He had planned to bring on His people as soon as He saw any sign of their turning. In addition, several reversals of His decrees are recorded. Through Jonah He declared to the Ninevites that within forty days Nineveh would be destroyed — but immediately upon their repentance He was moved to a gentler sentence. Through Isaiah He declared death to Hezekiah — and was moved by his tears and prayers to delay it. From this many argue that God has not appointed human affairs by an eternal decree, but decides this or that from year to year, day

to day, and hour to hour, according to each person's conduct and what He judges to be fair. Regarding His repentance, we must hold this: repentance can no more exist in God than ignorance, error, or weakness. For if no person deliberately and knowingly puts himself in a position that requires repentance, we cannot say that God repents without also saying that He is either ignorant of what will come to pass, or unable to prevent it, or plunges rashly into a course He immediately regrets. But this is so far from the intent of the Holy Spirit that in the very passage where repentance is mentioned, He denies that God repents at all — because He is not a man that He should repent. We should note that in the same chapter both statements appear side by side, and the comparison actually resolves the apparent contradiction. In figurative language it is said that God repented of having made Saul king — and immediately afterward it is added: 'The Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind, for He is not a man that He should change His mind.' Here His unchangeableness is affirmed plainly and without any figure of speech. It is therefore certain that God's decree in ordering human affairs is perpetual and beyond all repentance. And to confirm that His constancy is not in doubt, even His adversaries were compelled to bear witness to it. For Balaam, whether he wanted to or not, could not keep himself from bursting out: 'God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?'

What then does the word 'repentance' mean in relation to God? It means the same thing as all the other expressions that describe God to us in human terms. Because our weakness cannot reach to His exalted nature, the description of Him that was given to us was

rightly framed to our capacity so we could understand it. This is how it is framed for us: God is not painted as He is in Himself, but as He is perceived by us. Though in Himself He has no troubled movements of mind, He nonetheless testifies that He is angry with sinners. Just as when we hear that God is angry, we must not imagine any actual disturbance in Him — but recognize that this way of speaking is borrowed from our common experience, because God resembles an enraged and angry person whenever He executes judgment — so we must understand by 'repentance' nothing other than a change in God's works. For among people, every change is an amendment of something that displeased them, and amendment comes from repentance. Therefore the word 'repentance,' when applied to God, refers to a change in what He does. Yet in the meantime His purpose and will are not turned, nor is His attitude changed — He continues in one unbroken course what He had from eternity foreseen, approved, and decreed, however sudden the change may appear to human eyes.

Nor does the sacred history show that God's decrees were overturned when it records that the destruction pronounced against the Ninevites was pardoned, or that Hezekiah's life was extended after he had been warned of his death. Those who interpret it that way misunderstand the nature of threatenings. Although such warnings are stated plainly, the outcome shows they contained an implied condition. Why did God send Jonah to the Ninevites to announce the ruin of their city in advance? Why did He warn Hezekiah of his approaching death? He could have brought both of them to ruin without sending any advance word. His intent was not to let them see their death approaching from a distance. His intent was something else entirely: not that they should be de-

destroyed, but that they should be amended so as not to be destroyed. So when Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would fall in forty days, the very purpose was that it should not fall. When hope of further life was cut off from Hezekiah, the very purpose was that he might obtain further life. Who does not see that God intended through such warnings to awaken to repentance those He frightened, so that they might escape the judgment their sins had earned? If that is agreed, the nature of the thing itself leads us to understand an implied condition within the plain warning — which is confirmed by similar examples. When the Lord rebuked king Abimelech for having taken Abraham's wife, He said: 'Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman you have taken, for she is a man's wife.' But after Abimelech offered his defense, God said: 'Return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, know that you will surely die, you and all who are yours.' You see how in the first sentence God strikes hard at his mind to make him urgently seek to make amends, and in the second plainly declares His actual will. Since other similar passages work the same way, do not conclude from them that anything was taken back from God's original purpose when He reversed what He had previously pronounced. God prepares the way for His eternal decree when, in announcing punishment, He moves to repentance those He intends to spare — rather than changing anything in His will, or even truly in His word, which simply did not spell out in syllables what is nevertheless easy to understand. For that word of Isaiah must stand firm: 'The Lord of hosts has determined, and who can annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?'

¶THE .XVIII. CHAPTER. THAT GOD
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STYLL HIMSELFE REMAYNETH PURE
FROM ALL SPOT.



A difficult question arises from other passages, where it is said that God bends and directs Satan himself, and all the reprobate, according to His will. Human reasoning can hardly grasp how God, working through them, could remain unstained by their guilt — and how, even in His common working, He could be entirely free from fault and yet justly condemn the instruments He uses. This is why some have devised a distinction between what God does and what He merely permits — because they thought the problem impossible to solve otherwise: that both Satan and all the wicked are so under God's hand and power that He directs their malice to whatever end He pleases, and uses their wicked deeds to execute His judgments. Their reluctance might perhaps be excusable — frightened off by the appearance of absurdity — were it not

that they wrongfully resort to a false defense in order to shield the justice of God from blame. It seems unreasonable to them that God would by His will and command cause a man to be spiritually blind, and then punish him for that very blindness. So they escape the difficulty by arguing that this happens by God's permission, not by His will. But God Himself plainly declares that He does it, and thereby dismisses that evasion. It is proved by countless clear testimonies that men do nothing apart from God's secret command, and that all their deliberating is futile unless His secret direction establishes what He has already determined. That statement from the Psalm — that God does all that He wills — clearly applies to all human actions. If God is the definite appointer of war and peace, as the Psalm states, without exception — who would dare say that men move about blindly while God is unaware and standing idle? Particular examples make this even clearer. From the first chapter of Job we learn that Satan appears before God to receive his orders no less than the angels who willingly obey. The manner and purpose are different, but the result is the same: Satan cannot undertake anything except by the will of God. Though God may at first appear to give Satan only bare permission to afflict the holy man, the statement holds true: 'The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; as it pleased God, so it has come to pass.' From this we gather that God was the author of Job's trial, of which Satan and the wicked Sabeans were merely instruments. Satan's aim was to drive the holy man to madness through despair. The Sabeans cruelly and wickedly invaded and robbed him of goods that were not theirs. Yet Job acknowledged that God had stripped him of all his possessions and made him poor, because it pleased God to do so. Therefore, whatever men or Satan himself may at-

tempt, God holds the helm and turns all their actions toward the execution of His judgments. It was God's will that the false king Ahab be deceived: the devil offered himself for that service and was sent with a specific commission to be a lying spirit in the mouths of all the prophets. If the blinding and madness of Ahab was God's judgment, then the notion of bare permission is worthless. It would be absurd to say that a judge merely permits something to happen without also decreeing what he wants done and commanding his officers to carry it out. The Jews intended to destroy Christ, Pilate and the soldiers followed their violent desires — and yet in a solemn prayer the disciples acknowledged that all the wicked men did nothing except what God's hand and counsel had determined. Peter had already preached that Christ was delivered to be killed by the deliberate purpose and foreknowledge of God. As if to say: God, from whom nothing is hidden from the beginning, knowingly and willingly appointed what the Jews then carried out — just as in another place it is stated that God, who had foretold through all His prophets that Christ would suffer, fulfilled it in this way. Absalom defiled his father's bed with incestuous adultery and committed a detestable crime. Yet God declared this was His own work, saying: 'You did it secretly, but I will do it openly, and before the sun.' Jeremiah declares that all the cruelty the Chaldeans inflicted on Judah was the work of God — which is why Nebuchadnezzar is called the servant of God. God repeatedly declares that by His signal, by the sound of His trumpet, by His power and command, the wicked are stirred up to war. He calls the Assyrian the rod of His wrath and the axe He moves with His own hand. The destruction of the holy city and the ruin of the temple He calls His own work. David — not murmuring against God but

acknowledging Him as a righteous judge — confessed that Shimei's cursings came by God's command, saying: 'The Lord commanded him to curse.' Throughout the sacred history we constantly find that whatever happens comes from the Lord — the departure of the ten tribes, the death of Eli's sons, and many similar events. Those who are reasonably familiar with Scripture can see that for brevity's sake I have cited only a few testimonies out of many — but they are enough to make plain that those who substitute bare permission for God's active providence are talking nonsense, as if God sat in a watchtower watching the chances of fortune, and His judgments depended on the will of men.

Solomon's statement that the heart of a king is turned wherever God pleases applies not just to kings but to all humanity — it is as if he said that whatever we conceive in our minds is directed to God's end by His secret working. And truly, if God did not work in the minds of men, it would make no sense to say that He takes away speech from the eloquent, wisdom from the aged, and understanding from the princes of the earth, causing them to wander where there is no path. Related to this is what we often read: that men are filled with fear when God causes that fear to take hold of their hearts. So David walked out of Saul's camp undetected, because a deep sleep from God had fallen on them all. Nothing could be stated more plainly than where God repeatedly declares that He blinds men's eyes, strikes them with confusion, makes them drunk with a spirit of deep sleep, drives them to madness, and hardens their hearts. Many people refer these acts to permission as well — as if, in abandoning the reprobate, God merely allowed Satan to blind them. But that solution is too shallow, since the Holy Spirit expressly states that they are struck with blindness and madness

by God's just judgment. Scripture says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart — and also that He dulled it and strengthened it. Some try to explain these phrases away by pointing out that in another passage it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart, as if Pharaoh's own will were the sole cause. But there is no conflict at all: God moves a man to act, and the man also acts of his own accord — both are true, though in different ways. And I turn their own objection back on them. If hardening means only bare permission, then the actual impulse of stubbornness would not truly belong to Pharaoh. How weak and foolish would it be to interpret it as if Pharaoh merely suffered himself to be hardened? Scripture cuts off every such excuse. God says plainly: 'I will hold his heart.' Of the inhabitants of Canaan, Moses says they went out to battle because the Lord had hardened their hearts. The same truth is repeated by another prophet: 'He turned their hearts that they should hate His people.' Again, Isaiah says God will send the Assyrians against a deceitful nation and will command them to carry off spoils and seize prey — not meaning that He will teach wicked and stubborn men to obey willingly, but that He will bend them to execute His judgments as if His commands were engraved on their minds. This shows that they were moved by God's specific appointment. I acknowledge that God often works in the reprobate through Satan as an instrument — but Satan carries out his work only by God's direction and goes no further than he is permitted. The evil spirit that troubled Saul is described as coming from God, so that we understand Saul's madness was the result of God's just punishment. It is also said that Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers — but how, except that the powerful working of delusion comes from God Himself, to make those who refuse the truth believe lies?

In keeping with the first manner of speaking, it is said: 'If any prophet speaks falsely, I, God, have deceived him.' In keeping with the second manner of speaking, it is said that God hands men over to a reprobate mind and casts them into filthy desires — because He is the chief author of His own just punishment, and Satan is merely His instrument. Since we will return to this subject in the second book, where we discuss the free or bound will of man, what I have said here is sufficient for now. Let this be the summary: since the will of God is said to be the cause of all things, His providence is understood to govern all the purposes and works of men — making its power evident not only in the elect, who are led by the Holy Spirit, but also in compelling the reprobate to serve His purposes.

Since everything I have cited so far comes plainly and directly from Scripture, those who are not afraid to slander the heavenly oracles should take careful note of the kind of judgment they are taking upon themselves. If they claim ignorance as a form of modesty, what could be more arrogant than setting a single human word against the authority of God? I have no interest in entertaining that approach. And if they speak openly against it, what do they gain by spitting at heaven? This is nothing new — in every age there have been wicked and ungodly men who raved against this point of doctrine. But they will find it true, as the Holy Spirit long ago declared through David, that God prevails when He is put on trial. David briefly rebukes the madness of men who, in their total lack of restraint, not only dispute with God based on their own sinfulness but even presume to condemn Him. He also notes that the blasphemies they hurl toward heaven do not reach God — rather, He dispels the clouds of their objections and makes His righteous-

ness shine clearly. Our faith, grounded in God's word and standing above all the world, looks down from its high place and treats these objections with contempt. Their first objection — that if nothing happens apart from God's will, then God has two contradictory wills, because He secretly decrees what He has openly forbidden by His law — is easily answered. But before I answer, I remind readers again that this objection is aimed not at me but at the Holy Spirit, who taught Job to confess: 'As it pleased God, so it came to pass.' When thieves robbed Job, he recognized in their injury and harm the just chastisement of God. What does Scripture say elsewhere? The sons of Eli did not obey their father because God had determined to put them to death. Another prophet declares that God, who sits in heaven, does whatever He wills. I have now shown clearly enough that God is the author of all those things which these critics would have happen only by His idle permission. He declares that He creates light and darkness, forms good and evil, and that no disaster happens which He Himself has not brought about. I ask them plainly: does He execute His own judgments willingly or against His will? Just as Moses teaches that a man killed by the chance fall of an axe is delivered by God into the striker's hand, so the whole church in Luke confesses that Herod and Pilate conspired to do exactly what God's hand and purpose had decreed. And truly, if Christ had not been crucified by the will of God, where would our redemption come from? Yet God's will does not contradict itself, does not change, and does not pretend to will what it does not will. In God there is one single and simple will — but it appears to us as manifold, because our limited understanding cannot grasp how God can in different ways both will and not will the very same thing. Paul, after calling the calling

of the Gentiles a hidden mystery, then says that the manifold wisdom of God has been clearly displayed through it. Because of our dullness, God's wisdom appears to us to be many-sided, or as the old translator rendered it, of many fashions. But does that mean we should imagine some variety in God Himself — as if He changes His purpose or contradicts Himself? Rather, when we cannot understand how God can will something to happen that He forbids us to do, we should remember our own weakness — and remember that the light in which He dwells is not without reason called inaccessible, for it is covered in darkness. All godly and sober people will therefore readily agree with this statement of Augustine: that sometimes a person wills with a good will what God does not will. For example, a good son may wish his father to live, while God has determined that the father will die. Conversely, a person may will the same thing as God, but with an evil will. An evil son may wish his father dead, and God may will the same thing — but for entirely different reasons. Now the first son wills what God does not will, and the second son wills what God also wills — and yet the loving desire of the first son is far more in harmony with the nature of God's will than the unnatural wish of the second son, even though the second son wills the same outcome. How great a difference there is between what it means for a man to will something and for God to will it — and to what end each will is directed, so as to be approved or condemned. For God brings about good ends through the evil wills of evil men. A little earlier Augustine had said that the fallen angels, and all the reprobate, as far as they themselves are concerned, did what God did not will — yet in respect to God's omnipotence, they could by no means truly act against it, because while they acted against God's will, God's will was being accom-

plished upon them. From this he exclaims: 'Great are the works of God, sought out by all who delight in them — for in a marvelous way the very thing done against His will is not done without His will, because it could not happen if He did not permit it; and yet He does not permit it against His will but willingly; and He, being good, would not allow evil to be done if He were not omnipotent enough to bring good out of evil.'

In the same way the other objection is answered — or rather dissolves on its own: that if God not only uses the service of wicked men but also governs their counsels and desires, then He is the author of all their wicked deeds, and men are unjustly condemned for carrying out what God has decreed, since they are only obeying His will. But it is wrong to confuse God's will with His commandment, which countless examples show to be very different things. When Absalom violated his father's wives, it was God's will to punish David's adultery with that disgrace — yet God did not therefore command the wicked son to commit incest. This can be understood in a different sense regarding David's own situation, as in his words about Shimei's cursing. When David said that Shimei cursed him by God's command, he was not commending Shimei's obedience as if that raging man had followed God's orders — rather, David recognized his tongue as God's instrument of chastisement and patiently accepted the correction. This point must be held firmly: when God accomplishes through the wicked what He has decreed by His secret judgment, those wicked people cannot excuse themselves as though they were obeying His command — for in reality they are deliberately pursuing their own evil desires and breaking that very command. The election of King Jeroboam illustrates plainly how an act can be governed by God's secret provi-

dence while still being wickedly done by men. In that event, the recklessness and madness of the people is sharply condemned for overturning the order God had established and treacherously abandoning the house of David — and yet we know it was God's will that Jeroboam be anointed. In Hosea there appears a surface contradiction: God complained that the kingdom was set up without His knowledge and against His will, yet in another place He says He gave the kingdom to Jeroboam in His anger. How can these statements agree — that Jeroboam did not reign by God, and yet that God made him king? Like this: the people could not have abandoned the house of David without throwing off the yoke God had placed on them, and yet God was not stripped of His freedom to punish Solomon's ingratitude in this way. We see, then, how God — while not willing the treacherous breaking of loyalty — still justly wills a departure from their king for a different purpose, so that Jeroboam, entirely without expectation, was moved by sacred anointing to become king. In this way the sacred history says that an adversary was raised up to strip Solomon's son of part of his kingdom. Readers should weigh both facts carefully: it pleased God to have the people governed under the hand of one king, and so when the kingdom was divided it was done against His will — and yet the division also originated from His will. When the prophet moved Jeroboam, who had no such thought, by both words and the ceremony of anointing to hope for the kingdom, this was not done without God's knowledge or against His will — for God commanded it to be done. And yet the people's rebellion is justly condemned because they abandoned the line of David as though acting against God's will. Similarly, when Rehoboam arrogantly rejected the people's request, Scripture says this was done

by God to confirm the word He had spoken through His servant Ahijah. See how the sacred unity is torn apart against God's will, and yet at the same time ten tribes abandon Solomon's son by that same will. Here is another similar example. The sons of Ahab were killed and his entire family was wiped out with the people's consent and participation. Jehu rightly said that none of God's words had fallen to the ground and that God had done all He had spoken through His servant Elijah. And yet Jehu was right to rebuke the citizens of Samaria for having put their own hands to the deed, saying: 'Are you righteous? If I conspired against my lord, who killed all these?' I believe I have already explained clearly how in one and the same act both the guilt of man reveals itself and the righteousness of God shines gloriously. For thoughtful minds, this statement of Augustine will always be sufficient: the Father delivered the Son, Christ offered up His body, and Judas betrayed the Lord — so why in this one act of delivering is God righteous while man is guilty? Because even though they did the same thing, the reason for which each did it was entirely different. If anyone is still troubled by this — that there is no agreement between God and man when man does something unlawful at God's righteous direction — let them remember what Augustine says elsewhere: 'Who would not tremble at these judgments, where God works even in the hearts of evil men whatever He wills, and yet repays them according to their deserts?' In the treachery of Judas, it is no more legitimate to blame God for the wicked deed because He willed His Son to be betrayed and delivered to death, than it is to give Judas credit for our redemption. The same writer correctly tells us that in this judgment God does not examine what men could have done or what they have done, but what their will was — so that purpose

and will come into the reckoning. Those who find this hard should consider how tolerable their own stubbornness really is — rejecting what is clearly attested in Scripture simply because it exceeds their understanding, and criticizing the very teachings that God would never have commanded His prophets and apostles to deliver unless He knew them profitable to be known. True wisdom is nothing more than humbly and willingly receiving, without exception, whatever the holy Scriptures teach. As for those who more obstinately rage against it, since it is plain they are railing against God, they deserve no further refutation.

CHAPTER 1: THAT BY ADAM'S SIN
AND FALLING AWAY, MANKIND
BECAME ACCURSED AND DID
DEGENERATE FROM HIS FIRST
ESTATE, WHEREIN IS TREATED OF
ORIGINAL SIN



The ancient proverb urging man to know himself has always been highly regarded, and for good reason. If ignorance of things that concern ordinary human life is considered shameful, then not knowing ourselves is far more shameful — for it leaves us dazzled, even blinded, whenever we face any important decision. But the more profitable this lesson is, the more carefully we must make sure we do not misuse it, as some of the philosophers have done. When they urge men to know themselves, they make this the goal: that a man should be aware of his own dignity and excellence, looking at nothing in himself except what will cause him to swell with vain confidence and be inflated with pride. True self-knowledge, however, begins at a different point. First, by considering what was given to us in creation and how generously God continues His gracious favor toward us, we recognize how great the excellence of our nature would have been had it remained

uncorrupted. We also recognize that nothing in us is truly our own — everything we have is borrowed from God, so that we depend entirely on Him. Second, we call to mind our miserable condition after Adam's fall, which throws down all boasting and self-confidence, overwhelms us with shame, and truly humbles us. For just as God originally fashioned us in His own image to lift our minds toward virtue and the meditation of eternal life, we need to know that we are endowed with reason and understanding for the purpose of pressing forward to our appointed goal of blessed immortality — lest the great dignity of our nature, which sets us apart from animals, be swallowed up by our laziness. But no sooner does that original dignity come to mind than the painful sight of our filthiness and shame forces its way in — for in the person of the first man we have fallen from our original estate. From this grows a hatred and loathing of ourselves that is true humility, and from it is kindled a fresh desire to seek God, in whom each of us may recover the good things of which we find ourselves completely empty.

This is indeed what God's truth requires in the examination of ourselves — knowledge that strips away all confidence in our own power, leaves us nothing to boast about, and brings us to submission. We must hold to this rule if we are to reach the true goal of both right knowledge and right living. I am well aware that the other approach is far more attractive — the one that invites us to dwell on our good qualities rather than to face the miserable poverty and disgrace that should overwhelm us with shame. There is nothing human nature desires more than flattery, and when a person hears his gifts praised, he accepts it all far too readily. It is therefore no surprise that most people have gone dangerously

astray on this point. Since a more than blind self-love is naturally planted in every person, they convince themselves very willingly that there is nothing in them that deserves to be hated. Without any outside help, this empty opinion spreads everywhere: that man is entirely sufficient in himself to live well and blessedly. Even those who are content to think more modestly — granting something to God so as not to seem arrogantly self-sufficient — still divide things in such a way that the primary share of glory and confidence remains with themselves. And whenever talk comes along that flatters the pride already itching in their bones, nothing could please them more. So the more highly a speaker has praised the excellence of human nature, the more warmly he has been received and celebrated in nearly every age. But whatever praise of human excellence teaches a man to rest in himself does nothing but delight him with its sweetness while it deceives him — leading all who accept it to the most wretched ruin. What good does it do to stand on vain confidence, devising and attempting all sorts of plans for our own benefit, only to find ourselves forsaken and lacking sound understanding and true strength at the very first step — and yet pressing on boldly until we fall into destruction? This is exactly what happens to those who trust they can accomplish anything by their own power. Therefore, anyone who follows teachers who keep him focused only on his own good qualities will not advance in self-knowledge but will be swept violently into the worst kind of ignorance.

So while God's truth agrees with the natural instinct of all people that self-knowledge is a key part of wisdom, there is great disagreement about how that self-knowledge works. By the judgment of the flesh, a person thinks he has examined himself well when,

trusting in his own understanding and integrity, he boldly encourages himself to practice virtue, fights against vices, and works hard to shape himself toward what is noble and honorable. But the person who examines himself by the standard of God's judgment finds nothing to build his confidence on. The more honestly he looks inward, the more discouraged he becomes, until he is completely stripped of all confidence and has nothing left on which to base a well-ordered life. And yet God does not want us to forget the original dignity He gave our father Adam — a dignity that should rightly stir us toward righteousness and goodness. For we cannot think about either our original estate or the purpose for which we were created without being pressed forward to pursue immortality and desire the kingdom of God. But that reflection, rather than giving us courage, humbles and brings us low. What was our original estate? The one from which we have fallen. What was the purpose of our creation? The very purpose from which we have completely turned away — so that we might loathe our own miserable condition, groan in sorrow, and in groaning also mourn the loss of that dignity. Now when we say that man should find nothing in himself to give him bold confidence, we mean there is nothing in him on which he should base pride. Therefore, if anyone wants to know what kind of self-knowledge a person should have, let us divide it this way. First, let him consider what he was created for and what gifts he was given — gifts not to be despised — so that this reflection may stir him toward honoring God and toward the life to come. Then let him honestly weigh his own strength — or rather, his desperate lack of strength — so that by recognizing it he may be brought to utter humility, as one who has nothing in himself. The

first consideration shows him what his duty is; the second shows him how able he is to carry it out. We will address both in the order that the subject requires.

Since God punished this sin so severely, it could not have been a minor offense — it must have been a detestable wickedness. We must therefore examine the nature of Adam's fall, which kindled God's terrible vengeance upon all mankind. The popular opinion that the sin was merely about overindulgence — as if the highest virtue consisted in refraining from one single fruit, while every other kind of pleasant food was available in abundance in that blessed and fertile garden — is a childish interpretation. We must look deeper. The prohibition of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test of obedience — a means by which Adam could prove, through obeying, that he willingly submitted to God's authority. The very name of the tree indicated that the command was given for no other reason than that Adam, contented with his own estate, should not presumptuously reach for something higher. The promise of eternal life tied to the tree of life, and the fearful warning of death attached to eating from the tree of knowledge, were designed to test and exercise his faith. From all this it is not hard to see what moved Adam to provoke God's wrath against himself. Augustine is right when he says that pride was the beginning of all evil. If ambition had not lifted man beyond what was lawful and permitted, he could have remained in his estate. But we need a fuller account by looking at the nature of the temptation as Moses describes it. Since the woman was led astray through the serpent's deception and fell into unbelief, it is clear that disobedience was the beginning of the fall. Paul confirms this, teaching that all people were lost through one man's disobedience. It must also

be noted that the first man fell from submission to God not only because he was lured by Satan, but also because he despised the truth and turned to lies. Once God's word is despised, all reverence for God collapses — for His majesty is honored among us only as long as we hang upon His word. Unbelief, then, was the root of the fall. From unbelief arose ambition and pride, accompanied by ingratitude — for Adam, in craving more than was given to him, irreverently despised the great generosity with which God had enriched him. It was a monstrous wickedness that this creature of earth thought it too little to be made in the likeness of God unless he could also be made equal to God. If apostasy is a filthy and detestable offense — the act by which man withdraws from his Creator's authority and furiously throws off His yoke — then there is no point in minimizing Adam's sin. And it was no simple apostasy either, but was combined with shameful insults against God, since Adam and Eve agreed with Satan's slanders in which he accused God of lying, envy, and selfish withholding. In the end, unbelief opened the door to ambition, ambition gave birth to stubborn rebellion, and rebellion caused men to cast away the fear of God and throw themselves wherever their desires led them. Bernard is therefore right to teach that the gate of salvation is opened to us today when we receive the gospel through our ears — just as through those same windows, when they were opened to Satan, death entered. Adam would never have dared to act against God's command had he not first stopped believing God's word. The surest way to keep all desires in proper order is this: to believe that nothing is better than to remain righteous by obeying God's

commands, and that the highest end of a blessed life is to be loved by Him. By going along with the devil's lies, Adam did all he could to extinguish the glory of God.

Just as Adam's spiritual life consisted in remaining united and bound to his Creator, so his separation from God was the death of his soul. It is no wonder that, through his fall, he destroyed all his posterity — for he had overturned the entire order of nature both in heaven and on earth. All creation groans, Paul says, having been subjected to corruption against its will. If one asks the reason, the answer is clear: creation shares in the punishment deserved by man, for whose sake it was made. Since the curse that spreads through all parts of the world flowed outward from Adam's sin, it is entirely reasonable that it also spread to all his descendants. When the heavenly image in Adam was defaced, he did not suffer this penalty alone. In place of wisdom, strength, holiness, truth, and righteousness — the gifts with which he had been clothed — came a terrible plague of blindness, weakness, filthiness, falsehood, and injustice. He also dragged his entire offspring into the same ruin. This inherited corruption is what the early writers called original sin, using the word sin to mean the corruption of a nature that had previously been good and pure. There has been much debate about this, because nothing is further from common sense than the idea that all people are made guilty on account of one man's sin, and that this sin becomes universal. This may be why the earliest church teachers touched on this point only briefly, or at least not as clearly as they should have. But even their caution could not prevent the rise of Pelagius, whose godless invention was that Adam's sin harmed only himself and did not affect his descendants. Through this sleight of hand, Satan sought to make the dis-

ease incurable by concealing it. When it was proven by clear Scripture testimony that sin passed from the first man to all his descendants, Pelagius shifted his argument, claiming that sin spread through imitation rather than through natural propagation. Good men worked hard to refute this — above all Augustine — showing that we are corrupted not by someone else's wickedness imported from outside, but that we bring a vice planted in our very begetting from our mother's womb. To deny this was the height of shamelessness. But the recklessness of the Pelagians and Celestians will not surprise anyone who has read Augustine's writings and seen what shameless creatures they were in every other matter as well. David's confession is unmistakably clear: he declares that he was conceived in iniquity and that his mother bore him in sin. He is not there accusing his father or mother of specific sins. Rather, in order to magnify God's grace toward him, he traces his own sinfulness back to his very conception. Since it is obvious that this was not unique to David, it follows that the common condition of all mankind is described through his example. All of us who descend from unclean seed are born infected with the contagion of sin — indeed, before we even see the light of this life, we are filthy and stained in God's sight. As the book of Job says: 'Who can bring what is clean from what is unclean? No one.'

The uncleanness of parents passes into their children in such a way that all human beings without exception are defiled from the very beginning. But we cannot find the origin of this defilement unless we trace it back to the first parent of us all. Adam was not only the ancestor of human nature but also its root, and therefore all of mankind was rightly corrupted in his corruption. The apostle makes this plain by comparing Adam and Christ: 'Just as through

one man sin entered into the whole world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned — so by the grace of Christ, righteousness and life are restored to us' (Romans 5:12). What will the Pelagians say here? That Adam's sin spread by imitation? If so, then the only benefit we receive from Christ's righteousness is that He is set before us as an example to follow. Who could accept such a robbery of God's honor? If it is beyond question that Christ's righteousness becomes ours through a real sharing in it, and that by it we have life, then it equally follows that both righteousness and life were so lost in Adam that they had to be recovered in Christ — and that sin and death crept in through Adam in the same real way that they are abolished through Christ. The words are plain: many are made righteous through Christ's obedience, just as through Adam's disobedience they were made sinners. The relationship between the two is clear: Adam by his ruin dragged us down with him, and Christ by His grace restored us to salvation. In so clear a light of truth, a longer or more laborious proof is unnecessary. Paul makes the same point in his first letter to the Corinthians, when establishing the faithful in their confidence in the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:22): he shows that the life lost in Adam is recovered in Christ. When he declares that we all die in Adam, he also plainly testifies that we were infected with the pollution of sin. Condemnation could not reach those who had no guilt at all. But his meaning is made clearest by the other half of the sentence, where he teaches that hope of life is restored in Christ — and this happens only through the marvelous way in which Christ pours the power of His righteousness into us (Romans 8:10), as it is written elsewhere that 'the Spirit is life because of righteousness.' We must therefore interpret 'we are dead

in Adam' as meaning this: Adam, by sinning, did not only bring ruin on himself but plunged human nature headlong into the same destruction. He did so not merely for himself, but because he infected all his descendants with the same corruption into which he had fallen. Otherwise Paul's statement could not hold true: that all are by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3), if they were not already under the curse from the womb. It is easy to see that 'nature' there refers not to nature as God created it, but to nature as it was corrupted in Adam. For it would be unfitting to make God the author of death. Adam corrupted himself so thoroughly that the infection passed from him to all his offspring. And the heavenly Judge Himself, Christ, declares plainly enough that all are born evil and corrupted, when He teaches that whatever is born of flesh is flesh (John 3:6), and that therefore the gate of life is closed to all until they are born again.

We do not need the intricate disputation that troubled the early writers so much — namely, whether the soul of a child derives from the soul of its father, because the infection is thought to reside primarily in the soul. It is enough to hold this: the gifts that God was pleased to bestow on human nature, He deposited in Adam — and so when Adam lost them after receiving them, he lost them not only for himself but for all of us. Why search for some special means of transmission from soul to soul, when we learn that Adam received these gifts not for himself alone but for all of us, and that they were assigned not to one individual but to the whole of human nature? It is entirely reasonable, then, that when he was stripped of them, human nature was left naked and empty — and that when he was infected with sin, the infection spread to all of nature. From a rotten root grew rotten branches, which

passed their rottenness on to the shoots that sprang from them. The children were thus corrupted in the father, and they in turn passed that corruption to their own children — the corruption beginning in Adam and flowing continuously from generation to generation down to all his descendants. The infection does not originate in the substance of the flesh or the soul as such, but in God's arrangement by which the gifts He gave to the first man were to be held and either preserved or forfeited by him on behalf of all who came from him. As for the Pelagian objection — that it is unlikely children would inherit corruption from godly parents, since they should rather be sanctified by their parents' purity — it is easily answered. Children do not descend from their parents' spiritual regeneration but from their physical generation. Therefore, as Augustine says, whether an unbeliever is condemned as guilty and a believer is acquitted as innocent, both generate not innocent children but guilty ones, because they generate from a corrupted nature. The fact that children of believers share in a kind of parental holiness is a special blessing of God's covenant people — it does not disprove that the original and universal curse of mankind came first. Guilt belongs to nature; sanctification belongs to supernatural grace.

To prevent any vagueness in these statements, let us define original sin. I do not intend to examine all the definitions offered by various writers, but I will present the one that I believe best accords with the truth. Original sin is the inherited corruption and perversity of our nature, spread through every part of the soul, which first makes us guilty before God's wrath and then produces in us what Scripture calls the works of the flesh. This is what Paul regularly calls 'sin.' The acts that flow from it — such as adulteries,

fornications, thefts, hatreds, murders, and drunkenness — he calls the fruits of sin, though both Scripture and Paul himself also commonly refer to these acts as sins as well. Two things must be clearly distinguished here. First, we are so thoroughly corrupted and perverted in every part of our nature that we are rightly condemned and convicted before God on account of that corruption alone — for God accepts nothing but righteousness, innocence, and purity. Yet this condemnation is not merely for someone else's fault. When it is said that through Adam's sin we are brought under God's judgment, the meaning is not that we, as innocent and undeserving, are blamed for his wrongdoing. Rather, because through his offense we are all clothed in the curse, he is said to have bound us. And from him came not only the punishment but also the infection itself, which remains in us and rightly deserves that punishment. So while Augustine sometimes calls original sin 'another's sin' — to make it clearer that it is transmitted through natural descent — he also affirms that it is properly each person's own. And the apostle himself expressly testifies that death spread to all people because all have sinned and are wrapped in original sin and defiled by its stain. Therefore even infants, who bring their own condemnation from their mother's womb, are bound not by another's fault but by their own. Although they have not yet produced the actual fruits of iniquity, they carry the seed of it within them — indeed, their entire nature is a seed of sin, and therefore cannot be anything but hateful and abominable to God. It follows that it is rightly counted as sin before God, for there can be no guilt without sin. The second point is this: this perversity never stops in us but constantly produces new fruit — the very works of the flesh already described — like a blazing furnace that continually throws

out flame and sparks, or a spring that never stops flowing. Those who have defined original sin as the absence of the original righteousness that ought to have been in us do capture the substance of the matter, but they have not fully expressed its power and force. Our nature is not merely empty and stripped of goodness — it is also so abundantly and productively full of every kind of evil that it cannot be idle. Those who have called it concupiscence have used a word that is not far off the mark — if only most of them would add what they generally deny: that everything in man, from the mind to the will, from the soul to the flesh, is corrupted and saturated with this concupiscence. Or, to say it even more briefly: the whole person is, in himself, nothing other than concupiscence.

I have said, then, that sin has taken possession of all the parts of the soul since Adam fell away from the fountain of righteousness. It was not only his lower appetites that were lured into sin — wicked ungodliness seized the very citadel of his mind, and pride pierced to the very depths of his heart. It is therefore foolish and shortsighted to limit the corruption flowing from this to what they call sensual impulses, or to describe it as merely a stimulus that tempts and draws only the part they call 'sensuality.' In this, Peter Lombard revealed his deep ignorance when, searching for the seat of original sin, he located it in the flesh on the basis of Paul's testimony — yet not properly, he said, but only because it is most visible in the flesh. As if Paul meant only one part of the soul and not the whole human nature set in contrast to supernatural grace. Paul himself removes all doubt by teaching that the corruption does not reside in one part alone but that nothing is free from its deadly infection. When he treats of corrupted nature, he does not only condemn the visible disordered impulses of appetite but especially

labors to show that the mind is subject to blindness and the heart to wickedness. And Romans 3 is nothing other than a description of original sin. This is made even clearer by looking at renewal. The 'spirit,' which is set in contrast to the old man and the flesh, does not signify only the grace by which the lower or sensual part of the soul is corrected, but includes a full reformation of all the parts. Paul therefore commands not only that our gross appetites be put to death, but that we ourselves be renewed in the spirit of our mind — and in another place he calls us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. It follows that the very part in which the excellence and nobility of the soul shines most brightly is not merely wounded but so corrupted that it needs not merely healing but a wholly new nature. How thoroughly sin possesses both the mind and the heart will be examined later. Here I merely want to note briefly that the whole person, from head to foot, is so completely submerged in sin — as if overwhelmed by a flood — that no part is left untouched. Therefore, everything that proceeds from a person is counted as sin, as Paul says: all the affections of the flesh, all its thoughts, are hostility against God, and therefore death.

Let those go who presume to make God the author of their sins because we say that men are naturally sinful. They wrongly seek the work of God in their own filthiness, when they should instead be looking at Adam's nature as it was before it became corrupted. Our destruction comes from the fault of our own flesh, not from God — we perished for no other reason than that we fell away from our original estate. Let no one grumble and say that God could have better provided for our salvation by ensuring that Adam did not fall. That objection is something all godly minds should recoil from as far too presumptuous, and it also touches the secret of pre-

destination, which will be addressed in its proper place later. Let us hold, then, that our fall is to be attributed to the corruption of our nature — not to God, who is nature's author. It is true that a deadly wound has lodged itself in our nature. But it matters greatly whether that wound came from outside at some later point, or whether it was there from the beginning. The evidence is clear: the wound was inflicted by sin, and therefore we have no one to blame but ourselves. Scripture has faithfully recorded this truth. Ecclesiastes says: 'This I have found: God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes' (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Man's ruin is therefore to be laid at his own feet — for having received uprightness by God's goodness, he fell into vanity by his own foolishness.

We say, then, that man is corrupted by a natural defect — but one that did not originate in nature. We deny that it originated in nature in order to make clear that it is rather a condition that came upon man from outside than a property built into him from the beginning. Yet we call it natural so that no one thinks each person acquires it merely through bad habits, since in fact it holds all people bound by hereditary right. We are not saying this on our own authority. For this same reason the apostle teaches that we are all by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). How could God, who takes pleasure even in the least of His works, be wrathful against the noblest of all His creatures? He is angry not with His own handiwork but with the corruption of it. Therefore, since man's nature is corrupted, it is not inaccurate to say that man is by nature abominable to God, and it is equally accurate to call him naturally perverse and corrupted. Augustine, for his part, does not hesitate to call the sins that necessarily reign in our flesh — wherever God's

grace is absent — natural sins, in view of corrupted nature. With this the foolish invention of the Manichees disappears. When they imagined an evil substance dwelling in man, they were forced to invent a separate evil creator for him, to avoid assigning to the righteous God the cause and origin of evil.

CHAPTER 2: THAT MAN IS NOW SPOILED OF THE FREEDOM OF WILL, AND MADE SUBJECT TO MISERABLE BONDAGE



We have seen that sin's dominion — ever since it first enslaved the first man — not only reigns throughout all of humanity but fully possesses every soul. Now we must examine more closely whether, in being brought into this bondage, we are stripped of all freedom — and if any remains, how far its power extends. To help the truth of this question become clear, I will set up a guiding principle for the whole discussion. The best way to avoid error is to consider the dangers that lie on both sides. If man is declared to have lost all uprightness, he will immediately take that as an excuse for laziness — and because it is said he can do nothing on his own toward righteousness, he neglects it entirely as though it had nothing to do with him. On the other hand, if he is allowed to claim even the smallest credit for himself, he robs God of His honor and ruins himself through reckless self-confidence. To avoid both dangers, this is the course to take: let man be told that no goodness remains in him and that he is surrounded on every side by desperate necessity — and yet let him be taught to de-

sire the goodness he lacks and the freedom of which he has been deprived. This should stir him more urgently from laziness than any flattering fiction about the great powers he possesses. The importance of the second point is obvious to everyone. The first point, I notice, is doubted by more people than it should be. Once that is settled beyond dispute, this truth should stand firm: nothing must be left to man that would allow him to boast about himself, since he must be brought down from false self-glorification. If man was not permitted to glory in himself even at the time when God had adorned him with the most remarkable gifts, how much more ought he to be humbled now, after ingratitude has plunged him from high glory into utter shame? At that time, when man was elevated to the highest dignity, Scripture attributes nothing to him except that he was created in God's image — which quietly teaches that man was blessed not through anything of his own but through his sharing in God. What then remains now, except that, naked and stripped of all glory, he acknowledge God — the One to whom he was not grateful when he overflowed with the riches of His grace — and that now, confessing his own poverty, he glorify the One he failed to glorify when recognizing His gifts? It serves our good just as much as it serves God's glory that all praise of wisdom and strength be taken from us. Those who attribute anything more to us than the truth warrants join our ruin to the robbery of God. What else happens when we are taught to fight through our own strength, except that we are lifted up on a reed staff that immediately snaps and sends us crashing to the ground? And yet even that comparison gives our strength too much credit — for all that vain people have imagined and babble about human power is nothing but smoke. Augustine therefore rightly repeated this memorable

statement: that free will is not established but destroyed by those who defend it. I thought it necessary to say this as a kind of preface, for the sake of those who, when they hear that man's power is being demolished so that God's power may be built up in man, are inclined to view this approach as dangerous — or at least unnecessary. It will become clear, however, that this discussion is both necessary for religion and of great benefit to us.

We said earlier that the powers of the soul are seated in the mind and in the heart. Now let us consider what each is able to do. The philosophers are nearly unanimous in their view of the mind: they imagine that reason sits enthroned within it, illuminating all thought like a lamp and governing the will like a queen. They hold that reason is endowed with divine light so that it can give sound counsel, and that it possesses such lively energy that it can govern well. The senses, on the other hand, they regard as dull and dim-sighted, always crawling on the ground, wallowing in material things, and never lifting themselves to true insight. As for appetite: if it submits to reason rather than surrendering to the senses, it is carried toward the pursuit of virtue, stays on the right path, and is transformed into will. But if it gives itself over to the senses, it is corrupted and perverted by them and degenerates into lust. In their view, then, the soul contains three powers: understanding, sense, and appetite or will — the word 'will' being the more common term now. They say that the understanding is endowed with reason, the best guide toward a good and blessed life, as long as it remains within its own proper excellence and exercises its natural force. The lower motion they call sense — whereby a person is drawn into error and deception — can, they say, be tamed by the discipline of reason and gradually overcome. They place the will

between reason and sense as an independent faculty, free to choose whether it will obey reason or surrender itself to be carried away by the senses.

The philosophers do sometimes acknowledge — compelled by sheer experience — how difficult it is for reason to maintain its rule as queen within a person, who is at one moment lured by the temptations of pleasure, at another deceived by the false appearance of good things, and at another violently dragged off course by unruly passions, like a man pulled by ropes of sinew — as Plato puts it. Cicero says for the same reason that the sparks of virtue given by nature are quickly extinguished by corrupt opinions and evil habits. When such diseases have once taken hold in human minds, they admit that they overflow so violently that they cannot easily be restrained — and they do not hesitate to compare them to wild horses that throw off reason as though tossing the driver from the chariot, running wild without limit or control. But they have no doubt that virtues and vices are in our own power. Their reasoning: if it is in our choice to do a thing, then it is also in our choice not to do it. And if it is in our choice not to do it, then it is also in our choice to do it. We seem to do freely what we do, and to refrain freely from what we refrain. Therefore, if we choose to do good, we could equally leave it undone; if we do evil, we could equally avoid it. Some of them have gone so far in this direction as to boast that it is God's gift that we live, but our own achievement that we live well and righteously. From this comes the saying of Cicero, spoken through the character of Cotta: since every man acquires virtue for himself, no wise man has ever thanked God for it. 'For virtue,' he says, 'we are praised, and in virtue we glory — which would not be so if virtue were God's gift rather than our own.' And a little later

he adds: 'This is the common judgment of all people — that good fortune is to be asked from God, but wisdom is to be obtained by oneself.' This, then, is the core of the philosophers' position: the reason within man's mind is sufficient to govern him rightly. The will, subject to reason, is drawn toward evil by the senses. But since the will has free choice, nothing prevents it from following reason as its guide in all things.

Among the church writers, while none of them failed to acknowledge that sin has seriously wounded man's reason and thoroughly entangled his will in corrupt desires, many of them gave too much ground to the philosophers. The early writers, I think, elevated man's strength for two reasons: first, so as not to give the philosophers — with whom they were then engaged in debate — grounds for ridicule; and second, so as not to give the flesh, which was already sluggish toward good, a new excuse for laziness. Because they were unwilling to teach anything that sounded absurd by common human standards, they tried to make Scripture's teaching halfway agree with the philosophers. But that their primary concern was the second point — avoiding the encouragement of laziness — is clear from their own words. Chrysostom writes in one place: 'Because God has placed both good and evil things within our own power, He has given us freedom of choice, and He does not compel the unwilling but welcomes the willing.' And again: 'Often the one who is evil, if he wills it, is turned to good, and the one who is good falls into evil through laziness — because God made our nature to have free will. He does not impose necessity on us, but providing suitable remedies, He leaves all to lie in the disposition of the patient.' And again: 'Just as without being helped by God's grace we can never do anything good, so unless we

bring what is our own, we cannot obtain God's favor.' He had said earlier that God's help would not be everything — we too must contribute something. His familiar refrain was: 'Let us bring what is ours; God will supply the rest.' Jerome agrees: 'It is our part to begin, but God's to bring to completion; our part to offer what we can, His to fulfill what we cannot.' You can see that in these statements they attributed more to man in the pursuit of virtue than was fitting, because they thought the only way to shake off the natural sluggishness of human beings was to prove that they sin purely by their own choice. How well they handled this will be examined later. For now, it is enough to say that the statements we have just cited are completely false — as will shortly be shown. Although the Greeks exceeded others in exalting the power of human will — and Chrysostom above all — still all the early writers except Augustine are so inconsistent, wavering, or ambiguous on this point that almost no firm conclusion can be drawn from them. We will therefore not attempt a thorough survey of all their statements but will draw from each of them only as much as the plain presentation of the matter seems to require. As for the later writers: each one, in pursuit of personal praise for defending human nature, gradually slipped further and further until it became commonly accepted that man was corrupted only in his sensual part, while his reason remained entirely sound and his will largely intact. Meanwhile the phrase 'the natural gifts were corrupted in man and the supernatural taken away' circulated on everyone's lips — but scarcely one in a hundred truly understood what it meant. For my part, if I simply wanted to describe the nature of corruption, I could be content with those words. But it matters greatly to carefully weigh what a man — corrupted in every part of

his nature and stripped of his supernatural gifts — is actually capable of doing. Those who claimed to be disciples of Christ spoke about this too much like philosophers. The term 'free will' continued to be used among Latin writers as if man still remained in his uncorrupted state. The Greek writers were not ashamed to use an even more arrogant expression, calling it *autexousion* — meaning 'of its own power' — as if man controlled himself by his own strength. Since this principle — that man is endowed with free will — has been received by nearly everyone, including the common people, and since even many who claim expertise cannot define how far it extends, let us first examine the meaning of the word itself, and then proceed from the simplicity of Scripture to show what man is capable of on his own in matters of good and evil. As for the definition of free will: while the phrase appears in nearly all writers, few have defined it carefully. Origen seems to have stated the common understanding when he said it is the power of reason to distinguish between good and evil, and the power of will to choose either. Augustine does not differ from him when he teaches that it is a power of reason and will by which good is chosen when grace assists, and evil when grace is absent. Bernard, attempting to be more precise, speaks more obscurely: he says free will is a consent arising from the will's freedom — which cannot be lost — and from reason's judgment — which can go astray. Anselm's definition is less familiar: he calls it a power to maintain uprightness for its own sake. Peter Lombard and the other scholastic theologians preferred Augustine's definition because it was clearer and did not exclude God's grace, without which they recognized the will is not sufficient on its own. They also added their own refinements, which they thought were either improvements or contributed to

clearer expression. First, they agreed that the term *arbitrium* — 'free choice' — refers primarily to reason, whose task is to distinguish between good and evil, while the word 'free' properly applies to the will, which can turn in either direction. Since freedom properly belongs to the will, Thomas Aquinas says it would be quite fitting to call free will a power of choosing that, being a mixture of understanding and appetite, leans more toward appetite. So we now know what they hold the power of free will to consist in — namely, reason and will. It remains to see briefly how much they attribute to each.

The common practice is to leave to man's free determination things that are morally neutral — that is, matters that do not belong to the kingdom of God — while referring true righteousness to the special grace of God and spiritual regeneration. The author of the book *On the Calling of the Gentiles*, in trying to make this clear, lists three kinds of will: the first sensitive, the second natural, and the third spiritual. He says that man possesses the first two by his own liberty, while the last is the work of the Holy Spirit in man. Whether this is accurate will be examined in its proper place; my purpose here is only to briefly summarize the views of others, not to refute them. From this approach it follows that when writers discuss free will, they are primarily concerned not with what it can do in civil or external affairs, but with what it can do in obeying God's law. I regard the latter as the main question, while not dismissing the former — and I trust I will give good reason for this. The schools have accepted a distinction that identifies three kinds of freedom: freedom from necessity, freedom from sin, and freedom from misery. The first is so naturally fixed in man that it can never be taken away; the other two were lost through sin. I ac-

cept this distinction, except that necessity is wrongly confused with compulsion — a distinction that is important and will be addressed in another place.

If this is accepted, then it will be beyond dispute that man does not have free will to do good unless he is helped by grace — and specifically by that special grace given only to the elect through regeneration. I will not concern myself with those frenzied people who babble that grace is offered indiscriminately to all. But what remains uncertain is whether man is entirely stripped of the power to do good, or whether he retains some small, weak capacity that can do nothing on its own but can still contribute something when aided by grace. In trying to settle this question, Peter Lombard identifies two kinds of grace that are necessary for us to perform a good work. The first he calls working grace, by which we effectively will to do good. The second is cooperating grace, which follows and assists that good will. In this division I find one thing troubling: by attributing to God's grace the effective desire for good, Lombard subtly implies that man already has some natural, if ineffective, desire for good on his own. Bernard similarly holds that good will is indeed God's work, yet grants man this: that he himself moves first toward that good will by his own initiative. But this is far from Augustine's meaning, even though Lombard claims to have drawn this distinction from him. In the second part of the division, the vagueness of language has given rise to a wrong interpretation. People concluded from it that we cooperate with God's second grace in this sense: it lies in our power either to nullify the first grace by rejecting it, or to confirm it by obediently following it. The author of *On the Calling of the Gentiles* expresses it this way: those who exercise the judgment of reason are free to depart from grace,

so that it is worthy of reward not to have departed; and what could only be accomplished by the cooperation of the Holy Spirit may be credited to the merit of the one who could have chosen not to cooperate. I mention these two points in passing, so that the reader may see how far I differ even from the most careful of the scholastic theologians — and how much further still from the later ones, who have drifted even further from the early tradition. Still, we can gather from this distinction in what way they have attributed free will to man. In the end, Lombard says we do not have free will in the sense of being equally able to choose good and evil, but only in the sense that we are free from compulsion — a freedom that remains even though we are perverse and enslaved to sin and can do nothing but sin.

Man will therefore be said to have free will in this limited sense: not that he freely chooses between good and evil, but that he does evil voluntarily, not by compulsion. That is well said — but why dress such a small thing in such an impressive title? Fine freedom indeed, if man is not compelled to serve sin — while he is still a willing servant whose will is firmly shackled by sin's chains. I despise word-fights that needlessly exhaust the church. But I think certain words must be carefully avoided when they strongly suggest something false, especially when the error is harmful. How many people, upon hearing that free will is attributed to man, will fail to immediately conclude that he is master of both his mind and his will, and fully able to direct himself wherever he pleases? Someone might say: this danger can be removed by carefully explaining the meaning to people. But in fact, since the human mind is naturally bent toward falsehood, a person will sooner pick up an error from a single word than a truth from a lengthy explanation.

We have more experience of this in this very word than we could wish. For, leaving aside the careful qualifications of the early writers, nearly all those who came after them — by clinging to the natural meaning of the word 'free will' — have been swept into a self-confidence that leads to their ruin.

If the authority of the church fathers carries weight, they do use the phrase 'free will' continually — but their own explanations reveal how little they value it. Augustine himself does not hesitate to call it 'bound will.' In one place he objects to those who deny free will, but his stated reason is telling: 'Let no one be so bold as to deny free will to the point of trying to excuse sin.' But in another place he confesses that man's will is not free without the Holy Spirit, since it is subject to lusts that bind and conquer it. Again: 'When will was overcome by sin, in which it fell, human nature began to lose its freedom.' Again: 'Having misused his free will, man lost both himself and it.' Again: 'Free will has become captive and can do nothing toward righteousness.' Again: 'It cannot be free unless God's grace sets it free.' Again: 'God's justice is not fulfilled when the law commands and man obeys by his own strength, but when the Holy Spirit helps and man's will — not free by nature but freed by God — obeys.' He summarizes all of this in another place: man received great power of free will when he was created, but he lost it through sin. Having established that free will is set right only by grace, Augustine then sharply rebukes those who claim it without grace. 'Why then,' he says, 'do wretched people dare to boast of free will before they have been set free — or of their own strength after they have been?' 'And do they not notice that in the very name free will there is a reference to freedom?' 'But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' 'If then they are slaves to

sin, why do they boast of free will?' 'For a person is bound to whatever has overcome him.' 'But if they have been set free, why do they boast as if it were their own achievement?' 'Are they so free that they refuse to be servants of the One who says: Without Me you can do nothing?' In another place he seems to mock the term playfully, saying that the will was indeed free, but not freed — free from righteousness, but the slave of sin. He repeats and explains this elsewhere: man is not free from righteousness except by the choice of will, and not free from sin except by the grace of the Savior. One who testifies that man's freedom is nothing other than freedom from righteousness seems to be ironically mocking the empty title. Therefore, if anyone wishes to use the word 'free will' without a harmful meaning, I will not fight over it. But because I believe it cannot be used without great danger, and that abolishing it would be a great benefit to the church, I will not use it myself — and I would advise others, if they ask my opinion, to avoid it as well.

I may seem to have put myself at a disadvantage by admitting that all the church writers except Augustine have spoken so inconsistently or ambiguously on this matter that no firm conclusion can be drawn from them. Some will take this to mean that I am dismissing them all because they are against me. My intention was nothing of the sort. I simply wanted to warn sincere readers in good faith: if they rely on those writers' opinions on this point, they will find themselves constantly wavering. Sometimes those writers teach that man, stripped of all power of free will, must flee to grace alone; sometimes they seem to equip him with his own weapons. But it is not hard to show that in all their ambiguity they thought little or nothing of man's own strength and gave all the

credit for good things to the Holy Spirit — if I cite a few of their statements that teach this plainly. What else does Cyprian mean — a saying Augustine repeats so often — that 'we ought to glory in nothing, because we have nothing of our own,' so that man, entirely stripped in himself, may learn to depend wholly on God? What do Augustine and Eucherius mean when they explain that Christ is the tree of life — and that whoever reaches out to Him will live — and that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the free choice of will, so that whoever tastes of it forsakes God's grace and dies? What does Chrysostom mean when he says that every person is by nature not only a sinner but entirely sin? If we have no goodness of our own, if man from head to toe is nothing but sin, if it is not even legitimate to test how much free will can accomplish on its own — then how can it be right to divide the credit for a good work between God and man? I could gather many more such quotations from other writers, but I refrain, lest anyone accuse me of cherry-picking favorable statements and craftily leaving out those that go against me. Yet this I will affirm: however much those writers may sometimes press the claims of free will, their intended goal was to teach man to turn completely away from trust in his own power and to place all his strength in God alone. Now I come to the plain presentation of the truth as I consider the nature of man.

I am compelled here to repeat what I said as a preface at the beginning of this chapter. The more deeply a person is humbled and cast down by his awareness of his own misery, poverty, nakedness, and shame, the more he has profited in self-knowledge. There is no danger of a person thinking too little of himself, as long as he understands that what he lacks must be recovered in God.

But if he claims even the smallest thing for himself beyond what is truly his, he destroys himself with vain confidence and, by stealing God's honor for himself, becomes guilty of serious sacrilege. Whenever the desire to possess something of our own — something that rests in ourselves rather than in God — invades our minds, we should know that this thought comes from no other source than the one who persuaded our first parents to desire to be like God, knowing both good and evil. If that desire is the devil's word, let us give it no room — unless we wish to take counsel from our enemy. It is pleasant, of course, to imagine having such strength of our own that we could rest in ourselves. But let the many solemn warnings of Scripture drive away this vain confidence: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength' (Jeremiah 17:5). Again: God takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse, nor delight in the legs of a man, but delights in those who fear Him and hope in His mercy. Again: He gives power to the faint and strength to those who have none; even young men grow tired and stumble, but those who wait on the Lord renew their strength. All these sayings point to the same conclusion: we must not rest on any confidence in our own strength, however small, if we want God to be favorable to us — for He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Then let these promises come to mind: 'I will pour out water on the thirsty and floods on dry ground.' And: 'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.' These promises testify that only those who are consumed by the feeling of their own poverty are admitted to receive God's blessings. Nor should we pass over this promise from Isaiah: 'You will no longer have the sun for light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you — for the Lord will be your everlasting

light, and God will be your glory.' The Lord does not literally take away sun and moonlight from His servants — but because He alone will appear glorious in them, He calls their confidence away even from the things they consider most excellent.

The saying of Chrysostom has always pleased me greatly: that the foundation of our wisdom is humility. But even more so the saying of Augustine: 'Just as when a certain rhetorician was asked what was the first rule of eloquence, he answered: delivery; and the second: delivery; and the third: delivery — so if anyone asks me what are the rules of the Christian life, I would answer first, second, and third: humility.' By humility he does not mean the kind where a man, knowing he has some small virtue, merely restrains his pride. He means the kind where a person truly feels himself to be one who has no refuge except in humility — as he explains in another place. 'Let no man flatter himself: of his own he is a devil.' 'Whatever makes him blessed he has from God alone.' 'For what do you have of your own but sin?' 'Take away from yourself sin, which is your own, for righteousness belongs to God.' And again: 'Why is so much presumed upon the possibilities of nature?' 'It is wounded, maimed, vexed, and lost; it needs a true confession, not a false defense.' And again: 'When every man knows that in himself he is nothing and has no help in himself, his weapons are broken and the fighting stops.' 'But it is necessary that all the weapons of wickedness be broken, shattered, and burned, so that you remain unarmed and find no help in yourself.' 'The weaker you are in yourself, the more the Lord receives you.' Commenting on Psalm 70, he forbids us to rely on our own righteousness so that we may acknowledge the righteousness of God. He shows that God commends His grace to us by teaching us that we are nothing in

ourselves, that we stand only by the mercy of God, since apart from Him we are nothing but evil. Let us not therefore contend with God over our rights, as if giving Him the glory somehow diminishes our salvation. For as our humility is His exaltation, so the confession of our humility finds His mercy ready as a remedy. I do not require that a person who is not yet convinced should willingly surrender — or that if he believes he has any ability, he should force his mind to suppress it in order to practice true humility. Rather, I ask that, laying aside the disease of self-love and the desire to win arguments — the very things that blind him into thinking too highly of himself — he look honestly at himself in the true mirror of Scripture.

The common statement borrowed from Augustine also pleases me well: that the natural gifts were corrupted in man by sin, and the supernatural gifts were taken away entirely. By supernatural gifts they mean the light of faith and righteousness — the things that were sufficient for attaining eternal life and heavenly felicity. When man banished himself from the kingdom of God, he was stripped of the spiritual gifts with which he had been equipped for the hope of eternal salvation. It follows that, having been banished from God's kingdom, everything belonging to the soul's blessed life has been extinguished in him, until he recovers it through the grace of regeneration. These gifts include faith, the love of God, love toward neighbors, and the pursuit of holiness and righteousness. Because Christ restores all these to us, they are reckoned as gifts that come to us from outside and are beyond nature — which confirms that they were once taken away. Along with this, soundness of understanding and uprightness of heart were also lost — this is the corruption of the natural gifts. Although some measure

of understanding and will remains, we cannot say our understanding is sound and complete, since it is both weak and submerged in many kinds of darkness. And as for our will, its perversity is more than sufficiently evident. Since reason — by which a person distinguishes good from evil, understands, and makes judgments — is a natural gift, it could not be entirely destroyed, but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that ugly ruins of it are visible. In this sense John says that the light still shines in darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. In these words both things are plainly expressed: that in man's perverted and fallen nature, there still shine some sparks showing that he is a rational creature distinct from animals — yet this light is so smothered by thick ignorance that it cannot break through effectively. Similarly, the will — because it is inseparable from human nature — did not perish entirely, but it became bound to corrupt desires, so that it can crave nothing good. This is a complete summary, though it requires further explanation. Following the distinction we made between the soul's understanding and its will, let us first examine the power of understanding. To condemn it as entirely and perpetually blind, leaving it no capacity for knowledge of any kind, contradicts both Scripture and the plain experience of common sense. We can see that a desire for truth has been planted in man — a desire he would never have at all unless he had already tasted something of it. This natural love of truth is one mark of man's understanding, and the fact that animals lack it shows their brute, unreasoning nature. Yet even this small desire fades before it can properly begin — it quickly turns to vanity. For man's mind, in its dullness, cannot hold to the right path in searching out truth but wanders off into various errors, and — as if groping in darkness — frequently stum-

bles until at last it loses its way entirely. So in the very act of seeking truth, it reveals how unfit it is to find it. It is also troubled by another kind of perversity: it often fails to recognize what subjects are truly worth knowing, and so torments itself with foolish curiosity about useless and worthless things. The things most necessary to know either receive no attention, or receive it rarely and carelessly, and almost never with genuine effort. Non-Christian writers commonly complain about this same perversity, and it is clear that all people have fallen into it. This is why Solomon, after going through in Ecclesiastes all the fields of study in which men think themselves wise, pronounces them all vanity and meaningless pursuit.

Yet intellectual efforts are not always wasted — the mind does attain something, especially when it bends itself toward earthly matters. It is not so dull as to fail to taste something of higher things as well — though it applies itself to those more carelessly and with less power of comprehension. When the mind is carried up beyond the scope of this present life, it is especially then that it is exposed as weak. To see more clearly how far the mind's ability extends in different areas, it is helpful to make a distinction. Let this be the distinction: there is one kind of understanding for earthly things, and another for heavenly things. By earthly things I mean those that have nothing to do with God and His kingdom, true righteousness, or the blessedness of eternal life — things that concern only this present life and are, so to speak, contained within its boundaries. By heavenly things I mean the pure knowledge of God, the order of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom. Earthly things include civil government, the management of households, all the trades and crafts, and the

liberal arts and sciences. Heavenly things include the knowledge of God and His will, and the rule for shaping our lives according to that will. Concerning earthly things, this much must be acknowledged: because man is by nature a social creature, he is also by natural instinct inclined to nurture and maintain the bonds of society. We therefore find that the minds of all people share certain universal impressions of civil decency and order. From this it follows that there is no person who does not understand that human communities need to be governed by laws, and who does not grasp in his mind the basic principles of those laws. This is the source of the widespread and consistent agreement — found among all nations and all people — on laws: the seeds of those laws are naturally planted in everyone without any teacher or lawgiver. I attach little weight to the arguments and disputes that afterward arise when some people, driven by desire, seek to pervert law and justice — when lawless rulers substitute their personal will for right, acting like thieves and robbers, or when some (a very common fault) declare unjust what others have established as just, and stubbornly call praiseworthy what others have forbidden. Such people do not hate laws because they think laws are bad — they know well enough that laws are good and holy. Rather, they fight against plain reason because they are driven by headstrong desire, and they detest with their conduct what they approve with their minds. This kind of dispute does not remove the original understanding of equity. For even when people argue about specific points of law, they agree on a general standard of fairness. This shows both the weakness of human intellect — which halts and staggers even when it seems to be on the right path — and yet confirms that all

people carry within them a seed of civic order. This is strong evidence that in managing the affairs of this life, no person is entirely without the light of reason.

Next come the arts — both the liberal arts and the trades. Since all people have some aptitude for learning these, they too reveal the power of human intellect. And while not everyone is equally suited for every art, it is clear evidence of a common natural capacity that nearly every person can demonstrate their intelligence in at least one area. People have not only the ability to learn an art but also to invent something new within it — either expanding or improving on what others before them had discovered. This fact led Plato to mistakenly teach that such understanding is nothing more than recollection from a previous existence. But it should rightly lead us to acknowledge instead that the starting point of this capacity is naturally planted in the human mind. These facts plainly testify that a universal capacity for reason and understanding has been given to people by nature. Yet this is so universal a benefit that each person should recognize in it the particular grace of God. The Creator Himself moves us to this gratitude by creating those born with severe mental limitations — showing us, in the contrast, what remarkable gifts the human soul possesses when endowed with His light. That light is natural to all people and yet entirely a free gift of His generosity to each one. The discovery and systematic teaching of the arts, or the deeper and more excellent knowledge of them that belongs only to a few, is not the most reliable evidence of this common intellectual capacity. But since these gifts are distributed without distinction to both believers and unbelievers, they are rightly counted among natural gifts.

Whenever, therefore, we come across non-Christian writers, let the remarkable light of truth shining in them remind us that the human mind, however perverted and fallen from its original integrity, is still clothed with excellent gifts of God. If we consider that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will neither refuse nor despise truth wherever it appears — unless we are willing to dishonor the Spirit of God Himself, for the gifts of the Holy Spirit cannot be taken lightly without contempt and reproach toward Him. How then? Shall we deny that truth shone in the ancient lawgivers who established civil order and justice with such remarkable fairness? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their careful contemplation and precise description of nature? Shall we say they had no understanding who, by systematically developing rhetoric, taught us to speak with reason? Shall we say those who devoted their energies to natural science for our benefit were foolish? What of all the mathematical disciplines? Shall we dismiss them as the ravings of madmen? No — we cannot read the writings of the ancient thinkers on these subjects without great admiration for their intelligence. But shall we think anything praiseworthy or excellent without acknowledging that it comes from God? Let us be ashamed of such ingratitude — a failure that even the pagan poets avoided, since they acknowledged that philosophy, law, and all the useful arts were inventions of the gods. Since these men, whom Scripture calls natural men, had such sharp and penetrating insight into earthly matters, let their example teach us how many good things the Lord left in human nature even after it was stripped of the true God.

But let us not forget that these are excellent gifts of the Spirit of God, which He distributes for the common benefit of humanity to whomever He pleases. For if the understanding and skill required to construct the tabernacle had to be poured into Bezalel and Oholiab by the Spirit of God, it is no wonder that the knowledge underlying the most excellent human achievements is likewise said to come from the Spirit of God. And no one should ask what the wicked have to do with the Spirit of God, since they are entirely estranged from God. For when Scripture says the Spirit of God dwells only in the faithful, that refers to the Spirit of sanctification, by which we are consecrated to God to be His temples. Nevertheless, the same Spirit fills, moves, and animates all things according to the nature He has given to each kind by the law of creation. If it has been the Lord's will that we benefit from the work of unbelievers in natural philosophy, logic, mathematics, and other disciplines — let us make use of it. To neglect the gifts God has graciously provided through them would be to invite just punishment for our laziness. Yet lest anyone think a person is truly blessed merely because God has granted such great intellectual capacity in earthly matters, we must add this: all this power of understanding, and whatever knowledge follows from it, is fleeting and worthless before God where there is no firm foundation of truth. For Augustine teaches most truly — and as we have noted, Peter Lombard and the scholastic theologians were compelled to agree — that just as the free gifts were taken from man at the fall, the natural gifts that remained were also corrupted. Not that they are defiled in themselves insofar as they come from God, but because they cease to be pure in a defiled man, so that he has no ground for boasting in them.

Let this be the summary: reason is found in all of humanity as something proper to our nature, and it is what distinguishes us from animals, just as animals' sense perception distinguishes them from inanimate things. The fact that some people are born with severe cognitive limitations does not obscure this general grace of God. Rather, such cases remind us that whatever remains in us is rightly attributed to God's kindness — for if He had not spared us, our rebellion would have brought the destruction of our entire nature. As for the differences among people — some excelling in sharpness of mind, others surpassing in judgment, and others learning particular arts more quickly — in this variety God displays His grace so that no one can claim as his own what flows entirely from God's free generosity. How does one person excel over another, except that God's special grace appears in some more than in others within a shared human nature — and by passing many over, He makes plain that He owes this to no one? Furthermore, God pours special impulses into people according to their individual calling. We see many examples of this in the book of Judges, where it says the Spirit of the Lord moved those He called to rule the people. Likewise, every noble art carries with it a special kind of inspiration. This is why the men of valor who followed Saul were those whose hearts God had touched. When Samuel prophesied about Saul's role in governing the kingdom, he said: 'The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will be a different man.' This continued throughout David's reign as well — it is recorded that the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. The same is said elsewhere regarding particular impulses. Even Homer says that men excel in understanding not only according to what Zeus has allotted to each man, but also as the moment requires.

And experience confirms this: when men of the sharpest minds are at times left bewildered and at a loss, it shows that human intellect is in the hand and will of God to direct at every moment. For this reason Scripture says He takes understanding away from the wise, so that they wander from the path. Yet in all this diversity we still see traces of the image of God remaining, which set all of humanity apart from every other creature.

Now we must examine what human reason can see when it comes to the kingdom of God and spiritual understanding — which consists chiefly in three things: knowing God, knowing His fatherly favor toward us in which our salvation consists, and knowing how to shape our lives according to the rule of His law. In the first two areas especially, even the most brilliant minds are blinder than moles. I do not deny that philosophers have here and there said many things about God that are well and aptly expressed — but they always carry the flavor of a dizzy imagination. The Lord did give them, as noted above, a small taste of His divine nature, so they could not plead ignorance to cover their ungodliness. He often moved them to speak things by which they themselves could be convicted. But they saw what they saw in such a way that this seeing did not direct them to the truth, much less bring them to it. It is like a traveler in an open field who for a brief instant sees a wide flash of lightning in the night — but the sight vanishes so quickly that he is plunged back into darkness before he can even move his foot, let alone find his way. And besides, those small drops of truth sprinkled as if by accident throughout their books — how thoroughly are they contaminated by massive and monstrous falsehoods? Finally, they never so much as caught a scent of that assurance of God's good will toward us, without which the human mind

must inevitably be filled with endless confusion. Therefore, human reason neither approaches nor moves toward this truth — it does not even direct its gaze toward understanding who the true God is, or what He intends toward us.

But because we are so drunk with a false persuasion of our own deep insight that we are very reluctant to accept that in matters of God the mind is utterly blind and dull, I think it is better to establish this from the testimony of Scripture rather than from arguments alone. John teaches this plainly in the passage I just cited, where he writes that life was in God from the beginning, that the same life is the light of men, that the light shines in the darkness, and that the darkness has not understood it (John 1:4). He shows that man's soul is illuminated by the brightness of God's light, so that it is never entirely without some small flame or at least some spark of it — and yet that by such light man does not comprehend God. Why not? Because man's natural intellect, when it comes to the knowledge of God, is mere darkness. For when the Holy Spirit calls men 'darkness,' He at once strips them of all capacity for spiritual understanding. John then affirms that the faithful who receive Christ are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13). As if he were saying: the flesh has no capacity for the high wisdom needed to comprehend God and the things of God, unless it is enlightened by the Spirit of God. Christ Himself testified to this when He told Peter that his recognition of Him was a special revelation from the Father (Matthew 16:17).

If we were fully convinced of what should be beyond all controversy — that our nature entirely lacks what our heavenly Father gives to His elect through the Spirit of regeneration — there would

be no room for doubt. The faithful in the Psalms declare: 'With You is the fountain of life, and in Your light we see light.' The apostle confirms the same when he says that no one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist, seeing the dullness of his disciples, cries out that no one can receive anything unless it is given to him from above. That he means by this a special illumination rather than a common gift of nature is clear from this: he complains that all his many words commending Christ to his disciples accomplished nothing. 'I see,' he says, 'that words cannot inform human minds about divine things unless the Lord gives understanding through His Spirit.' Moses too, when he rebukes the people for their forgetfulness, makes this same observation: they cannot grow wise in the mysteries of God except by God's gift. 'Your eyes have seen those great signs and wonders,' he says, 'and yet the Lord has not given you a heart to understand, nor ears to hear, nor eyes to see.' What more would he need to say in order to call us blocks of wood when it comes to understanding the works of God? Accordingly, God promises through the prophet as a great act of grace that He will give the Israelites a heart to know Him — showing that man's understanding is spiritually wise only to the degree that God enlightens it. Christ confirmed this plainly with His own words when He says that no one can come to Him unless it has been given to him by the Father. Is Christ not the living image of the Father, in whom the whole brilliance of God's glory is shown to us? Therefore He could not have shown our incapacity to know God more clearly than by saying that we have no eyes to see His image even when it is placed openly before us. Did He not come to earth precisely to declare His Father's will to people? And did He not faithfully carry out that task? Certainly. Yet His preach-

ing accomplishes nothing unless the inward teacher — the Holy Spirit — opens the way into our minds. Therefore, only those who have been heard and taught by the Father come to Him. What kind of hearing and teaching is this? It is when the Holy Spirit, by a marvelous and unique power, forms the ears to hear and the mind to understand. So that this would not seem strange, Christ cites the prophecy of Isaiah, where God promises that in the restoration of the church, those gathered to salvation will be taught by the Lord. Since God there speaks of something particular to His elect, it is clear that He is not referring to the kind of learning that the wicked and ungodly share. It follows, then, that we must understand this: the way into the kingdom of God is open to no one except those to whom the Holy Spirit grants a new mind through His illumination. But Paul speaks most plainly of all. He deliberately takes up this subject, first condemning all human wisdom as foolish and worthless and demolishing it entirely, and then concludes: the natural man cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are discerned spiritually. Who is the natural man? The one who depends on the light of nature. He, I say, grasps nothing in the spiritual mysteries of God. Why not? Is it because he is too lazy to try? No — even if he were to work extremely hard, he still could not do it, because these things are spiritually discerned. What does that mean? It means that, being entirely hidden from human understanding, they are opened only by the Spirit's revelation — so wherever the Spirit of God does not shine, they are regarded as foolishness. Paul had earlier established that what God has prepared for those who love Him lies beyond the reach of eyes, ears, and human minds. He also testified that human wisdom is a

kind of veil that keeps the mind from seeing God. What can we say? The apostle declares that the wisdom of this world is made foolish by God — and shall we claim that this same wisdom has the sharpness to penetrate to the secret places of the heavenly kingdom? Far be such folly from us.

And so what Paul takes away from people in one passage he gives to God alone in another — in a prayer, saying: 'May the God and Father of glory give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation.' You hear that all wisdom and revelation is God's gift. What follows? 'And enlighten the eyes of your heart.' If they need a new revelation, they are therefore blind on their own — as Paul then goes on to say: 'that you may know what is the hope of your calling.' He therefore acknowledges that the human mind lacks the capacity to understand even its own calling. Let no Pelagian come here and chatter that God remedies this dullness simply by directing man's understanding through the teaching of His word where, without a guide, man could not have found his way. David had the law, in which all desirable wisdom was contained, and yet he was not content with that — he asked to have his eyes opened so that he might perceive the mysteries of that same law. By this he quietly says that the word of God is like the sun rising on the earth — but people gain little from it until the One who is rightly called the Father of lights gives or opens their eyes. Wherever He does not shine with His Spirit, everything remains in darkness. The apostles had been thoroughly and carefully taught by the best of all teachers — yet if they had not needed the Spirit of truth to instruct their minds in that very doctrine they had already heard, Christ would not have told them to wait for Him. If in asking something from God we thereby confess we lack it — and if God in promising it to

us thereby declares our need — then let no one hesitate to confess that he can understand the mysteries of God only to the degree that God's grace has enlightened him. The person who claims greater understanding for himself is all the more blind for failing to acknowledge his own blindness.

Now remains the third area: knowing the rule for living rightly — what we rightly call the knowledge of the works of righteousness. Here man's mind seems somewhat sharper than in the other two areas. The apostle testifies that the Gentiles, who have no written law, do the works of the law and show that the law is written on their hearts — their consciences bearing witness, and their thoughts either accusing or excusing them before God's judgment. If the Gentiles have righteousness naturally engraved on their minds, we cannot say we are entirely blind when it comes to how life should be ordered. It is widely said that man, by the natural law of which Paul speaks in that passage, is sufficiently instructed in the right rule of life. But let us weigh the purpose for which this knowledge of the law is planted in men — and then it will quickly become apparent how far it actually brings them toward the goal of reason and truth. This is also clear from Paul's words, if one observes their context. He had just said that those who sinned having the law are judged by the law, while those who sinned without the law will perish without the law. Since this might seem unjust — that the Gentiles should perish without any prior judgment — he immediately adds that their conscience serves as a law for them and is therefore sufficient ground for their just condemnation. The purpose of the natural law, then, is to render man without excuse. It can be defined this way: it is knowledge of conscience that sufficiently distinguishes between just and unjust, so as to remove the

pretense of ignorance from people who are convicted by their own testimony. Man is so tender toward himself that whenever he does evil, he turns his mind away from the feeling of sin as much as he can. This is apparently what moved Plato to think that no sin is committed except through ignorance. That would be fitting enough if human hypocrisy went so far in hiding vices that the mind might be entirely unaware of its guilt before God. But when the sinner who tries to escape the judgment stamped on his conscience is repeatedly pulled back to it — when he is not allowed to keep his eyes shut but is compelled, whether he likes it or not, to open them at times — it is simply wrong to say that he sins only through ignorance. Themistius speaks more accurately: he teaches that understanding is seldom truly deceived, but that blindness comes when it moves to the particular case. Everyone, when asked in general, will agree that murder is wrong. But a man who is plotting to kill his enemy thinks it over as though it were a good thing. The adulterer will condemn adultery in general, but privately flatters himself in his own case. This is the nature of this ignorance: when a man comes to the specific situation, he forgets the rule he just agreed to in the abstract. Augustine discusses this skillfully in his exposition of Psalm 57:1. Yet it is not always so, for sometimes the wickedness of the act presses so hard on the conscience that the person does not deceive himself with a false appearance of good — he runs knowingly and willingly into evil. From this impulse come such sayings as: 'I see the better and approve it, but I follow the worse.' Aristotle therefore made a very fitting distinction between incontinence and intemperance. Where incontinence rules, he says, the agitation of passion so clouds the mind that it fails to recognize the evil in its own specific act — even though it

could see the same evil in a general case. Once the passion cools, remorse immediately follows. But intemperance is not extinguished or broken by the feeling of sin — on the contrary, it stubbornly persists in its settled choice of evil.

When you hear that people possess a general capacity to distinguish good from evil, do not assume this means their judgment is fully sound and complete. If the purpose of the moral knowledge in men's hearts is simply to prevent them from claiming ignorance, then they do not need to perceive the truth fully in every matter. It is sufficient — more than sufficient — that they understand enough that they cannot escape: convicted by the testimony of their own conscience, they already begin to tremble before God's judgment seat. And if we measure our reason by the standard of God's law — which is the model of true righteousness — we will find it blind in many ways. It fails entirely when it comes to the chief requirements of the first table of the law: trust in God, giving Him the honor of being all power and righteousness, calling on His name, and truly observing the Sabbath. What soul ever, by natural instinct, discerned that the lawful worship of God consists in these and similar things? When people without God's word set out to worship Him, though they are called away from their empty rituals a hundred times over, they always slip back into them. They do acknowledge that sacrifices cannot please God without purity of heart — showing that they have some sense of spiritual worship. But they immediately corrupt this insight with their own invented additions. And they can never be persuaded that all that the law prescribes on this subject is true. Should I call that a sharply intelligent mind which can neither find wisdom on its own nor receive instruction? In the commandments of the second table there is

somewhat more understanding, to the degree that those commandments relate more closely to the maintenance of civil life among people. And yet even here human reason frequently fails. To a person with any proud sense of dignity, it seems utterly unreasonable to endure unjust and oppressive rule when it can be resisted — and in the common judgment of man, to bear it patiently is the mark of a servile and base spirit, while throwing it off is the sign of an honorable and free person. Likewise, revenge for injuries is not counted as a fault among the philosophers. But the Lord, condemning that so-called noble spirit, commands His people to maintain the very patience that the world despises. Furthermore, in all its concern with the law, human understanding pays no attention to the desires of the heart. A natural person simply will not allow himself to be brought to acknowledge the corrupt desires within him. The light of nature is extinguished before it ever reaches the entrance to that bottomless depth. For when philosophers identify unruly passions as faults, they mean the passions that burst out in obvious and visible ways — they take no account of the evil desires that quietly and gently stir within the mind.

Just as Plato was rightly criticized for attributing all sin to ignorance, so we must also reject the view that deliberate malice and stubbornness are present in all sins. Experience shows us all too often how frequently we fall with good intentions. Our reason is overwhelmed by so many forms of deception, subject to so many errors, stumbling at so many obstacles, and tangled in so many difficulties, that it is far from a reliable guide. How little it counts before the Lord in all areas of life is shown by Paul when he says that we are not sufficient even to think anything, as of ourselves. He is

speaking not just of will or desire — he also takes from us the very thought that we could conceive on our own how to do anything rightly. Are our diligence, perception, understanding, and reasoning so corrupted that we can devise or think of nothing that is right before the Lord? That seems too harsh to us, who so reluctantly allow ourselves to be stripped of our confidence in our own reason — which we regard as one of our most precious gifts. But to the Holy Spirit it seems entirely just, since He knows that all the thoughts of wise men are vanity and declares plainly that every intention of the human heart is only evil. If everything our minds conceive, plan, intend, and pursue is always evil, how can we possibly think of anything that pleases God — to whom only holiness and righteousness are acceptable? Thus we see that our reason, whichever way it turns, is wretchedly subject to vanity. David knew this weakness in himself when he prayed to be given understanding to learn the Lord's commandments rightly. By asking for a new understanding, he was quietly admitting that his own was not enough. And he did not do this only once — he repeated the same prayer nearly ten times in a single psalm. By this repetition he privately disclosed how urgently he felt driven to ask it. And what David prays for himself, Paul regularly prays for the churches: 'We do not cease to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthily of God.' As often as he calls this a good gift of God, he is also testifying that it lies beyond man's power. Augustine acknowledged this deficiency of reason in understanding the things of God so fully that he held the grace of illumination to be no less necessary for our minds than sunlight is for our eyes. And not content with that, he added a correction: we raise our eyes to see the

light, but the eyes of our mind lie shut unless the Lord opens them. Nor does Scripture teach that our minds are illuminated just once and then able to see by themselves — for what I just cited from Paul belongs to continual progress and growth. David makes this explicit in these words: 'With my whole heart I have sought You; do not let me stray from Your commandments.' Even after he had been regenerated and had made considerable progress in true godliness, he still confessed that he needed continuous direction every moment, lest he deviate from the knowledge he had received. For this reason he prays elsewhere for the renewal of a right spirit — which he had lost through his own fault — because the same God who gave it at the beginning must also restore it when it has been lost.

Now the will must be examined, for it is here that the chief liberty of free choice is said to reside — it has already been seen that choice belongs more to the will than to the understanding. First, lest the philosophers' common teaching — that all things by natural instinct desire what is good — seem to prove the uprightness of man's will: we must note that such appetite does not prove the freedom of will, since it proceeds from the inclination of one's nature rather than from a deliberate judgment of the mind. Even the scholastic theologians acknowledge that free will acts only when reason turns toward objects — meaning that the object of appetite must be capable of deliberate choice, with reason preparing the way before the choice is made. And truly, if a person considers what this natural desire for good in man actually is, he will find it is something he shares in common with animals. Animals also desire to be well, and when any appearance of good appears to their senses, they follow it. But man does not choose through reason in

order to pursue what is genuinely good for him according to the excellence of his immortal nature — he neither takes counsel from reason nor engages his mind, but follows the inclination of his nature blindly, like an animal. Therefore, the fact that a man is naturally drawn by instinct to desire good does not prove freedom of will. What would be required is this: that he discern the good through right reason, that having known it he choose it, and that having chosen it he pursue it. But lest anyone be taken in, there are two subtle confusions to note here. First, appetite here does not mean the proper function of the will but only a natural inclination. Second, 'good' is used here not in the sense of virtue or righteousness but in the sense of well-being — as we say someone is 'well' or 'in good condition.' Finally, even when a person strongly desires to attain what is good, he does not actually follow through. There is no person to whom eternal blessedness is not appealing, yet no one aspires to it without the moving of the Holy Spirit. Since the natural desire in people to be well provides no more proof of free will than the tendency in metals and stones to incline toward their own kind of perfection, let us now consider in other matters whether the will is so thoroughly infected and corrupted that it produces nothing but evil — or whether it retains some uncorrupted part from which good desires can still arise.

Those who attribute to God's first grace the fact that we effectively will seem, by contrast, to be quietly implying that the soul has a natural power on its own to aspire to good — but that this power is so weak it cannot grow into a full and perfect desire or rise to any genuine effort. There is no doubt that the scholastic theologians commonly embraced this opinion, which was borrowed from Origen and certain early writers. They were accustomed to

describing man in what they called 'purely natural' terms, taking as their text the words of the apostle: 'For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, that I keep on doing' and 'For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.' But in applying that passage this way, they completely misread Paul's argument. He is there dealing with the Christian struggle — which he touches on briefly in Galatians — the ongoing battle between the flesh and the spirit that the faithful constantly experience within themselves. But the spirit is not natural — it belongs to regeneration. That Paul is speaking of the regenerate is clear from this: when he says that no good dwells in him, he immediately qualifies it by saying he means this of his flesh. Therefore he says that it is not he who does the evil, but sin that dwells in him. What does this qualification mean — 'in me, that is, in my flesh'? It means: 'God does not dwell in me considered in myself, for no good is to be found in my flesh.' From this comes the kind of excuse that follows: 'I myself do not do the evil, but sin that dwells in me.' This excuse belongs only to the regenerate, who with the deepest part of their soul incline toward good. The conclusion Paul draws afterward makes all of this plain: 'I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind.' Who experiences this kind of inner battle except one who, having been regenerated by the Spirit of God, still carries the remnants of his flesh? Augustine himself, having once thought this passage referred to unregenerate human nature, later retracted that interpretation as false and self-contradictory. And truly, if we grant that men without grace have some small impulses toward good, what shall we say to the apostle who declares that we are not sufficient even to think anything on

our own? What shall we say to the Lord who declares through Moses that every intention of the human heart is only evil? Since the scholastic theologians have stumbled by misreading a single passage, we have no reason to follow their judgment. Let the word of Christ prevail instead: 'Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.' We are all sinners by nature, and therefore all held under the yoke of sin. If the whole person is subject to sin's dominion, then the will itself — which is sin's chief dwelling place — must be bound with the tightest chains. Otherwise Paul's statement that it is God who works the will within us would make no sense, if any act of will could precede the grace of the Holy Spirit. Away, then, with all the meaningless talk many have offered about preparation of the will. Although the faithful do sometimes pray to have their hearts formed for obedience to the law — as David does in many places — we must note that even the desire to pray that prayer comes from God. This is clear from David's own words: when he asks for a clean heart to be created within him, he is clearly not claiming the initiative of creation for himself. Let us therefore hold to this saying of Augustine: 'God will go before you in all things — and sometimes go before His wrath.' How? 'Confess that you have all these things from God — whatever good is in you is from Him; whatever evil, it is from yourself.' And a little later: 'Nothing is ours but sin.'

THE THIRD CHAPTER. ¶ THAT OUT OF THE CORRUPT NATURE OF MAN PROCEEDETH NOTHING BUT DAMNABLE.



Man cannot be better understood in either part of his soul than by examining the descriptions Scripture gives of him. If he is accurately described in Christ's words — 'What is born of the flesh is flesh' — and it is easy to prove this is so, then he is shown to be a truly wretched creature. For the mind set on the flesh, as the apostle testifies, is death, since it is hostile to God and does not and cannot submit to the law of God. Is the flesh so corrupt that in all its desires it is continually hostile to God? That it cannot agree with the righteousness of God's law? That it can produce nothing but the material of death? If human nature is nothing but flesh, try to find any good in it. But they object that 'flesh' refers only to the sensual part of the soul, not the higher part. This is sufficiently refuted by the words of Christ and the apostle. The Lord's argument is that man must be born again because he is flesh — but He is not commanding rebirth according to the body. In the mind also there is no rebirth if only a part of it is renewed; the whole must be made new. The comparison in both

passages confirms this. Spirit is set in contrast with flesh in such a way that nothing is left in between. Therefore, whatever is not spiritual in man is, by the same reasoning, called flesh. But we have nothing of the Spirit except through regeneration. Therefore, whatever we have by nature is flesh. If there were any doubt about this, Paul removes it when, after describing the old man as corrupted by the desires of deceit, he commands us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. He does not place unlawful lusts only in the sensual part but in the very mind itself, and therefore requires its renewal. And a little earlier he had painted such a picture of human nature as to show that no part of us was free from corruption and perversion. He writes that all the nations walk in the futility of their minds, are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance in them and the hardness of their hearts. Without doubt this is said of all those whom the Lord has not reformed to the uprightness of both His wisdom and His righteousness. This is made even plainer by the contrast that immediately follows, where he reminds the faithful that they have not learned Christ that way. From those words we gather that the grace of Christ is the only remedy by which we are delivered from that blindness and the evils that follow from it. Isaiah had already prophesied this about the kingdom of Christ, promising that the Lord would be an everlasting light to His church — even while darkness covered the earth and deep shadow the peoples. By testifying that God's light will arise only in the church, Isaiah leaves nothing but darkness and blindness outside of it. I will not catalogue all that is written about man's vanity in the Psalms and the Prophets. It is a weighty statement when David says that if man is weighed against vanity, he proves to be even more vain than vanity

itself. And man's mind receives a grievous blow when every thought that comes from it is scorned as foolish, empty, mad, and corrupt.

Nor is the condemnation of the heart any lighter — it is called deceitful and corrupt above all things. But since I aim to be brief, I will limit myself to one passage alone — one that serves as a bright mirror in which the full image of our nature can be seen. The apostle, intent on tearing down the arrogance of mankind, uses these testimonies: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; their tongue practices deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways. There is no fear of God before their eyes.' With these thunderbolts he strikes not at a few individuals but at the entire race of Adam's descendants. He is not rebuking the corrupt customs of one or two generations — he is charging the perpetual corruption of our nature. His purpose is not simply to rebuke people into reform, but to teach that all people are held down by an inescapable calamity from which they cannot rise unless they are lifted out by God's mercy. And because this could not be proved without first establishing the ruin and destruction of our nature, he produced these testimonies to show that our nature is worse than destroyed. Let it be agreed, then, that people are what they are described to be here — not merely because of bad habits but because of the corruption of their nature. Otherwise the apostle's argument fails: that man's only hope of salvation is the mercy of God, because in himself he is utterly lost and

without hope. I will not take time to justify the application of these testimonies, as if someone might think Paul was using them out of context. I will treat them as if Paul originally spoke them himself, rather than drawing them from the Prophets. First he removes righteousness from man — that is, integrity and purity. Then he removes understanding. The lack of understanding he proves by the departure from God, whom to seek is the very beginning of wisdom — a beginning necessarily absent in those who have turned away from Him. He then adds that all have gone astray and become worthless, that there is none who does good. After that, he catalogues the terrible sins that defile the members of those who are let loose into wickedness. Finally, he testifies that they are without the fear of God — the standard by which our steps should have been directed. If these are the inherited traits of the human race, it is pointless to search for any goodness in our nature. I grant that not all of these faults appear in every person — yet it cannot be denied that this Hydra lurks in the hearts of all. A body that already contains within it the seed and matter of disease cannot be called healthy, even if the pain has not yet become severe. Likewise, a soul cannot be considered sound while it is packed with such vices, even though the analogy is not perfect in every detail. For in the body, however sick, some life-force still remains — but the soul, submerged in this gulf of destruction, is not merely troubled by vices: it is entirely void of all goodness.

The question we seemed to have already settled now rises up again. In every age there have been some who, guided by nature, have pursued virtue throughout their lives. I am not ignoring the many failures that can be pointed out in their conduct — but through the very pursuit of honorable living they gave evidence

that some purity existed in their nature. What reward such virtues have before God we will discuss more fully when we speak of the merits of works. For now, we must say just enough to clarify the present question. These examples seem to suggest that we should not think human nature is entirely corrupt, since by its guidance some people have not only performed notable deeds but have also conducted themselves with genuine honor throughout their whole lives. But we must consider that in this corruption of nature, God's grace has a place — not to cleanse it from within, but to restrain it outwardly. For if the Lord were to let the minds of all people run wild with loosened reins into every kind of lust, there would not be a single person who would not demonstrate through plain experience that all the evils Paul attributes to all of human nature are spoken with complete accuracy. Think about it: can you exempt yourself from the number of those whose feet are swift to shed blood, whose hands are stained with robbery and murder, whose throats are like open graves, whose tongues are deceitful, whose lips are venomous, whose works are worthless, wicked, corrupt, and deadly — whose minds are without God, whose inward parts are perversity, whose eyes are set on traps, whose hearts are arrogantly lifted up to triumph over others, and all of whose members are bent toward endless evils? If every soul is subject to all these monstrosities — as the apostle boldly declares — we can easily see what would happen if the Lord were to let human desire run unchecked. No wild animal is so recklessly driven; no river, however fast and powerful, overflows so violently. The Lord heals these diseases in His elect by the means we will shortly describe. In others He only restrains them with a bridle, so that they do not break out as far as would be harmful to the general order of things — but

He does not cleanse them within. Some are held back by shame, some by fear of the law, from bursting into many kinds of filthiness — though they by no means hide all their corruption. Some, because they believe that an honorable way of life is worthwhile, pursue it after a fashion. Others rise above the common level in order to keep others in their place through their own dignity and authority. In this way God, through His providence, restrains the perversity of nature so that it does not erupt into action — but He does not cleanse it within.

But the difficulty is not yet resolved. We must either make Camillus comparable to Catiline, or else we must take Camillus as evidence that human nature, when cultivated by diligence, is not altogether without goodness. I grant that the fine qualities in Camillus were gifts of God and appear worthy of admiration when considered in themselves. But how do they prove natural goodness in him? Must we not return to the question of the mind and reason the argument out like this? If a natural man could excel in such uprightness of character, then nature must surely have some power toward the pursuit of virtue. But what if that very mind were crooked and perverse, following anything but true uprightness? And that it was indeed such there is no doubt, if you agree that he was a natural man — that is, not regenerate. What power of human nature toward goodness will you point to in such a case, if even in its greatest show of purity that nature is always found bending toward corruption? Therefore, lest you commend a person for virtue when his vices are merely wearing virtue's mask, do not attribute to the human will the power to desire goodness so long as it remains fixed in its own perversity. Yet there is a simpler and more certain answer to this question: those qualities in such men are not

common gifts of human nature but special graces of God, which He distributes in varying degrees among people who are otherwise ungodly. For this reason we readily say in ordinary speech that one person is well-natured and another ill-natured — and yet we still include both under the universal condition of human corruption. We are simply pointing out what special grace God has given to the one that He did not choose to give to the other. When it pleased God to make Saul king, He fashioned him as a new man. This is why Plato, alluding to Homer's legend, says that kings' sons are distinguished by some special mark, because God, providing for humanity, equips with a princely nature those whom He appoints to rule. From this same store came all the renowned great commanders of history. The same can be said of private individuals. But since the more any person has excelled, the more ambition has driven him forward — and since ambition taints all such virtues so that they lose all worth before God — whatever appears praiseworthy in ungodly people is ultimately of no account. Beyond that, the most important element of uprightness is missing entirely where there is no desire to advance the glory of God — and all who have not been regenerated by His Spirit lack that desire. Nor is it said without reason in Isaiah that the Spirit of the fear of God rests upon Christ, teaching us that all those who are apart from Christ are without the fear of God — which is the beginning of wisdom. As for the virtues that deceive us with their outward appearance, I grant that they will earn praise in the courts of civic life and in the common reputation of people — but before the heavenly judgment seat, they will have no value toward righteousness.

With the will held captive in sin's bondage, it cannot stir itself toward goodness, let alone devote itself to it. For such stirring is the beginning of turning to God — and Scripture attributes that entirely to God's grace. Jeremiah prays that the Lord would turn him, if it is His will to have him turned. And in that same chapter, describing the spiritual redemption of the faithful, the prophet says they were redeemed from the hand of one stronger than they — showing how tightly a sinner is bound while he lives under the devil's yoke, forsaken by the Lord. Yet the will still remains — a will intensely inclined toward sin and rushing toward it. Man was not stripped of his will when he plunged himself into this bondage, but of the soundness of his will. Bernard puts it well: the capacity to will is in all of us, but to will good is progress, to will evil is fault. Therefore, simply to will belongs to human nature; to will evil belongs to corrupt nature; to will well belongs to grace. When I say that the will, stripped of its freedom, is by necessity drawn toward evil, it is a wonder if anyone should find that a hard saying — for it contains no absurdity and does not differ from the language of the holy writers. But it offends those who cannot distinguish between necessity and compulsion. If you ask them: is not God of necessity good? Is not the devil of necessity evil? What can they answer? Goodness is so bound up with God's divinity that it is no more necessary that He be God than that He be good. And the devil, by his fall, is so cut off from all participation in goodness that he can do nothing but evil. Now if any God-robber should bark against this and say that God deserves little praise for a goodness He is compelled to keep — the ready answer is that it comes not from violent compulsion but from His infinite goodness that He cannot do evil. Therefore, if the fact that God necessarily does good does not hin-

der the freedom of His will in doing good, and if the devil — who can do nothing but evil — still sins willingly, who shall say that a man sins any less willingly merely because he is subject to the necessity of sinning? This necessity is something Augustine speaks of everywhere. Even when he was being aggressively pressed by the objections of Celestius, he did not hesitate to state plainly: it was by freedom that man came to be in sin, but now the corruption that followed as punishment has made necessity out of freedom. And whenever he touches on the subject, he does not hesitate to speak of the necessary bondage of sin in these terms. Therefore let this be the settled summary: man, being corrupted, sins willingly — not against his will, not under compulsion — with the mind's deepest inclination, not by external force, by the motion of his own desire, not by outside constraint. And yet from the very perversity of his nature he cannot but be moved and driven toward evil. If this is true, then he is plainly subject to the necessity of sinning. Bernard, agreeing with Augustine, writes: among all living creatures only man is free, and yet through sin he also endures a kind of violence — but a violence of will, not of nature, so that even so he is not deprived of freedom, since what is willed is free. A little later: the will, changed within itself to something worse by some strange and corrupted process, creates a necessity — yet that necessity, since it is willed, cannot excuse the will; and the will, since it is drawn by allurements, cannot escape the necessity. For this necessity is, in a certain sense, willing. He then says: we are weighed down by a yoke — but a yoke of willing bondage. Because of our bondage we are miserable; because of our will we are inexcusable — for the will, when it was free, made itself sin's slave. His final conclusion is that the soul is held in a strange and evil way as both

slave and free, under a willing and evil slavery: a slave by necessity, free by will, and — more wondrous and more miserable still — guilty precisely where it is free, bound where it is guilty, and thus bound where it is free. Readers can see from all this that I bring nothing new — these ideas were set forth long ago by Augustine from the common agreement of all godly people and were preserved in monasteries for nearly a thousand years afterward. Lombard, because he could not distinguish necessity from compulsion, opened the door to a damaging error.

On the other side, it is worth considering what kind of remedy God's grace provides in correcting and healing the corruption of our nature. For since God in helping us gives us what we lack, once we understand what He does in us, we will immediately see what our poverty is. When the apostle tells the Philippians that he is confident that He who began a good work in them will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ, there is no doubt that 'the beginning of a good work' refers to the very beginning of conversion — which lies in the will. Therefore God begins a good work in us by stirring up in our hearts the love, desire, and effort toward righteousness — or, to put it more precisely, by bending, forming, and directing our hearts toward righteousness — and He brings it to completion by confirming us in perseverance. Lest anyone suggest that God merely assists an already existing but weak will, the Holy Spirit declares elsewhere what the will is capable of when left to itself: 'I will give you a new heart.', 'I will put a new spirit within you.', 'I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.', 'I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.' Who would say that the weakness of the human will is merely strengthened by assistance so that it can effec-

tively aspire to choose what is good — when in fact it must be completely transformed and renewed? If there were any softness in a stone such that with help it could become tender enough to be molded, then I would grant that the human heart can be made pliable to do what is right, with God's grace supplying what is imperfect in it. But if God meant by this image to show that no goodness can ever be drawn from our heart unless it is made entirely new, we must not divide with Him what He claims for Himself alone. If a stone is transformed into flesh when God turns us toward the desire for what is right, then everything that was of our own will is taken away, and what comes in its place is entirely from God. I say the will is taken away — not in the sense that the will ceases to exist, for in man's conversion what belonged to the original nature remains intact — but in the sense that it is created new: not that the will then begins to exist, but that it is turned from a bad will into a good one. And I affirm that this is done entirely by God, since we cannot so much as think anything on our own, as the same apostle testifies. Therefore in another place he says that God does not merely help our weak will or correct our perverse will, but that He works the willing itself within us. It is therefore easily seen, as I said before, that whatever goodness is in the will is the work of grace alone. In this sense he says elsewhere that God works all things in all people — and there he is not speaking of God's general governance but giving God alone the credit for all the good things the faithful possess. And by saying 'all' he makes God the author of spiritual life from beginning to end. He had taught the same thing before in different words, saying that the faithful are of God in Christ — plainly referring to the new creation, in which what belonged to the old common nature is de-

stroyed. There is implied here a comparison between Adam and Christ, which he elsewhere states more explicitly, teaching that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in. By this reasoning he proves that our salvation is a free gift: because the beginning of all goodness lies in the second creation, which we receive in Christ. If we had any power of our own, even the smallest, we would also have some share of merit. But to prove that we are nothing in ourselves, he argues that we have deserved nothing — because we are created in Christ for good works that God has prepared. In those words he affirms again that every aspect of good works, from the first impulse onward, belongs to God alone. For this reason, after the psalmist said that we are God's handiwork — so that no division of credit could be made — he immediately adds: 'We did not make ourselves.' That he is speaking of regeneration, which is the beginning of spiritual life, is clear from what immediately follows: 'We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.' We see that the psalmist was not content merely to give God credit for our salvation — he expressly excludes us from any partnership with God in it, as if to say that there remains no portion, however small, for man to boast of, because it is all of God.

Some may grant that the will, being by its nature turned away from good, is converted by the Lord's power alone — but then add that once it has been prepared, it also plays its own part, as Augustine teaches: that grace precedes every good work, but the will accompanies grace as an attendant following behind, not as a forerunner leading the way. That statement by the holy man is not wrong in itself, though Peter Lombard handles it clumsily. But I affirm that both in the prophetic passages I have cited and in the

other relevant texts, two things are plainly indicated: first, that the Lord both corrects our corrupted will — or rather destroys it — and second, that He Himself puts a good will in its place. Insofar as the will is preceded and prepared by grace, I will let you call it an attendant — but since after being reformed it is the Lord's own work, it is wrong to credit man with obeying grace through a subsequently cooperating will. Therefore Chrysostom was not well advised when he wrote that neither grace without will nor will without grace can do anything — as if grace did not work the very will itself, as we have just seen from Paul. Nor was it Augustine's purpose in calling man's will an attendant of grace to assign it a secondary office in doing good works. His only aim was to refute Pelagius's wicked teaching, which placed the chief cause of salvation in man's merit. He therefore focused on the single point that grace precedes all merit — which was sufficient for the argument at hand — without addressing in that passage the separate question of grace's perpetual effect, though he handles that question excellently elsewhere. For sometimes when he says that the Lord goes before the unwilling in order to make him willing, and then follows the willing so that his willing may not be in vain, Augustine makes God the complete author of the entire good work. His statements on this subject are too clear to require extended argument. 'People labor to find in our will something that is our own and not of God,' he says, 'but how that could be found, I do not know.' And in his first book against Pelagius and Celestius, when expounding Christ's words — 'Everyone who has heard from the Father comes to Me' — he says: 'Free will is so helped not only that it may know what is to be done, but also that it may actually do it once it knows.' 'And so when God teaches not by the letter of the law but

by the grace of the Spirit, He teaches in such a way that the one who has learned not only sees it in knowing but also desires it in willing and carries it out in doing.'

Since we are now dealing with the central point on which the whole matter turns, let us proceed and establish the main conclusion for readers with a few clear testimonies of Scripture. And then, lest anyone accuse us of twisting Scripture, let us show that the truth we affirm — drawn from Scripture — also has the testimony of Augustine. I do not intend to rehearse everything that could be cited from Scripture in support of our view. Rather, by presenting the most carefully chosen passages, I hope to prepare the way for understanding all the others scattered throughout. I also think it fitting to show openly that I am in agreement with the man whom the consent of godly people rightly holds in high esteem. It is evident by plain proof that the beginning of goodness comes from nowhere except God alone, for a will inclined toward good is found only in the elect. But the cause of election is to be sought outside of man. From this it follows that man does not have a right will of his own, but that it proceeds from the same good pleasure by which we were chosen before the creation of the world. There is another related reason. Since the beginning of willing and doing good is from faith, we must ask where faith itself comes from. Since all of Scripture cries out that faith is a free gift of God, it follows that it is of God's pure grace alone when we — who are naturally inclined with our whole mind toward evil — begin to will what is good. Therefore, when the Lord speaks of two things in the conversion of His people — taking away their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh — He plainly testifies that what is of ourselves must be removed before we can be turned to righteous-

ness, and that whatever comes in its place is entirely from Him. And He does not say this only once. In Jeremiah He says: 'I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me all their days.' And a little later: 'I will put the fear of My name into their hearts, so that they will not turn from Me.' Again in Ezekiel: 'I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.' He could not more clearly claim for Himself and take from us whatever is good and right in our will than by declaring that our conversion is the creation of a new spirit and a new heart. The inevitable conclusion follows: nothing good comes from our will until it is reformed, and after it is reformed, whatever good it has is from God and not from us.

We also read holy men praying to this effect, as Solomon says: 'May the Lord incline our hearts to Him, that we may keep His commandments.' He reveals the stubbornness of our hearts, which naturally rejoice in rebelling against God's law unless they are bent. And the same is found in the Psalms: 'Lord, incline my heart to Your testimonies.' We must always notice the contrast implied here — between the perverse motion of the heart that drives it toward stubbornness, and this corrective work by which it is led to obedience. When David, feeling for a time the withdrawal of God's guiding grace, prays for God to create a clean heart within him and renew a right spirit in his inner being — does he not acknowledge that all the parts of his heart are full of corruption, and his spirit twisted with crooked perversity? And in calling the purity he prays for a creation of God, does he not attribute it wholly to God? But if someone objects that the prayer itself is evidence of a godly and holy disposition, our answer is ready: though David had by that

time come some way toward restoration, he is still reflecting on the miserable fallen state from which he came. Taking on the person of one estranged from God, he rightly prays to be given all that God gives to His elect in regeneration. Like a dead man, he wishes himself to be created anew — that from being a servant of Satan he might become an instrument of the Holy Spirit. The lust of our pride is truly marvelous and monstrous. Nothing does God require more earnestly than that we keep His Sabbath — that is, that we rest from our own works. And nothing is harder to obtain from us than bidding our own works farewell to make room for the works of God. If sluggishness did not hinder us, Christ has given testimony clear enough about His grace so that it should not be hidden. 'I am the vine,' He says, 'you are the branches; My Father is the vinedresser. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. For apart from Me you can do nothing.' If we bear fruit no more than a branch cut from the ground and left without moisture, we need search no further for what our nature's capacity for goodness is. And the conclusion is plain: 'Apart from Me you can do nothing.' He does not say that we are too weak to be fully sufficient on our own. He brings us to nothing and thereby excludes every opinion of ability, however small. If we are grafted into Christ and bear fruit like a vine that draws its living energy from the moisture of the earth, the dew of heaven, and the warmth of the sun, then I see nothing remaining for us in doing a good work — as long as we preserve for God what belongs to Him. That clever device is vainly raised that there is already sap in the branch and a certain capacity for fruit within it, so that the branch does not take everything from the earth or the root but contributes something of its own. For

Christ means simply that we are a dead stick and worthless when separated from Him — because by ourselves, when cut off, we have no power to do good. As He also says elsewhere: 'Every tree that My Father has not planted will be uprooted.' The apostle therefore attributes everything to God in the passage already cited: 'It is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.' The first part of a good work is the willing; the second is the vigorous effort in carrying it out. God is the author of both. If we claim anything for ourselves — either in the willing or in the doing — we steal it from God. If Scripture said that God helps our weak will, something would still be left for us. But when it says that He creates the will, then all the good in it is taken entirely out of our hands. And since the good will is still weighed down by the burden of our flesh and cannot rise on its own, Paul adds that God also provides the strength and perseverance needed to carry the battle through to its conclusion. Otherwise it would be impossible to maintain what he teaches elsewhere, that God alone brings all things to completion in all people — by which, as we have already shown, the entire course of spiritual life is meant. For this reason, after David prayed that God would open the ways of the Lord before him so he could walk in His truth, he immediately added: 'Unite my heart to fear Your name.' By these words he shows that even those who are well disposed are subject to so many inner distractions that they will easily waver and fall away unless they are established in constancy. For the same reason, in another place, after praying that his steps would be directed to keep God's word, he also asks for strength to fight: 'Let no iniquity have dominion over me.' In this way the Lord both begins and completes the good work in us, so that it is all His work: the will conceives a love for

what is right, is inclined to desire it, is stirred up and moved to pursue it, and then — so that our choice, desire, and effort do not fail but proceed to completion — man presses on steadily and continues to the end.

God moves the will not in the way that has been taught and believed for many years — as if after His prompting it is left to our choice whether to obey or resist — but by powerfully strengthening it. Therefore what Chrysostom so often repeats must be rejected: 'Whom He draws, He draws because they are willing' — by which he quietly teaches that God merely reaches out His hand to see whether we will accept His help. We grant that this described the state of man while he still stood upright, when he could bow in either direction. But since man's fall has taught us how wretched free will is unless God both wills and acts within us — what will become of us if He gives us His grace in only a small measure? Rather, by our ingratitude we obscure and diminish it. For the apostle does not teach that the grace of a good will is offered to us to accept or reject as we please — but that God will work it in us. This means nothing other than that the Lord by His Spirit directs and governs our heart and reigns in it as His own possession. Nor does God promise through Ezekiel to give the elect a new spirit merely so that they will be able to walk in His commandments — but so that He will actually make them walk. Christ's saying — 'Everyone who has heard from the Father comes to Me' — can only be understood as teaching that God's grace is effectual in itself, as Augustine also affirms. This grace God does not distribute generally and without distinction to all people — as the widely repeated saying attributed to Occam has it, that God denies nothing to the one who does his best. People should certainly be taught that

God's goodness stands open to all without exception who seek it. But since only those breathed upon by heavenly grace even begin to seek it, not even this smallest piece should be snatched away from God's praise. For it is the privilege of the elect to be regenerated by the Spirit of God and moved and governed by His guidance. Augustine therefore rightly mocks both those who claim any part of the willing for themselves, and those who think that what is given to all people generally is the special testimony of free election. 'Nature,' he says, 'but not grace, is common to all men.' He calls it a glittering but brittle trick, like glass that shines with mere vanity, when what God gives only to those He pleases is extended in teaching to all. In another place he writes: 'How did you come?', 'By believing.', 'Take care that while you claim credit for having found the right way, you do not perish from the right way.', 'I came,' you say, 'by free will. I came by my own willing.' 'Why do you swell with pride?' 'Do you want to hear that even this was given to you?' 'Hear the One who calls: No man comes to Me unless the Father draws him.' And it is plainly drawn from John's words that the hearts of the godly are so effectively governed by God's working that they follow with an unchangeable affection. 'Whoever is born of God,' he says, 'cannot sin, because God's seed abides in him.' For we see that the middle option the sophists imagine — where we are left free at any moment to either follow or refuse — is plainly excluded wherever Scripture affirms an effectual constancy to persevere.

There should have been no more doubt about perseverance — it should simply have been received as a free gift of God — were it not for the wicked error that grew powerful, teaching that God distributes subsequent grace according to each person's merit, re-

warding those who have shown themselves grateful for the first grace. But since this error grew from the notion that it lies in our power to refuse or accept the grace God offers, once that idea is driven away, this other error collapses with it. Yet those who hold this error go astray in several other ways as well. Beyond teaching that gratitude for the first grace and its proper use are rewarded with subsequent gifts, they also add that now grace does not work alone in us but only works together with us. Concerning the first point, we ought to believe this: the Lord, as He daily enriches and multiplies His servants with new gifts of His grace — because He is pleased with and approves of the work He has begun in them — finds in them something upon which to bestow still greater graces. To this belong the sayings: 'To him who has, more will be given.' And: 'Well done, good servant, because you have been faithful in a little, I will set you over much' (Matthew 25:21; Luke 19:17). But two things must be carefully observed here: first, that the proper use of the first grace should not be called the cause that earns subsequent graces; and second, that even if it is called a rewarding, it must not stop being understood as God's free grace. I grant, then, that the faithful may expect this blessing: the better they have used their initial graces, the more they will be increased. But I also say that this use itself is from the Lord, and that this rewarding is from His free generosity. They also make unfortunate and wrong use of the old distinction between working grace and cooperating grace. Augustine did use this distinction, but he qualified it carefully: God, in cooperating with us, brings to completion what He began by working in us, and the grace is the same throughout — it only changes its name according to the different stage of its effect. It follows that he does not divide the work between God and us as if

there were a mutual meeting of two parties in motion, but only notes the multiplication of grace. To the same effect he teaches elsewhere that many of God's gifts precede the goodwill of man — and that the goodwill itself is one of them. It follows that nothing is left for the will to claim as its own. Paul has expressed the same thing explicitly: after saying that it is God who works in us both to will and to work (Philippians 2), he immediately adds that God does both of these according to His good pleasure — by which word he declares that it is God's free generosity. As for the common argument that once we have yielded to the first grace, our own efforts now work alongside the grace that follows — my answer is this: if they mean that we, once broken to obedience by the Lord's power, go forward of our own accord and are inclined to follow the working of grace, I have no objection. For it is entirely certain that such readiness of obedience exists where God's grace reigns. But where does that readiness come from, if not from this: that the Spirit of God, remaining consistent with Himself, cherishes and confirms to perseverance the very inclination of obedience that He Himself first produced. But if they mean that man contributes something of his own by which he cooperates with God's grace — they are under a very dangerous delusion.

For the same reason the apostle's statement is wrongly twisted through ignorance: 'I have worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me' (1 Corinthians 15:10). People interpret it this way: since saying he surpassed all the others might seem arrogant, he corrected himself by giving the credit to God's grace — but in a way that still makes himself a co-worker with grace. It is remarkable that so many otherwise sound-minded people have stumbled over this. The apostle does not write that

God's grace labored alongside him in order to make himself a partner in the labor. Rather, by this correction he gives away all credit for the labor to grace alone. 'It was not I who labored,' he says, 'but the grace of God that was with me.' The ambiguity of the language misled people — and especially a poor translation that left out the force of the Greek article. For translated word for word, he does not say that grace was a co-worker alongside him, but that the grace that was with him was the sole worker of it all. Augustine teaches the same thing clearly, though briefly: 'God's goodwill precedes many of His gifts, but not all of them — and among those gifts it does precede, the goodwill itself is one.' His reasoning follows: 'For it is written: His mercy shall come before me (Psalm 59:10), and: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me (Psalm 23:6).' 'His mercy goes before the unwilling man to make him willing; it follows the willing man so that his willing will not be in vain.' Bernard agrees, representing the church as saying: 'Draw me even against my will, that You may make me willing; draw me as I lie sluggish, that You may make me run' (Sermon 2 on the Canticles).

Now let us hear Augustine in his own words, lest the Pelagians of our age — that is, the scholastic theologians of the Sorbonne — charge us, as they are prone to do, with having all antiquity against us. In this they follow their father Pelagius, by whom Augustine was long ago drawn into the same dispute. In his book *On Rebuke and Grace*, written to Valentine, Augustine discusses at length what I will summarize briefly but in his own words. To Adam was given the grace to persevere in good if he chose. To us is given the will to persevere, and through that will to overcome evil desire. Adam therefore had the ability to persevere if he willed, but not

the willing that would make him able. To us is given both the willing and the ability. The first freedom was the ability not to sin; ours is much greater — the inability to sin. Lest anyone think Augustine was speaking of the perfection of immortality to come — as Lombard wrongly reads it — he removes that doubt shortly after. 'The will of holy men,' he says, 'is so kindled by the Holy Spirit that they are therefore able because they so will, and they so will because God works that willing in them.' 'For if in so great a weakness — in which power must still be perfected, to keep pride in check — their own will were left to them, so that they could persevere by God's help if they chose, while God does not work in them the very choosing, then amid so many temptations the will would inevitably fall because of its weakness and so could not persevere.' 'Therefore help is given to the weakness of man's will, so that it is moved without wavering or slipping by the grace of God, and thus does not fail, however weak it is.' Augustine then treats more extensively how our hearts by necessity follow the movement of God working affection within them. He says that the Lord draws people with their own wills — but with wills that He Himself has produced. We now have testified through Augustine's own words the very thing we chiefly desire to establish: that grace is not merely offered by God to be received or refused by each person's free choice, but that grace is what forms the choice and will in the heart. Every good work that follows is the fruit and effect of that grace, and it obeys no other will than the one grace itself has created. These too are his words from another place: nothing but grace produces every good work in us.

But where Augustine says in another place that grace does not take away the will but turns an evil will into a good one and assists it once it is good, he means only that a person is not drawn in such a way that he is carried along without any inner movement, like an object pushed from outside. Rather, he is so inwardly moved that he obeys from his very heart. That grace is specially and freely given to the elect he writes to Boniface: 'We know that grace is not given to all people, and that to those to whom it is given, it is not given on the basis of merit in works or in will, but by free favor. And to those to whom it is not given, we know that by God's just judgment it is withheld.' In that same letter he strongly argues against the idea that subsequent grace is given to reward people for not refusing the first grace, as if that made them worthy. He insists that Pelagius must grant that grace is necessary for every one of our actions and is not given in return for works — otherwise it would not truly be grace. The matter cannot be stated more concisely than in Chapter 8 of his book to Valentine, *On Rebuke and Grace*. There Augustine first teaches that man's will does not obtain grace through its freedom, but obtains freedom through grace. By that same grace, through the imprint of a genuine delight for what is good, the will is shaped to persevere. It is strengthened with invincible force, so that while grace governs it, it never falls away, and when grace withdraws, it immediately collapses. By God's free mercy it is both converted to good and, once converted, remains in it. The directing of man's will toward good, and its steadfastness after that direction, depends solely on God's will and not on any merit of man's own. And so to man is left a kind of free

will — if we care to call it that — that can neither turn to God nor remain with God except by grace, and that is capable of everything it is capable of through grace alone.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. ¶ HOW GOD WORKETH IN THE HEARTES OF MEN.



It has been sufficiently proved, I think, that man is held so captive under the yoke of sin that he can neither desire goodness nor strive for it on his own. We have also made the distinction between compulsion and necessity, showing that even when he sins necessarily, he still sins willingly. But since, while subject to the devil's bondage, he seems to be led more by the devil's will than his own, it remains now to describe the nature of both kinds of working. Then we must answer the question whether anything in evil actions can be attributed to God, in which Scripture indicates that His working is somehow involved. In one place Augustine compares man's will to a horse ready to obey its rider, and he compares God and the devil to the two riders. 'If God sits upon it,' he says, 'He governs it temperately, like a sober and skilled rider — spurring it forward when it is too slow, pulling it back when it is too fast, restraining its waywardness and wildness, taming its stubbornness, and guiding it in the right way.' 'But if the devil has taken possession of it, like a foolish and reckless rider he drives it violently through pathless places, throws it into ditches, rolls it down steep slopes, and spurs it onward into stubbornness and fury.' This comparison will serve for now, since nothing better

comes to hand. When we say that the will of a natural man is subject to the devil's rule and stirred by him, we do not mean that the man strains against it and resists while being forced to obey, as slaves are sometimes compelled against their will by their masters. Rather, being deceived and bewitched by Satan's lies, the will yields obediently to his every leading. Those whom the Lord does not choose to govern with His Spirit, He by just judgment gives over to be moved by Satan. The apostle therefore says that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers who are appointed for destruction, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). And in another place: that he works in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2). The blinding of the wicked and the wicked deeds that follow are called the works of Satan — and yet the cause is not to be sought anywhere else than in the will of man, from which the root of evil springs and in which the foundation of Satan's kingdom — namely, sin — rests.

But the order of God's working in such things is entirely different. The harm done to the holy man Job by the Chaldeans can serve as an example (Job 1). The Chaldeans killed his servants and, like enemies at war, drove away his cattle as plunder. Their wicked act is plain to see, and in it Satan is not idle — the narrative says that all of this proceeded from him. But Job himself acknowledged the work of the Lord in it, declaring that the One who allowed the Chaldeans to take his possessions was the Lord who had taken them away. How can we attribute the very same act to God as author, to Satan as author, and to man as author — without either excusing Satan by association with God, or making God the author of evil? Quite easily — if we first look at the end for which each acted, and then at the manner in which each acted. The Lord's purpose

was to test and exercise His servant's patience through calamity. The devil's aim was to drive him to despair. The Chaldeans, in violation of all right and law, sought profit at another's expense. This great diversity of purposes produces a great difference in the moral quality of the act. There is no less diversity in the manner of doing. The Lord handed His servant over to Satan to be afflicted. The Chaldeans, whom He chose as instruments to carry it out, He left under Satan's direction and delivered them to be driven to it. Satan with his poisonous stings goaded the Chaldeans — already perverse of their own nature — to commit the harm. They rushed furiously to do wrong and defiled their entire members with wicked action. Therefore it is rightly said that Satan works in the reprobate, in whom he exercises his kingdom — the kingdom of wickedness. It is also said that God works in them in His own manner — because Satan himself, as an instrument of God's wrath, turns himself here and there at God's bidding and commandment to execute His just judgments. I am not speaking here of God's universal working by which all creatures are sustained and from which they receive the power to do anything at all. I speak only of that special working visible in each specific act. We see therefore that there is no absurdity in attributing one and the same act to God, to Satan, and to man. The diversity of ends and manners of acting makes God's justice in it appear blameless, while the wickedness of Satan and man stands fully exposed to their reproach.

On this point also the early writers are sometimes too cautious to confess the plain truth, fearing that they will open a window to wickedness by speaking too freely about the works of God. I respect that caution — and yet I think there is no danger in simply

holding what Scripture teaches. Augustine himself was not entirely free from this kind of restraint, as when he says that hardening and blinding belong not to God's working but to His foreknowledge. But the plain language of Scripture does not allow such refinements, for it clearly indicates that something more than foreknowledge is involved on God's part. Augustine himself, in his fifth book against Julianus, labors at length to prove that sins are not merely permitted or suffered by God but are also subject to His power — so that former sins may be punished by means of later ones. Similarly, the appeal to mere permission is too weak to stand. Scripture frequently says that God blinds and hardens the reprobate, that He turns, bends, and moves their hearts, as I have explained more fully elsewhere. But how this happens can never be explained if we retreat to mere foreknowledge or permission. Therefore we answer that it happens in two ways. First, since when His light is withdrawn nothing but darkness and blindness remain, since when His Spirit is withdrawn our hearts grow hard as stone, and since when His direction ceases they twist into crookedness — it is rightly said that He blinds, hardens, and bends those from whom He withdraws the power to see, to obey, and to act rightly. The second way — which comes closer to the literal meaning of the language — is that for the execution of His judgments through Satan as the minister of His wrath, God both directs their purposes toward whatever end He pleases and stirs up their wills and strengthens their efforts. So when Moses recounts that King Sihon refused to grant the people passage because God had hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, he immediately adds the pur-

pose behind it: 'that He might give him into our hands.' Because it was God's will to destroy Sihon, the hardening of his heart was God's preparation for that destruction.

According to the first manner these passages seem to be spoken: 'He takes away speech from those who speak the truth and takes away reason from the elders; He takes understanding away from those who lead the people and makes them wander where there is no path.' And again: 'Lord, why have You made us err and hardened our hearts so that we do not fear You?' These passages speak of what God produces in people by withdrawing His grace, rather than of how He actively works in them. But other texts go further — such as those concerning the hardening of Pharaoh. 'I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, so that he will not listen to you or let the people go.' Afterward it says that He made his heart heavy and hardened it. Did He harden it by simply withdrawing His support? That is true — but He did something more: He committed Pharaoh's heart to Satan to be confirmed in stubbornness. This is why He had earlier said: 'I will hold his heart.' When the people left Egypt, the inhabitants of the land came out and met them as enemies. Who stirred them up? Moses affirms to the people that it was the Lord who had hardened their hearts. And the prophet, recounting the same history, says that 'He turned their hearts to hate His people.' You cannot say they merely stumbled because God withdrew His counsel from them — for if they were hardened and turned, then they were purposely bent toward that very thing. Furthermore, when it pleased God to punish the transgressors among the people, how did He accomplish His work in the reprobate? In such a way that the effective power of the working was clearly His, and they served only as His instruments. At times He

threatened to summon them with a whistle; at times He said they would be like a net to entangle His enemies, and at times like a hammer to strike the Israelites. But He showed most clearly that He is not idle in them when He called Sennacherib an axe, one that was both directed and driven by His own hand to cut. Augustine states it aptly in one place: insofar as they sin, it is their own doing; insofar as in sinning they carry out this or that particular thing, it is the power of God, who divides the darkness as He pleases.

That Satan's service is used to spur the reprobate forward whenever the Lord by His providence appoints them to this or that task can be sufficiently proved from a single passage alone. For it is frequently said in Samuel that an evil spirit from the Lord violently seized or left Saul. To call this spirit the Holy Spirit would be blasphemous. The unclean spirit is therefore called the spirit of God because it acts at His command and under His power, serving as His instrument rather than acting independently. To this must also be added what Paul teaches: that the powerful working of error and deception is sent by God, so that those who have not obeyed the truth may believe lies. Yet in one and the same action there is always a great difference between what the Lord does and what Satan and the wicked intend. He employs the evil instruments that are under His hand — instruments He can turn wherever He wishes — to serve His justice. They, being evil, produce in their actions the wickedness they have conceived through the corruption of their nature. The rest of what serves to defend God's majesty from slander and to cut off every excuse from the wicked

has already been set out in the chapter on providence. Here my only aim was to show how Satan reigns in the reprobate person, and how God also works in them both.

Although we touched on this before, it has not been clearly stated what freedom man has in those actions that are neither righteous nor sinful in themselves — actions that belong more to the bodily than the spiritual life. Some have granted him free choice in such matters, I think, more because they did not want to argue over something of minor importance than because they were firmly convinced of what they conceded. As for me, while I agree that those who hold that man has no power toward righteousness have grasped what is chiefly necessary for salvation, I also think this other point must not be neglected: that whenever a thought comes to our minds to choose what is beneficial to us and our will inclines toward it — and whenever our understanding avoids what would otherwise harm us — this too is the work of God's special grace. The reach of God's providence extends this far: not only to bring about the outcomes He foresees as fitting, but also to incline the wills of people toward them. If we consider the management of outward affairs by our understanding alone, we might think they lie entirely under human will. But if we give credit to the many testimonies that cry out that the Lord governs the hearts of men in these things as well, they will compel us to acknowledge that our will is subject to God's special directing. Who moved the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites and lend them their most precious valuables? They would never have found it in their hearts to do so of their own accord. Their hearts, then, were more under the Lord's command than under their own governance. And truly, if Jacob had not been persuaded that God puts different affections

into people as it pleases Him, he would not have said of his son Joseph — whom he took to be a pagan Egyptian — 'God grant you to find mercy before this man.' The whole church likewise confesses in the Psalms that when it pleased God to have mercy on them, He softened the hearts of cruel nations toward them. Again, when Saul became so inflamed with anger that he prepared for war, the cause is stated plainly: the Spirit of God compelled him. Who turned Absalom's mind away from following the counsel of Ahithophel, which had been treated as an oracle? Who inclined Rehoboam to accept the advice of the young men? Who caused the great nations to be struck with fear at the approach of Israel? The harlot Rahab herself confessed that it was done by God. And who threw down the hearts of Israel with dread and terror, if not the One who threatened in the law that He would give them a heart full of fear?

Someone will object that these are isolated examples and should not be made into a universal rule. But I say that they are sufficient to prove what I am affirming: that God, whenever He means to prepare the way for His providence, bends and turns the wills of people even in outward matters — and that human choice is not so free that God's will does not govern over it. That your mind depends more on God's directing than on your own free choice — daily experience itself will force you to think this, whether you wish to or not. In matters of no difficulty your judgment and understanding often fail you. In things not hard to accomplish, your courage gives out. And conversely, in the most obscure matters, ready advice suddenly presents itself. In great and dangerous affairs, a courage that overcomes all difficulty is given to you. So I understand Solomon's words: 'The Lord makes both

the ear to hear and the eye to see.' I take him to be speaking not of their creation but of the special grace by which we use them. And when he writes that the Lord holds the heart of the king in His hand like a stream of water and turns it wherever He wills, he uses this particular example to cover the whole general case. For if any person's will were exempt from God's rule, that distinction would most belong to the will of a king, who exercises something like lordship over the wills of others. But if even the will of a king is governed by God's hand, then no one's will is exempt from the same condition. Augustine has a notable statement on this point: if Scripture is carefully read, it shows that not only the good wills of people — which God makes good out of evil, and which He Himself having made, He directs to good works and eternal life — but also those wills that preserve the created world are so in God's power that He turns them wherever and whenever He wills, to show kindness or to execute punishment, by a judgment most secret indeed, but most righteous.

Here readers must remember that the power of man's will is not to be measured by the outward outcome of things, as some unskilled thinkers improperly tend to do. They think they prove cleverly that man's will is in bondage by pointing out that even the greatest rulers do not always get what they desire. But the power of will we are speaking of is to be considered within the person, not measured by outward results. For in the debate about free will, the question is not whether a man can carry out in practice all the things he has planned in his mind — for outward obstacles may prevent that. The question is whether in every matter he has both a free judgment of mind and a free inclination of will. If a man has both of these, then Attilius Regulus, shut up in the narrowness of a

barrel lined with sharp spikes, would possess free will no less than Augustus Caesar, ruling a large part of the world with a nod of his head.

THE FIFT CHAPTER. ¶A CONFUTATION OF THE OBJECTIONS THAT ARE WONT TO BE BROUGHT FOR DEFENCE OF FREE WYLL.



It might seem that enough has been said about the bondage of human will — except that those who hold a false opinion of liberty are determined to tear it down, and they bring forward certain arguments to attack our position. First they pile up various absurdities to make it appear offensive to common sense, and then they assault it with Scripture passages. We will refute both lines of attack in turn. They argue: if sin is of necessity, then it is no longer sin; but if it is voluntary, then it can be avoided. These were the weapons Pelagius used against Augustine, whose name we will not yet invoke to silence them — we will first address the substance of their argument. I deny, therefore, that sin is any less blameworthy because it is necessary. I also deny that the conclusion they draw follows: that because sin is voluntary it can therefore be avoided. If anyone wants to argue with God and escape His judgment on the grounds that he could not have done otherwise, God has a ready answer — which I have addressed elsewhere — that it is not from creation but from the corruption of nature that people, having

been made slaves to sin, can will nothing but evil. Where does this incapacity come from, which the wicked so eagerly invoke, except from the fact that Adam voluntarily made himself subject to the devil's tyranny? The corruption, with the chains of which we are bound, arose from the first man's fall from his Creator. If all people are justly held guilty in that fall, let them not think they can excuse themselves by pointing to the necessity — for in that very necessity lies the plainest cause of their condemnation. I have explained this above, and I have used the example of the devil himself to show that one who sins necessarily still sins willingly. Likewise, among the holy angels, whose wills cannot be turned from good, those wills do not cease to be wills. Bernard too teaches this aptly: that we are all the more wretched because our necessity is voluntary — yet it holds us so completely in its grip that we are slaves to sin, as we have already described. The second part of their argument is also flawed, because it leaps too quickly from 'voluntary' to 'free' — but we have already proved that something can be done voluntarily without being subject to free choice.

They further argue: if virtues and vices do not proceed from free choice of will, it is not reasonable that people should be punished for the one or rewarded for the other. This argument, though it originates with Aristotle, is used in some places by Chrysostom and Jerome. But that it was a common Pelagian argument, Jerome himself does not hide — he even rehearses it in their own words: 'If God's grace works in us, then grace, not we who labor, shall be crowned.' On the matter of punishment, I answer that it is justly imposed on those from whom the guilt of sin proceeds. What difference does it make whether sin is committed by a free or a bound judgment, as long as it is committed by a willing desire? Especially

since the person is shown to be a sinner precisely because he is under sin's bondage. As for rewards for righteousness — it is apparently a great absurdity that they depend more on God's generosity than on our own merit. How often do we find this repeated in Augustine: that God crowns not our merits but His own gifts, and that these are called rewards not because we deserved them but because they are given in response to the graces He had already bestowed? The objectors wisely observe that if rewards do not flow from the fountain of free will, there is no room left for merit — but they are greatly mistaken in thinking this differs so far from the truth. Augustine does not hesitate to teach as necessary what they consider so scandalous to confess. He asks: 'What are the merits of any person whatever, when He comes not with due payment but with free grace — He who alone is free, and who sets free from sin?' 'He finds all people to be sinners.' And again: 'If what is due to you were to be paid out, you would be punished. What happens instead? God has not given you the punishment you deserved, but gives you grace you did not deserve. If you want to have nothing to do with grace, boast of your own merits.' And again: 'By yourself you are nothing. Sins are yours, but merits are God's. Punishment is what is owed to you, and when reward comes, He will crown His own gifts, not your merits.' In the same vein he teaches elsewhere that grace is not from merit but merit is from grace. A little later he concludes that God goes before all human merit with His gifts so that out of those very gifts He may gather His own deserving — and He gives everything freely, because He finds nothing in us on which to base salvation. But why make a longer list when such statements appear throughout his writings? The apostle will deliver them from this error still more directly, if they will hear from

what source he traces the glory of the saints: 'Those He foreknew He predestined; those He predestined He called; those He called He justified; those He justified He glorified.' Why then, as the apostle testifies, are the faithful crowned? Because by the Lord's mercy — not by their own effort — they were chosen, called, and justified. Away therefore with this vain fear that there will be no more merit if free will is taken away. It is foolish to be frightened away from what Scripture itself calls us to. 'If you have received all things,' Paul says, 'why do you boast as if you had not received them?' You see that for this very reason he takes all things away from free will and leaves no room for merit. Yet since God's generosity is boundless and inexhaustible, the graces He bestows on us — because He makes them truly ours — He rewards as though they were our own virtues.

They also bring forward what appears to be taken from Chrysostom: 'If the power to choose good or evil is not ours, then all who share the same nature must be either all good or all evil.' Not far from this is the argument of the author of *On the Calling of the Gentiles* — whoever he was, the book circulates under the name of Ambrose — when he argues that no one would ever fall away from faith unless God left us in a mutable condition. It is remarkable that such excellent men should fall into such confusion here. How did it not occur to Chrysostom that it is God's election that makes the difference between people? We have no fear of granting what Paul affirms so earnestly: that all are perverse and given to wickedness. But we add with him that it is by God's mercy that not all remain in that perverseness. By nature we are all sick with the same disease. Only those on whom it has pleased God to lay His healing hand recover. The rest, whom in His just judgment

He passes over, waste away in their own corruption until they are consumed. The reason some continue to the end and others fail in their course is no different. Perseverance itself is God's gift — a gift He does not distribute evenly to all but gives to those it pleases Him to give it to. If someone asks why some hold firm and others fall away in unsteadiness, we know no other reason than this: God sustains the one group, strengthened by His power so they do not perish, while He does not give the same strength to the other, so that they become examples of instability.

They press on further, saying that exhortations are useless, that admonitions serve no purpose, that it is foolish to rebuke if the sinner has no power to obey. When similar objections were raised against Augustine in his own time, he was compelled to write *On Rebuke and Grace*. While he thoroughly sweeps away such objections at length, he reduces his adversaries' argument to this summary: 'O man, in the commandment learn what you ought to do; in correction, learn that you do not have it by your own fault; in prayer, learn from where you may receive what you need.' He makes essentially the same argument in *The Spirit and the Letter*, where he teaches that God does not measure His commandments by the strength of man, but when He commands what is right, He freely gives His elect the power to fulfill it. This does not require a lengthy dispute. For in this case we are not alone — Christ and all the apostles stand with us. Let those who disagree consider how well they will fare when they pit themselves against such adversaries. Does Christ, who testifies that we can do nothing without Him, any the less rebuke and discipline those who did evil without Him? Does He any the less call every person to devote themselves to good works? How severely does Paul reprove the

Corinthians for neglecting love? And yet he prays to God that that same love would be given to them. He testifies in Romans that it is not of the one who wills nor of the one who runs but of God who shows mercy — and yet he never stops afterward exhorting, encouraging, and rebuking. Why then do they not take issue with the Lord for wasting His effort by requiring from people what only He can give, and by punishing what is done through lack of His grace? Why do they not tell Paul to spare those in whose hands it is not to will or to run, but only in the mercy of God who goes before them — a mercy which in some cases He has withheld? As if the Lord did not have a very good reason for His manner of teaching — a reason readily found by those who seek it reverently. But how much exhortation, admonition, and rebuke can accomplish on their own in changing the mind, Paul makes clear when he writes that neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth actually accomplishes anything. So we see that Moses establishes the commandments of the law with great authority, and the prophets call people to account sharply and threaten transgressors — and yet they freely confess that people only become wise when a heart is given to them to understand. They confess that it is God's own work to circumcise hearts, to give hearts of flesh in place of hearts of stone, to write His law on the inmost parts of people — and finally, in renewing souls, to make His teaching effective.

What purpose, then, do exhortations serve? This purpose: when they are despised by the wicked with a stubborn heart, they will stand as witness against those people when they come to the Lord's judgment seat — and even now they strike and press against their conscience. However much the most corrupt person mocks

them, he cannot disprove them. But you might ask: what can wretched people do if the softness of heart required for obedience has been withheld from them? The real question is: why does the person excuse himself, when he can blame the hardness of his heart on no one but himself? So the wicked, who would gladly laugh exhortations away if they could, are beaten down by their force whether they will it or not. But the chief benefit toward the faithful is what must be chiefly considered. Since the Lord works all things in them by His Spirit, He does not abandon the instrument of His word — He uses it with full effect. Let this therefore stand as true: all the strength of the godly rests in the grace of God, according to the prophet's word: 'I will give them a new heart that they may walk in My statutes' (Ezekiel 11:19). But you might ask: why then are they admonished of their duty instead of simply being left to the direction of the Holy Spirit? Why are they moved by exhortation, since they can make no greater progress than the Spirit's prompting produces? Why are they rebuked if they go astray, since they fell by the inevitable weakness of the flesh? 'O man, who are you to lay down a law for God?' If it is His pleasure that we be prepared by exhortation to receive the very grace by which that exhortation is obeyed, what is there in this arrangement for you to find fault with? Even if exhortations and rebukes did nothing else for the godly but reprove them of sin, they would on that basis alone be far from useless. As it is, since the Holy Spirit working inwardly uses them powerfully to inflame desire for goodness, to shake off laziness, to remove the pleasure and poison-sweetness of wickedness, and to produce instead a hatred and loathing of it — who would dare say they are superfluous? If anyone requires a plainer answer, here it is: God works in His elect in

two ways — inwardly by His Spirit, and outwardly by His word. By His Spirit, enlightening their minds and shaping their hearts to love and keep justice, He makes them new creatures. By His word, He stirs them to desire, seek, and attain that same renewal. By both together He displays the effective working of His hand, in proportion to how He distributes His grace. When He sends that same word to the reprobate — though not for their amendment — He makes it serve another purpose: it presses their conscience even now, and on the day of judgment it makes them all the more without excuse. So even though Christ declares that no one comes to Him except those the Father draws, and that the elect come after hearing and being taught by the Father (John 6:44), He does not therefore neglect the office of teacher. He calls diligently with His voice those who must also be inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit if they are to benefit at all. And Paul teaches that teaching is not wasted even on the reprobate, for to them it is 'the fragrance from death to death' — and yet still a fragrance pleasing to God (2 Corinthians 2:16).

Our opponents work very hard at piling up Scripture testimonies — they do this deliberately, so that even if they cannot overpower us with the weight of any single argument, they may overwhelm us with sheer numbers. But as in battle, when it comes to hand-to-hand combat, a larger but weaker army — however impressive its display — is broken and routed by a few well-placed blows, so it will be very easy for us to overthrow them with their whole assembly. For since the passages they misuse against us, when divided into their categories, all come down to a few key points, one answer will serve for many of them — so there is no need to spend time dissolving each one separately. Their main

force lies in the commandments, which they believe are proportioned to our strength, so that whatever is shown to be required by the one must necessarily be achievable by the other. They therefore go through commandment after commandment and use them to measure the extent of our ability. They argue: either God is mocking us when He charges us with holiness, godliness, obedience, chastity, love, and gentleness, and when He forbids us uncleanness, idolatry, unchasteness, anger, theft, pride, and the like — or else He requires only things that are within our power. We may sort all the commandments they pile together into roughly three categories. Some require our initial conversion to God. Some speak simply of keeping the law. Others command us to continue in the grace of God we have already received. We will first address them in general, then turn to the specific categories. It has long been a common practice to extend the reach of the law's commandments to human power, and it has some plausibility — but it proceeded from the grossest ignorance of the law. Those who think it offensive to say that keeping the law is impossible rest on this argument: that otherwise the law was given in vain. But they speak as if Paul had never written a word about the law. I ask them: what is meant by these statements — that the law was added because of transgressions; that through the law comes knowledge of sin; that the law produces sin; that the law entered so that sin might increase (Galatians 3:10; Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7)? Was the law meant to be scaled down to our strength so that it would not be given in vain? Or was it set far above us precisely in order to expose our weakness? The same apostle defines the fulfillment of the law as love (1 Timothy 1:5). But when he prays for the

Thessalonians' hearts to be filled with love, he thereby confesses that the law sounds in our ears to no profit unless God pours its full requirement into our hearts (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Truly, if Scripture taught nothing more than that the law is a rule of life we ought to follow with our best effort, I would agree with their position without hesitation. But since Scripture carefully and clearly sets out the many purposes of the law, it is better to consider through that fuller account what the law can actually accomplish in man. For the present argument, what Scripture teaches is this: as soon as the law has stated what we ought to do, the power to obey it comes from God's goodness — and therefore the law drives us to prayer, so that we may ask God for what we lack. If there were only the commandment with no promise attached, then our strength might be tested against whether it was sufficient to answer the commandment. But since the commandments come with promises that declare that not only our help but our entire ability rests in the aid of God's grace, those promises testify far more than adequately that we are entirely unfit and far from sufficient to keep the law. Let it therefore no longer be insisted that our strength must be proportional to God's commandments, as if the Lord had calibrated His standard of justice to our level of weakness. Rather, His promises should teach us how unready we are in ourselves — we who need His grace in every respect. But they ask: who would believe that the Lord appointed His law for senseless blocks of wood? No one is trying to persuade anyone of that. The wicked are no blocks of wood — when taught by the law that their desires are at war with God, they are convicted by their own testimony. Nor are the godly mere blocks — when the law reminds them of their weakness, they flee to grace. To this

purpose belong these sayings of Augustine: 'The Lord commands things we cannot do, so that we may know what we ought to ask of Him.' 'The commandments are of great value, if so much is granted to free will that the grace of God may be honored the more.' 'Faith obtains what the law commands — indeed, the law commands precisely so that faith may obtain what the law commands. Indeed, God requires faith itself of us, but finds nothing to require unless He first gives what He is to find.' And again: 'Let God give what He commands, and command what He will.'

This will become even clearer when we examine the three categories of commandments mentioned above. The Lord frequently commands in both the law and the prophets that we turn to Him. Yet the prophet in turn responds: 'Turn me, Lord, and I shall be turned — for after You turned me, I repented.' God commands us to circumcise the uncircumcised foreskin of our heart, yet through Moses He declares that this circumcision is done by His own hand. He everywhere requires newness of heart, but elsewhere He testifies that it is given by Himself. 'What God promises,' says Augustine, 'we do not achieve by free will or nature — He Himself accomplishes it by grace.' This is the same point Augustine notes in the fifth rule of Ticonius: that we must carefully distinguish between the law and the promises, between commandments and grace. Away, then, with those who derive from the commandments a measure of human ability toward obedience in a way that destroys the grace of God by which the commandments themselves are fulfilled. The commandments of the second sort are direct — they tell us to honor God, to serve Him and cleave to His will, to keep His commandments, and to follow His teaching. And yet innumerable passages testify that whatever righteousness, holiness,

godliness, or purity we have is His gift. The third sort was illustrated by the exhortation of Paul and Barnabas to the faithful, as Luke records — that they should continue in the grace of God. But where the strength for that perseverance is to come from, Paul himself states in another place: 'Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord.' In another place he tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit, with whom we have been sealed until the day of redemption. But since this requirement could not be fulfilled by people on their own, he prays it for the Thessalonians from God — that God would count them worthy of His holy calling and fulfill in them every good purpose and work of faith. Likewise in his second letter to the Corinthians, when treating the subject of charitable giving, he repeatedly calls for their willing and godly generosity — and yet a little later he thanks God for having put it into the heart of Titus to take on the task of exhorting them. If Titus could not even use his own mouth to exhort others except insofar as God moved him, how could the others have been willing to give unless God Himself had directed their hearts?

The more clever among them find a way to parry all these testimonies by suggesting that nothing prevents us from combining our own efforts with God's help for our weak endeavors. They also bring in passages from the prophets where the work of our conversion appears to be divided between God and us, such as: 'Turn to Me, and I will turn to you.' We have shown above what kind of help the Lord provides, and there is no need to repeat it here. I ask only this one concession: that it is false to conclude that we have the power to fulfill the law simply because God commands obedience to it. It is evident that the grace of the Lawgiver is both necessary for us and promised to us for the fulfilling of all His com-

mandments. From this it plainly follows that at least more is required of us than we are able to supply. That statement of Jeremiah cannot be explained away by any clever argument: that the covenant God made with the ancient people was void because it was only of the letter, and that it could be established only when the Spirit came to frame their hearts to obedience. Nor does 'Turn to Me and I will turn to you' support their error. For what is meant there is not the turning of God by which He renews our hearts to repentance, but the turning by which He shows Himself gracious and merciful in outward blessings — just as through adversity He sometimes shows His displeasure. When the people, afflicted with many miseries and calamities, complained that God had turned away from them, He answered that they would not lack His favor if they returned to upright living and to Him who is the pattern of righteousness. The passage is therefore wrongly twisted when it is made to suggest that the work of our conversion is divided between God and man. We have treated this subject briefly here because the proper place to address it at length is when we come to treat of the law.

Their second line of argument is much like the first. They cite the promises in which God makes a covenant with our will, such as: 'Seek good and not evil, and you shall live.' 'If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good things of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword — for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' And: 'If you put away your abominations from My sight, then you will not be driven out. If you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God and observe all His commandments which I command you today, then the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.' And simi-

lar passages. They think — awkwardly and as if in mockery — that the benefits God offers in His promises are assigned to our own will, as if it were in our power to secure them or throw them away. It is easy to make this argument sound impressive with eloquent complaints: that the Lord is cruelly mocking us when He declares that His favor depends on our will, if that will is not in our power; that God's generosity would be a fine thing indeed if He set His benefits before us while we had no power to take them; and that there is something remarkable about promises that depend on an impossibility and can therefore never be fulfilled. We will address conditional promises more fully in another place, where it will be plain that there is no absurdity in their impossible fulfillment. As for the present question: I deny that God is unkindly mocking us when He calls us to merit His benefits, knowing us to be utterly unable to do so. For since the promises are offered both to the faithful and to the wicked, they serve a purpose with both groups. Just as God's commandments prick the conscience of the wicked so that they cannot enjoy their sins in complete forgetfulness of His judgments, so in His promises He brings them, in a sense, as witnesses of their own unworthiness of His goodness. Who could deny that it is entirely just and fitting that the Lord should bless those who honor Him and punish those who despise His majesty according to His severity? Therefore God acts rightly and appropriately when, in His promises to the wicked who are bound in the chains of sin, He attaches the condition that they will receive His benefits only if they depart from their wickedness — or at least so that they may understand how rightly they are excluded from the things that belong to the true worshippers of God. Furthermore, since God seeks by every means to stir up the faithful to call upon

His grace, it is entirely fitting that He should also use promises for this purpose — just as we have shown that commandments have been profitably used toward them. Being informed of God's will through His commandments, we are reminded of our own misery — how far our whole heart falls short — and we are thereby stirred to call upon His Spirit to direct us in the right way. And because our sluggishness is not sufficiently sharpened by commandments alone, promises are added to allure us with a certain sweetness to love righteousness. And the more we desire righteousness, the more fervently we will seek God's favor. Notice, then, how in these conditions — 'if you will' and 'if you will hear' — the Lord gives us neither the power to will nor the power to hear, and yet He does not mock us for lacking that power.

Their third line of argument is closely related to the two previous ones. They bring forward passages in which God rebukes the ungrateful people and says that it was entirely their own fault that they did not receive from His tender love all the good things He intended for them. Among such passages are these: 'The Amalekite and the Canaanite are before you, and you will fall by their sword, because you refused to obey the Lord.' 'Because I called and you did not answer, I will do to this house what I did to Shiloh.' And: 'This nation did not hear the voice of the Lord their God, nor accept correction, therefore they are rejected by the Lord.' And: 'Because you hardened your heart and would not obey the Lord, all these evils have come upon you.' How, they ask, could such rebukes be laid against the people if they could readily answer: 'We loved prosperity and feared adversity, but in failing to obey the Lord in order to obtain the one and avoid the other, we were unable to do otherwise, because we were subject to sin's dominion.'

Therefore these evils should not be charged to us, since it was not in our power to avoid them.' But setting aside the appeal to necessity — which is a weak and sickly defense — I ask them whether they can clear themselves of all fault. For if they are found guilty of any fault, the Lord has every reason to reproach them for bringing upon themselves the loss of His mercy through their own perversity. Let them answer, then, whether they can deny that their stubborn will was the cause of their stubbornness. If they find the source of the evil within themselves, why do they look everywhere else for external causes, as if they were not the authors of their own destruction? And if it is true that sinners are both deprived of God's benefits and punished through their own fault and no one else's, then there is every reason for them to hear these rebukes from God's mouth — so that, if they persist stubbornly in their faults, they may learn in their misery to accuse and hate their own wickedness rather than charge God with cruel injustice. And if they retain any willingness to be taught, they may grow weary of the sins through whose deserts they see themselves miserable and ruined, and may return to the right way — acknowledging with sincere confession what the Lord recounts in rebuking them. That such prophetic rebukes had this effect on the godly is shown by Daniel's solemn prayer in chapter nine. For the first use — making sinners feel responsible — we see an example in the Jews, to whom Jeremiah was commanded to declare the cause of their miseries, even though the outcome had already been foreordained by the Lord: 'You shall speak all these words to them, and they will not listen; you will call to them, and they will not answer.' To what end, then, was he sent to preach to deaf ears? So that even against their will and unwillingness, they might understand that what they

heard was true — and that it would be wicked sacrilege to lay on God the blame for evils that rested in themselves. These few answers will enable you to make easy work of the infinite heap of testimonies that the enemies of God's grace customarily pile together — drawn from both commandments and denunciations against lawbreakers — in order to erect an idol of free will. It is said reproachfully in the Psalms of the Jews: 'A perverse generation that did not make their heart upright.' In another psalm the prophet urges the people of his day not to harden their hearts, because all the fault of stubbornness rests in the perversity of people themselves. But it is foolish to conclude from this that the heart is pliable in either direction, since the preparation of the heart belongs to God alone. The psalmist says: 'I have inclined my heart to keep Your commandments' — expressing his willing and wholehearted devotion to God. Yet he does not boast of being the author of that inclination, which he confesses in the same psalm to be God's gift. We must therefore hold firmly in mind Paul's exhortation: he urges the faithful to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling — because it is the Lord who works both the willing and the doing. He does assign them duties and calls them to activity, so that they will not give themselves over to the laziness of the flesh. But by commanding fear and carefulness he so humbles them that they remember the very thing they are commanded to do is properly God's work. He plainly indicates that the faithful work, so to speak, passively — insofar as power is supplied to them from heaven — so that they should claim nothing at all for themselves. Therefore when Peter urges us to add diligence to our faith, he is not granting us a second separate ability to act on our own, but only shaking off the sluggishness of the flesh by which faith itself is

so often smothered. Paul's words 'Do not quench the Spirit' serve the same purpose, since laziness often creeps over the faithful if not checked. But if anyone concludes from this that it lies within their own choice to nurture the light offered to them, that ignorance is easily corrected: because the very diligence Paul requires comes from God alone. We are also frequently commanded to cleanse ourselves from all defilement — and yet the Holy Spirit claims for Himself alone the work of sanctification. Finally, that the same thing which belongs properly to God is also attributed in a transferred sense to us is clear from John's words: 'Whoever is born of God keeps himself.' Those who promote free will seize on this as if we were kept safe partly by God's power and partly by our own — as though the very safekeeping the apostle mentions had not come from heaven. For this reason Christ also prays His Father to keep us from evil, and we know that the godly, while they fight against Satan, gain the victory through no army or weapons of their own, but only through the armor and weapons of God. So when Peter commanded us to purify our souls in the obedience of truth, he immediately added as a correction: 'by the Holy Spirit.' Finally, John briefly shows how all human strength is powerless in the spiritual battle when he says that those born of God cannot sin, because God's seed abides in them. And in another place he gives the reason: because our faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

A testimony from the law of Moses is also raised against us, and it appears to carry considerable weight against our position. After publishing the law, Moses declares to the people: 'For this commandment that I command you today is not too difficult for

you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven... but the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it' (Deuteronomy 30:11).

If this is taken as a plain statement about the commandments themselves, I grant it would not be without some force in the present argument. Though it might be easy enough to dismiss it by saying that Moses is speaking not of how easy the law is to keep but of how clearly it is known, even that response might leave some doubt. But the apostle, who is no uncertain interpreter, removes all doubt — for he affirms that Moses was here speaking of the doctrine of the gospel. If any stubborn person insists that Paul violently distorted those words to make them refer to the gospel, that boldness would not be without impiety, and there is sufficient reason apart from apostolic authority to refute it. For if Moses spoke only of the commandments, he was filling the people with a most empty confidence. What else would they have done but plunged headlong to ruin, if they had taken on themselves the keeping of the law as a thing within their own ability? Where is the supposed readiness to keep the law, if the only access to it ends in a headlong fall to destruction? Therefore nothing is more certain than that Moses in these words was pointing to the covenant of mercy, which he had published alongside the strict demands of the law. For just a few verses earlier he had taught that our hearts must be circumcised by the hand of God so that we may love Him. He therefore placed this ease he speaks of — not in human strength, but in the help and power of the Holy Spirit who performs His work mightily in our weakness. Indeed the passage should not be understood simply as referring to commandments at all, but rather to the promises of the gospel — which are so far

from establishing any human power to attain righteousness that they utterly overthrow it. Recognizing this, Paul uses this very testimony (Romans 10:8) to prove that salvation is offered in the gospel not under the hard and impossible condition of the law — which demands that only those who have fulfilled all the commandments shall attain it — but under a condition that is easy, ready, and fully accessible. This testimony therefore gives no support to claims of freedom in the human will (Deuteronomy 30:11).

There are also certain other passages commonly objected, in which God appears to withdraw His supporting grace, test people, and wait to see what they will do with their effort — such as Hosea: 'I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face' (Hosea 5:15). It would be foolish, they argue, for the Lord to observe whether Israel would seek His face unless their minds were pliable and could bend themselves to one side or the other of their own will. As if it were not God's customary way in the prophets to make a show of despising and casting off His people until they have amended their lives. But what exactly will our opponents derive from such threatening passages? If they mean to conclude that a people forsaken by God can arrange their own salvation, all of Scripture will cry out against them. If they acknowledge that God's grace is necessary for conversion, why do they dispute with us? The truth is they grant it as necessary but still insist on preserving man's own power alongside it. How do they prove that? Certainly not from this passage or any like it. For there is a great difference between stepping back from a person and watching what he will do when left entirely to himself, and supplying modest help proportional to his limited strength. What do such expressions mean, then? I answer that they are equivalent

to God saying: 'Since this stubborn people have profited nothing from My admonishing, exhorting, and rebuking, I will withdraw for a time, sit quietly, and let them be afflicted. I will see if, after long miseries, they will at last begin to remember Me and seek My face.' God's going far away signifies the withdrawal of prophecy; His watching what people will do signifies that He, keeping silence and hiding Himself as it were, for a time exercises them with various afflictions. He does both of these things to humble us the more. We would be hardened rather than improved by the scourges of adversity, unless He shaped us to responsiveness by His Spirit. Therefore, when the Lord — offended and, in a manner, wearied by our stubborn obstinacy — temporarily withdraws Himself by taking away His word through which He normally gives us a certain presence of Himself, and makes a test of what we would do in His absence, it is completely wrong to conclude from this that there is any power of free will for Him to observe and test. He does this for one purpose only: to drive us to acknowledge that we are nothing in ourselves (Hosea 5:15).

They also bring in their defense the common manner of speaking found both in Scripture and in ordinary life. Good works are called ours, and Scripture says we do what is holy and pleasing to God just as readily as it says we commit sins. If sins are justly attributed to us as proceeding from us, then by the same reasoning something in righteous deeds ought also to be assigned to us. It would make no sense, they say, to speak of us as doing things when we are moved by God like stones, incapable of any motion of our own. So while they grant the chief part to God's grace, these expressions of speech show that our effort still plays a secondary role. If the argument rested only on good works being called ours, I

would respond that daily bread is also called ours when we pray for God to give it to us. What does the title of possession prove, except that by God's generosity and free gift the thing becomes ours — even though it was not naturally ours? So either let them mock the same logic in the Lord's Prayer, or let them stop treating it as an absurdity that good works are called ours, when we have no ownership in them except by God's liberality. But it is somewhat stronger when Scripture frequently says that we ourselves worship God, obey the law, and practice good works. Since these are the proper activities of mind and will, how can they be attributed both to the Holy Spirit and to us, unless there is some combining of our effort with God's power? We can escape from these entanglements easily if we consider carefully how the Spirit of the Lord works in holy people. The comparison our opponents push so aggressively against us misses the point entirely — who is so foolish as to think that the motion of a person is no different from the throwing of a stone? Nothing of the kind follows from our doctrine. We count among the natural powers of man: to approve and refuse, to will and not will, to strive and to resist — that is, to approve vanity and refuse perfect goodness, to will evil and be unwilling toward good, to strive after wickedness and resist righteousness. What does the Lord do with this? If it is His will to use that perversity as an instrument of His wrath, He directs and appoints it to whatever end He pleases, so that by an evil hand He may execute His good work. Shall we then compare a wicked man who serves God's power in this way — while he labors only to obey his own desire — to a stone thrown by outside force, carried along with no motion, no sense, and no will of its own? We see how great the difference is. But what does God do in good things — which is the chief question?

When He establishes His kingdom in the faithful, He by His Spirit restrains their will so that it is no longer driven about by wandering desires according to nature's inclination. So that the will may be bent toward holiness and righteousness, He bends, shapes, fashions, and directs it to the standard of His righteousness. And so that it will not stumble and fall, He establishes and confirms it with the strength of His Spirit. For this reason Augustine writes: 'You will say to me: then we are wrought upon, and do not work ourselves. Indeed you both work and are wrought upon — and you work well when you are being wrought upon by what is good. The Spirit of God who works in you helps those who work, and calls Himself a helper because you also do something.' In the first part he teaches that man's working is not abolished by the Holy Spirit's moving, because the will belongs to human nature, which is guided to aspire toward goodness. But when he immediately adds that by the title 'helper' it may be gathered that we too do something, we must not take this as if he were assigning us some separate and independent role. Rather, because he did not want to encourage laziness in us, he pairs God's working with ours in such a way that the willing belongs to our nature but the willing well belongs to grace. This is why he had said a little earlier: 'Unless God helps us, we will not be able to overcome — indeed, we will not even be able to fight at all.'

From all this it is clear that the grace of God — as the word is used when we speak of regeneration — is the rule of the Spirit directing and governing the will of man. It cannot govern the will unless it also corrects it, reforms it, and renews it — which is why we say that regeneration begins with the destruction of what is our own. It must also move the will, stir it, drive it forward, carry it

along, and hold it firm. Therefore we rightly say that all the actions proceeding from the renewed will are wholly and entirely the work of that grace alone. At the same time we do not deny what Augustine teaches: that the will is not destroyed by grace but rather restored. For both of these things stand together very well: that man's will is said to be restored when its faultiness and perversity are reformed and it is directed to the true standard of righteousness — and also that a new will is said to be created in man, since it is so defiled and corrupted that it needs to put on an entirely new nature. There is therefore no reason why we should not also say that we ourselves do what the Spirit of God does in us — even though our own will, considered in itself, contributes nothing that can be separated from His grace. We must therefore keep in mind what we have already cited from Augustine: that some people vainly search for some good in the human will that is truly its own. Whatever people try to mix from the strength of free will into the grace of God, they are only corrupting grace — like diluting wine with muddy and bitter water. But even though whatever good is in the human will proceeds from the sole impulse of the Holy Spirit, because willing is naturally planted in us it is not without reason that what God claims the credit for is said to be done by us. First, because everything He works in us by His goodness belongs to us — so long as we understand that it is not of ourselves. Second, because the mind is ours, the will is ours, and the effort is ours — it is these that He directs toward good.

The other testimonies they scrape together here and there will not trouble even those of modest understanding who have fully grasped the answers given above. They cite the statement from Genesis: 'Its desire is for you, and you shall rule over it.' They in-

interpret this as referring to sin, as if the Lord was promising Cain that sin's power would not overcome his mind if he would labor to subdue it. We say it fits the context far better to read this as spoken about Abel. For God's purpose there was to rebuke the wickedness of the envy that Cain had conceived against his brother, and He does so on two grounds. First, that Cain was vainly scheming to surpass his brother in God's sight, before whom only righteousness receives honor. Second, that he was far too ungrateful for the benefit God had already given him — being unable to bear his brother even though that brother was under his authority. But lest we be thought to embrace this interpretation only because the other is against us, let us grant that God was speaking about sin. If so, then God is either making a promise or issuing a command. If a command — we have already shown that commands do not prove human ability. If a promise — where is its fulfillment? For Cain became subject to sin, over which he should have had dominion. Someone will say the promise contained an implicit condition, as if God had said he would have victory if he strove for it. But who would accept such a twisted interpretation? For if this dominion refers to sin, no one can doubt that it is spoken in the form of a command — which does not determine what we are able to do but what we ought to do, even if it is beyond our power. In any case, both the subject matter and the grammatical structure require that a comparison be made between Cain and Abel — for it was only by his own wicked conduct that the older brother came to be placed below the younger.

They also use the apostle's statement: 'It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.' From this they conclude that something exists in man's will and effort

which, though weak in itself, when helped by God's mercy is not without successful results. But if they carefully weighed what Paul is actually discussing there, they would not so rashly misuse this sentence. I know they can bring forward Origen and Jerome in support of their interpretation — and I could set Augustine against them. But what those writers thought is not what matters — what matters is what Paul meant. Paul is there teaching that salvation is prepared only for those to whom the Lord is pleased to grant His mercy, and that ruin and destruction await all those He has not chosen. Using Pharaoh as an example of the reprobate's condition, and having confirmed the certainty of free election through Moses's testimony — 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy' — he draws the conclusion: 'So then it does not depend on man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.' If this were understood to mean that willing or running are insufficient because they are too weak for so great a weight, Paul's statement would have been poorly framed. Away then with such word-play — 'it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, therefore there is some willing and some running.' Paul's meaning is simply this: it is not the will, it is not the running that secures the way of salvation — it is the mercy of God alone. He says nothing different here than he says in Titus, where he writes that the goodness and kindness of God appeared not through works of righteousness which we had done, but according to His infinite mercy. The very people who use this argument — that Paul must mean there is some willing and some running since he said it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs — would not allow me to reason the same way: namely, that we have done some good works, since Paul says we have not obtained God's goodness by the good works we have done. If they

see the flaw in that argument, let them open their eyes and they will see that their own argument has the same defect. For Augustine's reasoning is sound: if it were said 'it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs' simply because willing and running by themselves are insufficient, then by the same logic we could say 'it is not of the mercy of God' because mercy alone does not work it. Since that conclusion is absurd, Augustine rightly concludes that the statement means this: there is no good will in man unless the Lord prepares it — not that we should not will and run, but because God works both in us. No less unsuitably do some twist Paul's statement 'we are co-workers with God' — which without doubt refers only to ministers of the word. They are called co-workers with God not because they bring anything of their own, but because God uses their service after He has made them fit and equipped them with the necessary gifts.

They bring forward Ecclesiasticus — a book whose authority, as is well known, is disputed. But even if we do not reject it — as we would be within our rights to do — what does it actually testify for free will? It says that when man was created he was left in the hand of his own counsel; that commandments were given to him, which if he kept them would preserve him; that before man was set life and death, good and evil; and that whatever he chose would be given to him. Granted that man received from his creation the power to choose either life or death. What if we answer on the other side that he lost that power? It is certainly not my intention to dispute with Solomon, who affirms that man was created upright at the beginning and forged for himself many schemes. But since man in straying lost — as if in a shipwreck — both himself and all his good things, it does not follow that everything belong-

ing to the original creation belongs equally to his corrupted and fallen nature. My answer, therefore, to this author of Ecclesiasticus, whoever he may be — and not to him alone — is this: if you intend to instruct man to seek within himself the power to attain salvation, your authority does not carry enough weight with us to prejudice the undoubted word of God, even in the slightest. But if your aim is only to restrain the malice of the flesh, which — by blaming its evils on God — seeks a vain defense for itself, and you therefore reply that uprightness was given to man so it might be clear that he himself was the cause of his own destruction — then I willingly agree. Provided you also agree with me in this: that by his own fault he is now stripped of the gifts with which God clothed him at the beginning. Let us then together confess that he now needs a physician far more than a defender.

Our opponents also frequently cite Christ's parable of the traveler who was beaten by robbers and left half dead on the road. It is well known that nearly all the church writers use this story as a picture of humanity's ruined condition. From it, our opponents argue that sin and the devil have not so completely crippled man that no remnants of his original goodness remain — since the text says he was left half alive. Where is this half life, they ask, unless some portion of right reason and will survived? But if I were to refuse to accept their allegorical reading altogether, what could they do? There is no doubt the fathers invented this allegorical interpretation beyond the plain meaning of the Lord's words. Allegories may not go further than Scripture itself leads — they are certainly not sufficient on their own to establish doctrine. And there are good reasons why I could, if I chose, overturn this interpretation entirely — because the Word of God does not leave man half alive but

teaches that he is completely dead as far as the blessed life is concerned. When Paul speaks of our redemption, he does not say we were healed when we were half dead and half alive, but that we were raised up when we were dead. He does not call on those who are half alive to receive the light of Christ, but on those who are sleeping and buried. The Lord Himself speaks the same way when He says that the hour is coming when the dead will rise again at His voice. How could anyone seriously set this light allegory against so many clear passages of Scripture? But suppose we grant this allegory the force of genuine testimony — what would our opponents actually get from it? Man is half alive, and therefore something safe remains in him. I grant it: he retains a mind capable of understanding, though it cannot penetrate to heavenly and spiritual wisdom; he retains genuine judgment about honesty; he retains some sense of God, though he does not reach the true knowledge of God. But what do all these things accomplish? They certainly cannot take from us Augustine's conclusion — which the schools themselves have accepted as their common teaching — that after man's fall, the freely given gifts on which salvation depends were taken away from him, and that his natural gifts were corrupted and defiled. Let this truth remain firm and unshakable: the mind of man is so estranged from the righteousness of God that it conceives, desires, and pursues all wickedness, filthiness, and wrongdoing; his heart is so thoroughly soaked in the poison of sin that it breathes out nothing but corruption. And even when people display some goodness outwardly, the mind remains wrapped in hypocrisy and deceit, and the heart entangled in inward perverseness.

THE SIXTE CHAPTER. ¶ THAT MANNE BEYNG LOSTE, MUST SEKE FOR RE- DEMPTION IN CHRIST.



Since all humanity perished in Adam, the dignity and nobility of our original creation does us little good — it only adds to our shame — until God appears as our Redeemer in the person of His only begotten Son, who does not recognize people defiled and corrupted by sin as His own work. Therefore, since we have fallen from life into death, all the knowledge of God as Creator that we have discussed would be useless unless faith followed — faith that presents God to us as a Father in Christ. The natural order was this: the created world should be a school where we learn godliness, and from there we would pass on to eternal life and perfect happiness. But since our fall, wherever we turn our eyes — upward or downward — God's curse presents itself to our sight. That curse, which grips and encompasses innocent creatures because of our fault, must inevitably overwhelm our own souls with despair. Although God wills that His fatherly love still appears to us in many ways, we cannot conclude from looking at the world that He is our Father — because our conscience inwardly convicts us and shows that our sin gives God just cause to disown us as His

children. Beyond this, we are burdened by laziness and ingratitude: our minds are blinded and cannot see the truth, and all our senses are so disordered that we maliciously rob God of His glory. We must therefore come to Paul's statement: since the world, through its own wisdom, did not know God in the wisdom of God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. By 'the wisdom of God' Paul means the magnificent stage of heaven and earth, furnished with countless wonders, through which we should have wisely come to know God. But because we profited so poorly from it, He calls us back to faith in Christ — which the unbelieving despise as foolishness. Therefore, although the preaching of the cross does not agree with human reasoning, we ought to embrace it humbly if we desire to return to God our Creator, so that He may once again be our Father. Since the fall of the first man, no knowledge of God has been sufficient for salvation apart from the Mediator. Christ is not speaking only of His own era but is speaking of all ages when He says that eternal life is to know the Father, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. All the more shameful, then, is the thoughtlessness of those who claim to open heaven to all unbelieving and godless people apart from Christ — the one whom Scripture everywhere teaches is the only door through which we enter salvation. But if anyone would limit Christ's statement only to the proclamation of the Gospel, we have a ready answer. It has been a common conviction in all ages and among all peoples that those who are estranged from God — declared accursed and children of wrath — cannot please Him without reconciliation. We can also cite Christ's answer to the woman of Samaria: 'You worship what you do not know, but we worship what we know, for salvation is from the

Jews.' In those words He both condemns as false all the religions of the Gentiles and gives the reason — the Redeemer was promised under the law to the one chosen people. It follows that no form of worship ever pleased God except that which had regard for Christ. This is why Paul affirms that all the Gentile nations were without God and without hope of life. Since John teaches that life was from the beginning in Christ and that the whole world fell away from it, we must return to that same source — Christ. And therefore Christ, as the Reconciler, declares Himself to be the life. The inheritance of heaven belongs only to God's children. But those who are not grafted into the body of the only begotten Son cannot rightly be counted among His children. John plainly testifies that those who believe in His name are made children of God. Since it is not yet my direct purpose to discuss faith in Christ fully, it is enough for now to have touched on it briefly.

God never showed Himself merciful to the ancient people, nor ever gave them any hope of grace, except through the Mediator. I will not discuss the sacrifices of the law here, through which the faithful were openly and clearly taught that salvation must be sought nowhere except in the cleansing accomplished by Christ alone. I will only say this: the blessed state of the church has always rested on the person of Christ. Although God included all of Abraham's descendants in His covenant, Paul rightly reasons that Christ is specifically the seed in whom all nations were to be blessed — because we know that not everyone born from Abraham according to the flesh was counted as his seed. Setting aside Ishmael and others, consider the two sons of Isaac — Esau and Jacob, twin brothers born from the same womb at the same time. While they were still together in their mother's womb, one was

chosen and the other rejected. How did it happen that the elder was passed over and only the younger was accepted? And how did it happen that the greater part was forsaken? Clearly, then, Abraham's seed was principally reckoned in one person, and the promised salvation was never secure until it came to Christ, whose work is to gather together what had been scattered. The first adoption of the chosen people therefore depended on the grace of the Mediator. Although Moses does not state this in plain words, it is clear enough that all the godly understood it. Even before any king had been established among the people, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, spoke of the happiness of the godly in her song: 'God will give strength to His king and will exalt the horn of His anointed.' By those words she was speaking of God blessing His church. This is confirmed by the oracle added shortly afterward: 'The priest whom I shall appoint will walk before My anointed.' There is no doubt that the heavenly Father intended the living image of Christ to be seen in David and his descendants. And so, calling the godly to the fear of God, He commands them to kiss the Son. This agrees with the Gospel statement: 'Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father.' Though the kingdom collapsed when ten tribes fell away, the covenant God had made with David and his successors had to stand. God said through the prophets: 'I will not destroy the kingdom entirely, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen; but one tribe will remain to your son.' The same promise is repeated a second and third time. It is also expressly added: 'I will afflict the seed of David, but not forever.' Shortly after: 'For the sake of His servant David, God has given a lamp in Jerusalem, to raise up a son and to preserve Jerusalem.' And when the kingdom was approaching

ruin, it was said again: 'God would not destroy Judah for the sake of His servant David, because He had promised to give a lamp to him and his sons forever.' In short, all others were passed over and only David was chosen as the one on whom God's good pleasure would rest. As it is said elsewhere: 'He rejected the tabernacle of Shiloh and the tabernacle of Joseph; He did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but He chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. He chose His servant David to shepherd Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance.' In the end, it pleased God to save His church in such a way that her safety and preservation depended on that one head. Therefore David cries out: 'The Lord is the strength of His people, the strength of the salvation of His anointed.' He immediately adds a prayer: 'Save Your people and bless Your inheritance' — meaning that the condition of the church is inseparably bound to the rule of Christ. Similarly in another place: 'Lord, save us; let the king hear us on the day we call upon him.' By those words he plainly teaches that the faithful had no other confidence in fleeing to God for help except that they were sheltered under the protection of the king. This is confirmed by another psalm: 'Lord, save us; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord' — where it is clear that the faithful are pointed back to Christ, expecting to be saved by God's hand. The same meaning appears in another prayer where the whole church calls on God's mercy: 'Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You have preserved for Yourself.' Though the psalm laments the scattering of the whole people, it prays for their restoration through the head alone. When the people were led into exile, the land was wasted, and everything was destroyed, Jeremiah lamented the ruin of the church and grieved above all that the de-

struction of the kingdom had cut off all hope from the faithful. 'Christ,' he says, 'the breath of our life, has been caught in our sins — the one of whom we said, under his shadow we shall live among the nations.' From all this it is now clear enough: because God cannot be merciful to mankind except through the Mediator, Christ was always set before the holy fathers in the time of the law as the one toward whom they could direct their faith.

Whenever comfort is promised in affliction — and especially when the deliverance of the church is described — the banner of hope and trust is raised in Christ alone. Habakkuk says: 'God went out to save His people, with His Messiah.' And whenever the prophets speak of the restoration of the church, they call the people back to the promise made to David concerning the eternal continuation of his kingdom. This is no surprise — otherwise there would have been no certainty in the covenant. The remarkable statement of Isaiah serves this purpose. When he saw that the unbelieving king Ahaz rejected the promise of Jerusalem's deliverance and immediate safety, Isaiah suddenly turned to the Messiah: 'Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a Son.' The point was this: though the king and his people stubbornly refused the promise offered them, as if they were determined to discredit God's truth, the covenant would not be made void — the Redeemer would come at His appointed time. In short, all the prophets were careful, whenever they wanted to show that God would be merciful, to set forth the kingdom of David — for on it hung redemption and everlasting salvation. So Isaiah says: 'I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the faithful mercies of David. Behold, I have given Him as a witness to the nations' — meaning that when the faithful were at their lowest, they could have no hope except through the one who

bore witness that God would be gracious toward them. Similarly, Jeremiah raised the despairing people with these words: 'The days are coming when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and then Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely.' Ezekiel said: 'I will set up one shepherd over My sheep, My servant David. I the Lord will be their God, and My servant David will be their shepherd. I will make a covenant of peace with them.' And after describing the incredible renewal of the people, Ezekiel adds: 'My servant David shall be their king, and there shall be one shepherd over them all, and I will make an everlasting covenant of peace with them.' I am drawing a few passages from among many, because my only intent is to remind readers that the hope of all the godly has always rested in Christ alone. All the other prophets speak in the same way. Hosea says: 'The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together and shall appoint for themselves one head.' He explains this more plainly afterward: 'The children of Israel will return and will seek the Lord their God and David their king.' Micah, speaking of the return of the people, says expressly: 'The king will go before them, and the Lord at their head.' Amos, meaning to celebrate the renewal of the people, says: 'In that day I will raise up the fallen tabernacle of David, and I will repair its gaps and raise up its ruins' — because the only standard of salvation was the royal glory rising again from the line of David, which is fulfilled in Christ. Therefore Zechariah, whose age was closer to the appearing of Christ, proclaims it even more plainly: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king comes to you, righteous and saved.'

This agrees with the psalm already cited: 'The Lord is the strength of the salvation of His anointed — save us' — where salvation flows from the head to the whole body.

God's will was that the Jews should be so trained by these prophecies that they would direct their eyes straight to Christ when seeking deliverance. Even when they had badly gone astray, the memory of that fundamental principle could not be erased: that God, through the hand of Christ as He had promised to David, would be the deliverer of His church, and the covenant would rest on His own free grace, by which God had adopted His chosen people. This is why, when Christ entered Jerusalem a little before His death, the children were singing: 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' It was clearly common knowledge and widely understood — the only pledge of God's mercy remaining to them lay in the coming of the Redeemer. For this reason Christ Himself, to bring His disciples to a full and clear faith in God, commanded them to believe in Him: 'You believe in God; believe also in Me.' Although faith properly speaking rises from Christ to the Father, His point is that even though faith rests in God, it gradually dissolves unless Christ serves as the means to hold it firm and steady. Otherwise the majesty of God is too high for mortal men, who crawl on the ground like worms, to reach. I therefore accept the common saying that God is the object of faith — but with an important qualification. Christ is not called the image of the invisible God without reason: this title reminds us that if we do not find God in Christ, salvation cannot be known to us. Among the Jews, the scribes and Pharisees had obscured with false inventions what the prophets said about the Redeemer. Yet Christ took it as a commonly accepted truth that there was no remedy for mankind's desperate

condition and no means of delivering the church except by the giving of the Mediator. What Paul teaches — that Christ is the end of the law — was not as widely known among the people as it should have been. But how true and certain it is appears plainly from the law and the prophets. I am not yet speaking of faith, since there will be a more fitting place for that later. For now let readers hold this as firmly established: the first step of godliness is to acknowledge God as our Father — to defend, govern, and care for us until He gathers us into the everlasting inheritance of His kingdom. From this it is plain, as we have already said, that the knowledge of God that brings salvation does not exist apart from Christ. Therefore from the beginning He has been set before all the elect, so that they might look to Him and rest all their trust in Him. Irenaeus writes in keeping with this when he says that the Father, who is immeasurable, is measured in His Son — because God has adapted Himself to the capacity of our understanding, so that His overwhelming glory would not crush our minds. Reckless people, failing to grasp this, twist a sound statement into a wicked fantasy — as though Christ contained only a portion of the deity drawn from the whole. But the statement means nothing other than that God is comprehended in Christ alone. The saying of John has always been true: 'Whoever does not have the Son does not have the Father either.' In earlier ages, many people boasted of worshipping the supreme God, maker of heaven and earth. But because they had no Mediator, it was impossible for them to truly taste God's mercy and be convinced that He was their Father. Not knowing Christ as the head, their knowledge of God was empty — and so in the end they fell into gross and vile superstitions, which exposed their own ignorance. The same is true today: the Turks loudly pro-

claim that the Creator of heaven and earth is their God, yet by turning away from Christ they substitute an idol in place of the true God.

THE SEUENTH CHAPTER. ¶ THAT THE
LAW WAS GEUEN, NOT TO HOLDE
STILL THE PEOPLE IN IT, BUT TO
NOURISH THE HOPE OF SALUATION
IN CHRIST VNTILL HIS COMYNG.



From the entire sequence of events we have traced, we can conclude that the law was added about four hundred years after Abraham's death — not to draw the chosen people away from Christ, but to keep their minds in anticipation of His coming, to kindle in them a longing for Him, and to strengthen their hope so they would not grow weary from the long wait. By 'the law' I mean not only the Ten Commandments, which lay out the rule for holy and righteous living, but also the full form of religion delivered through Moses. Moses was not made a lawgiver to abolish the blessing promised to Abraham's descendants. On the contrary, we see that everywhere he reminds the Jews of the free covenant made with their fathers — the covenant whose heirs they were — as if he had been sent to renew it. This was set forth most plainly through the ceremonies. What could be more futile and foolish than for people to offer up the repulsive smell of burning animal fat in order to reconcile themselves to God? Or to seek the washing

away of their moral filth through the sprinkling of water or blood? In short, all the religious rituals prescribed by the law — if considered on their own, apart from the shadows and figures that pointed to a corresponding reality — would amount to nothing but empty mockery. It is not without reason that both Stephen's sermon and the letter to the Hebrews give careful attention to the passage where God commands Moses to make everything concerning the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him on the mountain. For if these things had not pointed toward something spiritual, the Jews would have wasted their labor on them just as uselessly as the Gentiles wasted theirs on their worthless rituals. Those who have never seriously pursued godliness cannot endure the long lists of various rites and regulations without tedium. They not only wonder why God burdened His people with such a heap of ceremonies but even mock and ridicule them as childish games. The reason is that they do not consider the purpose behind them — and if the figures of the law are separated from that purpose, they must indeed be condemned as empty. But those very figures show that God did not command sacrifices in order to occupy His worshippers with earthly exercises; He intended to lift their minds to something higher. This is also evident from His nature: since He is spirit, He is pleased with no worship except spiritual worship. The prophets testify to this when they rebuke the Jews for sluggishness — for thinking that God found any value in sacrifices in themselves. Did the prophets intend to undermine the law? No — as true interpreters of the law, they wanted to direct people's eyes toward the goal from which the common people had strayed. From the grace offered to the Jews, it is certain that the law was not without Christ. Moses set forth this goal of their adoption: that

they should become a priestly kingdom to God. But they could not attain this unless they had access to a greater and more excellent reconciliation than the blood of animals could provide. What is less likely than Adam's children — all born into slavery to sin through inherited corruption — being raised to royal dignity and made partakers of God's glory? Such an extraordinary benefit could only come to them from a source outside themselves. And how could the right of priesthood remain in force among people who were abominable to God because of their sins, unless they had been consecrated in a holy head? Peter therefore rightly applies Moses's words to show that the fullness of grace — of which the Jews had only a taste under the law — was fully given in Christ: 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood.' The purpose of that reworking is to show that those to whom Christ appeared through the Gospel have received more than their fathers — because they are all endowed with both priestly and kingly honor, so that, trusting in their Mediator, they may boldly come before God.

We should also note in passing that the kingdom eventually established in the house of David was part of the law and fell under the ministry of Moses. It follows that Christ was set before the eyes of the old covenant people as in a double mirror — both in the tribe of Levi and in the descendants of David. As I said, they could not stand before God as either kings or priests — bound as they were by sin and death and defiled by their own corruption — apart from Christ. This confirms Paul's statement that the Jews were held under the supervision of a guardian until the seed came for whose sake the promise was given. Because Christ had not yet come in person, they were like children — too young and weak to bear the full weight of heavenly knowledge. How the ceremonies

led them by the hand to Christ has already been explained and can be understood even more clearly from the testimony of the prophets. Although the people were commanded to come daily with new sacrifices to appease God, Isaiah promised that all their sins would be cleansed with one single sacrifice. Daniel speaks in harmony with this: the priests from the tribe of Levi entered the sanctuary daily; but of the one great Priest it was declared once for all, by an oath, that He was chosen by God to be a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. In that era the anointing with oil was visible and external; but through his vision Daniel announced that a different kind of anointing was coming. I will not work through many more examples, since the author of the letter to the Hebrews, from chapter four through chapter eleven, has shown at length and clearly enough that the ceremonies are worthless and empty until we come to Christ. Concerning the Ten Commandments: Paul's lesson must also be kept in mind — that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. And another lesson: Christ is the Spirit who gives life to the letter that kills on its own. In the first of these two, Paul means that righteousness is taught in vain by commandments until Christ grants it — both through free imputation and through the Spirit of regeneration. He rightly calls Christ the fulfillment and end of the law, because knowing what God requires of us would do us no good unless He came to help us when we are fainting and crushed under an unbearable burden. Elsewhere Paul teaches that the law was given for transgressions — that is, to bring people to humility by showing them their own guilt and condemnation. Since this is the true and only preparation for seeking Christ, everything Paul says in various passages fits together consistently. At times Paul

was forced to speak narrowly of the bare law, because he was opposing false teachers who claimed that we earn righteousness through the works of the law — yet in reality the law is always clothed with the covenant of free adoption.

It is important to understand how the moral law, by showing us our guilt, leaves us without excuse and drives us to seek pardon. If it is true that the law teaches perfect righteousness, then it follows that perfectly keeping the law is perfect righteousness before God — the kind by which a person may be judged righteous at God's heavenly tribunal. Therefore, when Moses published the law, he did not hesitate to declare before heaven and earth that he had set before Israel life and death, good and evil. We cannot deny that eternal salvation belongs as its reward to perfect obedience to the law, just as the Lord has promised. But we must also examine whether we actually render that obedience — obedience upon the merit of which we could reasonably hope for that reward. It is of very little use to see eternal life set as the reward for keeping the law if we cannot know whether we can actually reach eternal life by that path. And here the weakness of the law reveals itself. Because none of us keeps the law, we are shut out from the promises of life and fall under the curse alone. I am not describing what sometimes happens — I am describing what must inevitably happen. The law's demands far exceed human ability, so a person may see the promises from a distance but never gather any fruit from them. Only one thing remains: through the law's goodness, a person may better understand his own misery — recognizing that all hope of salvation has been cut off and that death certainly hangs over him. On the other side, the terrible penalty laws press down on us — not

just a few of us, but every single person without exception. They pursue us with relentless severity, so that we see imminent death staring at us through the law.

Therefore, if we look only at the law, we can do nothing but be discouraged, confused, and driven to despair — because through it we are all condemned and cursed and shut out from the very blessedness it offers to those who worship God. Will someone ask: Is the Lord mocking us? How does it differ from mockery to hold out the hope of happiness, to call and encourage people toward it, and to declare that it lies open before them — while at the same time the entrance to it is blocked and impossible to reach? My answer is this: although the conditional promises of the law depend on perfect obedience to the law — which no one renders — they are not given in vain. When we have learned that those promises will be empty and useless for us unless God embraces us with His free goodness apart from any regard for our works, and unless we receive by faith that same goodness given to us in the Gospel, then even the conditional promises are not without their effect. God freely gives us all things, and to the overflowing of His generosity He adds this: He does not refuse our imperfect obedience but forgives whatever it falls short of full performance — and so He allows us to enjoy the fruit of the law's promises as if we ourselves had fulfilled the condition. We will not pursue this matter further here, since it will be treated at greater length when we come to discuss the justification of faith.

Our claim that it is impossible to keep the law needs to be explained and proved briefly. This view has long been considered absurd by many people — so much so that Jerome did not hesitate to call it accursed. What Jerome thought is not my concern. Let us

seek what is true. I will not labor through various philosophical distinctions about the kinds of possibility. I call something impossible if it has never happened and if God's own decree prevents it from ever happening. Looking back as far as human memory reaches, I say this: not one holy person, while clothed in a body of death, has ever reached that full perfection of love — loving God with all his heart, all his mind, all his soul, and all his strength. Nor has there been anyone who was not troubled by the pull of sinful desire. Who can deny this? I know what kind of saintly figures foolish superstition imagines for us — people whose purity the angels of heaven could hardly match — but this is contrary to both Scripture and the testimony of experience. I also say that no one in the future will reach the mark of true perfection while still burdened with a mortal body. The testimony of Scripture on this point is plain. Solomon said: 'There is not a righteous man on earth who does not sin.' David said: 'No living man will be justified before You.' Job affirms the same in many places. Most clearly of all, Paul says that the flesh desires against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. And Paul's proof that all who are under the law are subject to the curse rests on this very point: because it is written that cursed are all who do not abide in all the commandments of the law — taking it as a given that no one is able to abide in them. Whatever Scripture declares must be held as permanent and necessary. The Pelagians once challenged Augustine with the clever argument that it was an injustice to God to say He commands more than the faithful are able to perform by His grace. Augustine, to avoid their trap, conceded that the Lord could, if He chose, raise a mortal man to the purity of angels — but that He has never done so and never will, because He has declared otherwise in Scripture.

I do not deny that either. But I add this: it is inappropriate to argue about God's power in opposition to His truth. Therefore this statement is not open to caviling: that something is impossible if Scripture declares it will not be. When the disciples asked the Lord who could be saved, He answered: 'With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Augustine also argues powerfully that in this flesh we never render to God the full love we owe Him. Love, he says, follows knowledge — and no one can perfectly love God unless he has fully known God's goodness. While we journey in this world, we see through a glass and in a dim reflection; it follows that our love is imperfect. Let this stand without dispute: while we are in this flesh, it is impossible to fulfill the law — as will also be proved from Paul in another place.

To set the whole matter out more clearly, let us briefly summarize the purposes and uses of what is called the moral law. As I understand it, they fall under three headings. The first is this: by showing every person the righteousness of God — that is, the righteousness that alone is acceptable to God — the law warns, convicts, and condemns every person of his own unrighteousness. For man, blinded and intoxicated by self-love, must be driven to knowledge and confession of his own weakness and corruption. As long as his self-conceit is not clearly exposed, he swells with reckless confidence in his own strength and cannot be made to think it small, since he measures it against the standard of his own will. But as soon as he begins to compare his strength against the demands of the law, he finds reason to lower his confidence. However great his opinion of himself had been before, he immediately feels himself struggling under the enormous weight — then staggering and stumbling, and finally collapsing entirely. Schooled by the law in

this way, he sheds the arrogance that had blinded him. He must also be cured of another kind of pride — the disease of hypocrisy we mentioned. As long as he is permitted to stand on his own judgment, he devises a counterfeit righteousness in place of the real thing, and being satisfied with this, he dares to defy God's grace with fabricated righteousnesses of his own. But as soon as he is forced to weigh his life on the scales of the law, he sets aside his presumptuous claim to righteousness and sees himself as an infinite distance from true holiness. He also sees that he is full of countless vices of which he previously thought himself clean. For the evils of sinful desire are hidden in such deep and twisted inner recesses that they easily escape a person's notice. It is not without reason that the apostle says he would not have known what sinful desire was had the law not said, 'You shall not covet' (Romans 7) — because unless it is exposed from its hiding places by the law, it destroys a person so secretly that he does not even feel its deadly blow.

The law is like a mirror in which we see, first our weakness, then through our weakness our wickedness, and finally through both our condemnation — just as a mirror shows us the blemishes on our face. When a person lacks the power to pursue righteousness, he inevitably sinks in the mud of sin. After sin comes curse. And the more transgressions the law holds us guilty of, the more severe the judgment it pronounces against us. This is the point of the apostle's statement that through the law comes the knowledge of sin — for there he speaks only of the law's first use, which is demonstrated in sinners who have not yet been regenerated. Similar to this are two other statements: that the law came in so that the offense would increase, and that it is the ministry of death

that produces wrath and kills. Without doubt, the more the conscience is struck by the law's knowledge of sin, the more iniquity grows — because the violation of the law is compounded by defiance against the Lawgiver. It follows that the law arms God's wrath for the destruction of the sinner, since by itself it can only accuse, condemn, and destroy. As Augustine writes: when the Spirit of grace is absent, the law is present only to accuse and kill us. And yet saying this brings no dishonor to the law, nor takes anything from its excellence. If our will were fully shaped and directed toward obedience to the law, the knowledge of it alone would be sufficient for salvation. But because our fleshly and corrupt nature fights as an enemy against God's spiritual law and is not improved by its discipline, the law — which was given for salvation, if it had found willing hearers — turns instead into the occasion of sin and death. Since we are all proved to be transgressors, the more clearly the law reveals God's righteousness, the more fully it exposes our own wickedness on the other side. The more securely it confirms the reward of life laid up for righteousness, the more certain it makes the destruction awaiting the wicked. These statements, far from dishonoring the law, serve all the more to glorify God's generosity. For they make plain that it is our own wickedness and stubbornness that prevents us from enjoying the blessedness openly set before us in the law. And this makes God's grace — which helps us apart from any merit of our own — all the sweeter, and His mercy all the more lovely. Through this we learn that He never wearies of doing us good and heaping new gifts upon us.

When the law seals our guilt and condemnation, it does not do so — if we respond to it rightly — in order to crush us with despair or drive us headlong into ruin. The reprobate do react that way,

but that is because of their stubbornness. For the children of God, the instruction must have a different end. I grant that the apostle testifies that we are all condemned by the law's judgment, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may stand accountable to God (Romans 3:20). But the same apostle teaches elsewhere that God has shut everyone up in unbelief — not to destroy all or let all perish, but that He might have mercy on all (Romans 11:32). The purpose is that, abandoning their foolish confidence in their own strength, they may understand that they stand and are upheld only by God's hand. Stripped bare and empty, they may flee to His mercy, rest in it completely, hide themselves entirely in it, and take hold of it alone in place of the righteousness and merits that are freely given in Christ to all who sincerely desire and seek them by true faith. For in the commandments of the law, God appears only as the rewarder of perfect righteousness — which none of us possesses — and as a strict judge of wrongdoing. But in Christ His face shines full of grace and gentleness, even toward wretched and unworthy sinners.

Augustine speaks often about this benefit — seeking the help of grace — as when he writes to Hilary: 'The law commands that, striving to do what it commands and growing weary of our weakness under the law, we should learn to ask for the help of grace.' Again, to Aselius: 'The benefit of the law is to convict man of his own weakness and compel him to seek the medicine of grace that is in Christ.' Again, to Innocent of Rome: 'The law commands; grace supplies the strength to obey.' Again, to Valentine: 'God commands things we cannot do, so that we may learn what to ask of Him.' Again: 'The law was given to accuse you, so that being accused you would fear, and fearing you would seek pardon, and not

presume on your own strength.' Again: 'The law was given for this purpose: to make the great small, to show that you have no power of your own for righteousness, so that as a poor, unworthy, and needy person you would flee to grace.' Then he turns to address God and says: 'So do it, Lord; do it, merciful Lord. Command what cannot be fulfilled — yes, command what cannot be fulfilled except by Your grace. That way, when people cannot fulfill it by their own power, every mouth may be stopped and no one may think himself great. Let all be small, and let the whole world stand guilty before You.' I am not wise enough to pile up more testimonies, since this holy man has written an entire book devoted to this subject, which he entitled *On the Spirit and the Letter*. The second benefit of the law he does not describe as vividly — either because he saw it as dependent on the first, or because he did not understand it as well, or because he lacked the words to express clearly what he correctly grasped. Yet even for the reprobate, this first use of the law is not without effect. They do not go as far as the children of God — who, after their pride is broken down, are renewed and flourish again in the inner person. Instead, they are struck by the initial terror and lie still in despair. Yet even this serves to display the justice of God's judgment, as their consciences are tossed by troubled waves. The reprobate always want to evade God's judgment. Even before it is fully revealed, they are so convicted by the testimony of the law that their own consciences expose what they deserve.

The second use of the law is this: those who feel no concern for what is just and right unless compelled, when they hear the law's terrible penalties, are at least held back by the fear of punishment. They are restrained — but not because their inward attitude has changed. They are held back as if by a bridle: they keep their hands

from outward wrongdoing and suppress their perverseness within, which they would otherwise unleash freely. This does not make them any better or more righteous before God. Although fear or shame prevents them from acting on their inner intentions or openly letting their sinful desires run loose, their hearts are not turned toward the fear and obedience of God. In fact, the more they restrain themselves outwardly, the more fiercely they burn inwardly — boiling and ready to do anything and break out in any direction, if only the terror of the law did not hold them back. More than that: they deeply hate the law and despise God its Lawgiver, and if they could, they would gladly be rid of the One they cannot stand — neither when He commands what is right, nor when He punishes those who despise His majesty. In some this attitude is more hidden, in others more obvious, but it is present in all who have not been regenerated: they follow the law not by willing submission but by compulsion, resisting it under the force of fear. Yet this coerced and enforced righteousness is necessary for the common life of society. It preserves order and prevents everything from descending into chaos — because if all things were permitted to all people, everything would be thrown into turmoil. This discipline is also not without benefit for the children of God, as long as they — before their calling, still lacking the Spirit of sanctification — are still driven about by the folly of the flesh. When they are pulled back from outward lawlessness by fear of God's judgment, even though their minds are not yet tamed and they make only small progress at that stage, they are at least partly trained to bear the yoke of Christ. So when they are called, they are not completely raw and unacquainted with discipline as something foreign. This use of the law is what the apostle seems particularly to have in

mind when he says that the law was not made for the righteous but for the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane, those who strike their fathers or mothers, murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice homosexuality, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:9). By this he means that the law serves as a restraint on the wild impulses of the flesh, which would otherwise stray out of control.

Paul's statement that the law was a guardian or schoolmaster leading the Jews to Christ (Galatians 3:23) can be applied to both groups we have discussed. The first group consists of those who are overly confident in their own strength or righteousness and are therefore unfit to receive Christ's grace unless they are first emptied. The law humbles them through self-knowledge so that they may be prepared to desire what they previously thought they did not need. The second group needs a bridle to hold them back from giving the flesh such free rein that they abandon all pursuit of righteousness. Where God's Spirit does not yet govern, sinful desires can boil up so intensely that they are in great danger of dragging the soul down into the complete forgetting and despising of God. God prevents this through this remedy. Those He has appointed to the inheritance of His kingdom — if He does not regenerate them immediately — He keeps under fear through the works of the law until the time of His visitation. This is not the pure and childlike fear that ought to characterize God's children, but it is still a useful fear that, according to their capacity, serves as an introduction to true godliness. The evidence for this is so abundant that examples are hardly needed. Anyone who has ever spent time without knowing God will acknowledge that during that period the

law held him in some degree of fear and submission to God, until the time when God's Spirit regenerated him and he began to love God from the heart.

The third use of the law — which is also its principal use and most directly serves its true purpose — applies to believers, in whose hearts God's Spirit already lives and reigns. Although they have the law written and engraved on their hearts by the finger of God — that is, they are so moved and directed by the Spirit that they desire to obey God — they still benefit from the law in two ways. First, the law is an excellent means by which they can daily learn more clearly and confidently what God's will is — the will they are striving to follow — and be confirmed in their understanding of it. Consider a servant who is already fully devoted in his heart to pleasing his master: he still needs to carefully study his master's ways so that he can shape and apply himself to them. None of us should exempt ourselves from this need. No one has yet attained such great wisdom that daily instruction from the law cannot bring fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of God's will. Second, since we need not only instruction but also motivation, God's servant will draw from the law this further benefit: through frequent reflection on it, he is stirred up to obedience, strengthened in it, and pulled back from the slippery path of sin. In this way holy people must keep pressing themselves forward. However eagerly they may be pursuing God according to the Spirit, they are always weighed down by the sluggishness of the flesh, so that they do not advance with the full readiness they should. To this flesh the law is given as a whip — to prod it forward like a slow and dull donkey. And for the spiritual person as well, since he is not yet free from the burden of the flesh, the law serves as a con-

stant spur that will not let him stand still. It was with this use in mind that David praised the law with such remarkable words: 'The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the statutes of the Lord are upright, making the heart rejoice; the commandment of the Lord is pure, giving light to the eyes,' and so on. And again: 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' — and countless other things he rehearses throughout that psalm. None of this contradicts Paul's statements about the law, which show not what the law does for the regenerate but what the law in itself can give to man. Here, David describes how greatly the Lord instructs those whom He has inwardly prepared for obedience through the reading of His law. David has in view not the commandments alone, but also the promises of grace attached to them — and it is these promises that alone make what is bitter become sweet. What could be less attractive about the law if it did nothing but trouble souls with demands and drive them with dread and terror? David especially shows that he understood the Mediator through the law — for without the Mediator, there is no delight or sweetness in it.

Because some people fail to grasp this, they boldly dismiss all of Moses and bid farewell to the two tables of the law, arguing that it is not appropriate for Christians to cling to a doctrine that contains the ministry of death. Let this irreverent opinion be far from our minds. For Moses himself taught excellently that the very same law which can produce nothing but death in sinners ought to have a better and more excellent use in holy people. When he was about to die, he openly declared to the people: 'Take to heart all the words I am testifying to you today, that you may command your children to keep, to do, and to fulfill all the things written in this book of the law — for they are not empty words for you, but

they are your life.' And if no one can deny that the law contains a complete pattern of righteousness, then either we must have no rule at all for living justly and uprightly, or else we must not depart from it. There is one rule of life — not many — and it is permanent and unbending. Therefore, when David describes the life of a righteous person as continually occupied in meditating on the law, let us not restrict that to his own era, for it is most fitting for all ages until the end of the world. Do not be frightened away or turned back from being instructed by it simply because it prescribes a standard of holiness far beyond what we can perform while we carry about our mortal bodies. The law no longer acts toward us as a harsh debt collector demanding full payment before it will be satisfied. Rather, through the perfection it calls us to, it shows us a target — and striving toward that target throughout our lives is both profitable for us and fully in keeping with our duty. If we keep pressing forward in that striving, it is well. All of life is a race, and when the course is finished, the Lord will grant us to reach the mark toward which our efforts have been pressing from afar.

Now, since the law's power over the faithful is the power to exhort — not the power to bind their consciences with a curse, but only to shake off sluggishness and stir up imperfection by repeated calling — many people, when they want to express this freedom from the law's curse, say that the law has been abolished for believers. I am speaking here of the moral law only. They do not mean that the law no longer tells believers what is right, but only that the law is no longer to them what it was before — that it no longer condemns and destroys them by filling them with dread and confusion. Paul clearly teaches this kind of abrogation, and it also appears that Christ Himself addressed it — as is evident from

the fact that He went out of His way to deny that He had come to abolish the law, which would have been unnecessary unless that opinion had been widespread among the Jews. Since such an opinion could not arise without some plausible basis, it likely grew from a misunderstanding of His teaching — as most errors tend to take occasion from some element of truth. So that we do not stumble over the same stone, let us carefully distinguish what is abrogated in the law and what remains in force. When the Lord declares that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it, and that until heaven and earth pass away not a single jot of the law shall pass away but all shall be fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18), He clearly confirms that His coming takes nothing away from the outward keeping of the law. And rightly so, since He came rather to heal transgressions. Therefore the teaching of the law remains in full force for all Christians — instructing, warning, rebuking, and correcting to form and prepare us for every good work.

As for Paul's statements about the curse, it is clear that they do not apply to the law's teaching itself, but only to its power to bind the conscience. For the law not only teaches — it also authoritatively demands what it commands. If the demand is not met, if any duty falls short in any way, the law unleashes its curse like a thunderbolt. This is why the apostle says that all who are under the works of the law are subject to the curse, because it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not fulfill all' (Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26). And he says that those are 'under the works of the law' who do not place righteousness in the forgiveness of sins — the forgiveness by which we are released from the law's rigid demands. He therefore teaches that we must be freed from the law's bondage, unless we want to perish miserably under it.

But freed from which bondage? The bondage of its harsh and exacting demands — which relent nothing from the law's extremity and leave no offense unpunished. It was from this curse that Christ redeemed us by becoming a curse for us. For it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree' (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:22-23). In the following chapter Paul also says that Christ was made subject to the law in order to redeem those who were under the law — and both statements mean the same thing, for he immediately adds that we might receive the rights of adopted children. What does this mean? That we should no longer be crushed under perpetual bondage that holds our consciences gripped tight with the anguish of death. And yet this remains always unshaken: nothing is withdrawn from the authority of the law, and it ought still to be received by us with the same reverence and obedience.

The situation with the ceremonies is different — they were abolished not in their underlying meaning but only in their outward practice. The fact that Christ brought them to an end by His coming does not diminish their holiness; it actually sets them forth and makes them glorious. For just as the ceremonies would have been empty displays to the ancient people apart from the death and resurrection of Christ being shown through them, so if they had continued we could not today discern what purpose they were ordained to serve. Therefore Paul, to prove that observing them now is not only unnecessary but even harmful, teaches that they were shadows of which we now have the substance in Christ (Colossians 2:17). We see then how in the abolishing of the ceremonies the truth shines more clearly than if they still pointed from a distance — as though through a veil — to a Christ who has now plainly appeared. This is why the veil of the temple was torn in two

at Christ's death and fell down: the true and clear image of heavenly realities had come to light, having previously been only imperfectly sketched in dim and rough outlines, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews explains (Hebrews 10:1; Luke 16:16). This is what Christ's statement means: that the law and the prophets were until John, and from that time the kingdom of God has been proclaimed gladly. He does not mean that the holy fathers had no preaching that contained the hope of salvation and eternal life — but that they saw it only from a distance and under shadows, whereas we see it today in full light. John the Baptist declares why the church of God had to advance beyond those first instructions: because the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Although the cleansing of sins was truly promised through the ancient sacrifices, and the ark of the covenant was a real pledge of God's fatherly favor, all of this would have been mere shadow had it not rested on the grace of Christ — in whom alone there is perfect and lasting stability. Let this then stand firm: even though the ceremonial practices of the law have ceased, their very ending makes it all the clearer how great their benefit was before Christ's coming — and Christ, in abolishing their outward practice, confirmed and sealed their force and meaning with His death.

There is a somewhat more difficult point in what Paul writes: 'He made you alive together with Him, when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, having forgiven all your offenses, having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees that was against us and contrary to us, and He has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.' Paul seems here to extend the abolishing of the law further, so that we have nothing more to do

with its decrees. Those who interpret this passage as referring only to the moral law are wrong — they think it is the law's relentless severity rather than its teaching that is abolished. Those who examine Paul's words more carefully see that he is properly speaking about the ceremonial law, and show that this word carries this meaning more than once in Paul. In Ephesians he writes: 'He is our peace, who has made the two into one and broken down the dividing wall, abolishing in His flesh the law of commandments contained in decrees, so that He might create in Himself one new man out of the two.' There he is clearly speaking of the ceremonies, which he calls the dividing wall that separated Jews from Gentiles. I agree that the first interpreters are rightly corrected by these, but I do not think those latter interpreters fully set forth the apostle's meaning either. In Ephesians, where Paul's purpose was to inform the Ephesians about their adoption into the fellowship of Israel, he teaches that the obstacle that had kept them apart — namely the ceremonies — has been removed. The ritual washings and sacrifices by which the Jews were consecrated to the Lord were what separated them from the Gentiles. But in the letter to the Colossians, who can fail to see that something deeper is in view? The issue there is about Mosaic observances, which the false apostles were pressing on the Christian people. But just as Paul in Galatians takes that controversy further back to its ultimate source, he does the same here. If you consider the ceremonies as nothing more than required practices, why would Paul call them 'a certificate of debt against us'? Why would he place the whole substance of our redemption in the canceling of that certificate? The subject itself shows that something more profound is being considered. I believe I have reached the natural meaning of the passage,

if the following is granted — a statement written most truly by Augustine and drawn from the plain words of the apostle himself: in the Jewish ceremonies there was a confession of sins rather than a cleansing of them. What else did the worshippers do through sacrifices but confess in conscience that they were guilty of death, offering cleansings as substitutes? What else did they testify through their washings but that they were unclean? In this way, the certificate of their sin and uncleanness was renewed again and again, but the repeated testifying of it brought no discharge. This is why the apostle writes that the redemption of the offenses that had accumulated under the old covenant was accomplished at last through the death of Christ. The apostle therefore rightly calls these ceremonies 'certificates against those who observe them' — for by observing them, worshippers publicly sealed their own guilt and uncleanness. It does not contradict this that they were also partakers of the same grace we have. That grace they obtained in Christ — not in the ceremonies. Paul separates the ceremonies from Christ because at that time, as they were being practiced, they obscured Christ's glory. So we learn that the ceremonies, considered in themselves, are rightly called certificates against human salvation, because they were formal documents testifying that those who relied on them were still bound. When the false apostles tried to bind the Christian church to these ceremonies again, Paul had good reason to warn the Colossians — by showing them their deeper meaning — where they would end up if they allowed themselves to be yoked by them once more. For in doing so, Christ's benefit would be taken from them, since He, having once accom-

plished eternal cleansing, has completely abolished these daily observances, which had only been able to seal sins but could do nothing to remove them.

CHAPTER 8: AN EXPOSITION OF THE MORAL LAW



At this point I think it will be useful to include a brief exposition of the Ten Commandments. This will better confirm what I have already touched on — that the observance God once appointed remains in force. It will also give us proof of a second point: that the Jews, through the law, not only learned the true nature of godliness but were also compelled, by the terror of judgment when they saw their inability to keep it, to be drawn to the Mediator whether they wanted to be or not. In setting out what is required for true knowledge of God, we have already taught that we cannot conceive of God according to His greatness without His majesty presenting itself and binding us to worship Him. In the knowledge of ourselves, we have established this as the central point: stripped of confidence in our own strength and emptied of trust in our own righteousness, and on the other side discouraged and brought low by consciousness of our own need, we must learn complete humility and lowliness. The Lord sets forth both of these in His law. He first claims for Himself the rightful authority to govern, calling us to reverence for His divine majesty and defining what that reverence consists of. He then publishes a rule of righteousness — a righteousness against which our perverse and

crooked nature always strains, and below the perfection of which our natural power to do good falls far short. By this He convicts us both of weakness and of unrighteousness. Furthermore, the inward law that we said earlier is engraved and imprinted on the hearts of all people does in some measure teach us the same things that are to be learned from the two tables. Our conscience does not allow us to sleep in perpetual numbness — it bears witness within us and reminds us of what we owe to God, shows us the difference between good and evil, and accuses us when we stray from our duty. But mankind, wrapped in such a dense darkness of error, can barely catch even a faint glimpse of the worship that pleases God through the law of nature — and is very far from knowing it rightly. Moreover, he is so swollen with arrogance and ambition and so blinded by self-love that he cannot even look within himself and descend to learn submission, humility, and acknowledgment of his misery. Therefore — as was necessary given both our dullness and our stubbornness — the Lord gave us a written law, which would testify more clearly to what the law of nature had left too obscure, and would shake off our drowsiness and touch our minds and memories more vividly.

From the law we easily understand what we are to learn: since God is our Creator, He rightfully holds the place of our Father and Lord, and for this reason we owe Him glory, reverence, love, and fear. We are not free to follow wherever the desires of our own minds lead us — we are to depend on Him and rest only in what pleases Him. We also learn that He delights in righteousness and uprightness, that He abhors wickedness, and that therefore — unless we are willing to fall away from our Creator in wicked ingratitude — we must pursue righteousness throughout our whole lives.

For we yield to God the reverence we owe Him only when we prefer His will to our own, and it follows that there is no proper worship of Him except the keeping of righteousness, holiness, and purity. We cannot make excuses by claiming we lack the ability, as though we were bankrupt debtors unable to pay. It is not right to measure God's glory by our own capacity — whatever we may be, He always remains the same: a lover of righteousness, a hater of wickedness. Whatever He requires of us — and He can require only what is right — we are bound by nature to obey. Our inability to obey is our own fault. If we are held captive by our own sinful desires so that we are not free to obey our Father, we have no grounds to plead necessity as our defense — the evil lies within us and is to be charged to ourselves.

When we have made this much progress through the law's teaching, we must then turn that same teaching inward on ourselves, and from it draw away two things. The first is this: by comparing the law's righteousness with our own lives, we learn that we are far from satisfying God's will, and that we are therefore not worthy to have a place among His creatures — much less to be counted among His children. The second is: when we examine our own strength, we learn that it is not merely insufficient to keep the law but entirely absent. From this flows both a distrust of our own strength and a troubled, anxious state of mind. For the conscience cannot bear the weight of its guilt without God's judgment immediately appearing before it. And when God's judgment is felt, it strikes a terrifying dread of death into us. Likewise, being confronted with proofs of its own weakness, the conscience cannot help but immediately despair of its own strength. Both of these produce humility and the breaking down of self-confidence. So at

last it comes about that man, gripped by the sense of eternal death hanging over him on account of his own unrighteousness, turns to the mercy of God alone as the only refuge of salvation. Feeling that he cannot pay what the law demands, despairing of himself, he breathes again and begins to seek and look for help from another source.

Not satisfied with producing reverence for His righteousness, the Lord has also added promises and warnings to fill our hearts with love for Him and hatred of wickedness. Because our minds are too blind to be moved by the beauty of goodness alone, it pleased our most merciful Father in His tender kindness to draw us with the sweetness of rewards to love and long for Him. He therefore declares that rewards are stored up with Him for virtue, and that whoever obeys His commandments will not spend his labor in vain. He also proclaims that He not only abhors unrighteousness but that it will not go unpunished — for He will take vengeance on those who despise His majesty. To urge us by every means possible, He promises both the blessings of this present life and eternal blessedness to those who keep His commandments, and threatens both present miseries and the punishment of eternal death to those who transgress them. The promise 'the one who does these things will live by them' and the corresponding threat 'the soul that sins will die' without doubt refer to the immortality or the death to come, which will never end. Wherever God's favor or His wrath is mentioned, the one contains eternity of life and the other eternal destruction. A long register of present blessings and curses is laid out in the law. In the penalty ordinances the supreme holiness of God is displayed, which can tolerate no wickedness. In His promises, besides His great love of righteousness — which He

cannot bring Himself to leave unrewarded — His marvelous generosity is also proved. For since we and everything we have are already indebted to His majesty, whatever He requires of us is rightly demanded as a due debt, and the payment of a debt does not deserve a reward. Yet He sets aside His own right when He offers to reward our obedience — obedience that we do not render as something not already owed. What those promises hold for us has already been partly said and will appear more fully in the proper place. For now it is enough to remember that the promises of the law contain high commendation of righteousness, so that it may be all the more clear how greatly God is pleased by keeping it. The penalty ordinances are set out to increase our detestation of unrighteousness, so that the sinner, charmed by the flattery of sin, will not forget that the judgment of the Lawgiver awaits him.

When the Lord gave a rule of perfect righteousness and applied all its parts to His own will, He declared that nothing is more acceptable to Him than obedience. This is all the more worth noting because human nature is always ready to devise various forms of worship to win God's favor. In every age, this misguided religious impulse — which is naturally planted in the human mind — has shown and still shows itself: people always delight in inventing a path to righteousness apart from God's Word. The result is that the commandments of the law have very little place among what people commonly call good works, while an endless number of human-invented works occupy almost all the room. What else did Moses intend but to restrain this kind of presumption when, after publishing the law, he said to the people: 'Pay attention and listen to everything I command you, so that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and

right before the Lord your God. Do only what I am commanding you — do not add to it or take from it.' Earlier, after proclaiming that it was Israel's wisdom and understanding before other nations to have received from the Lord these judgments, righteous standards, and ceremonies, he added: 'Therefore keep yourself and your soul carefully, so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen, and that they never depart from your heart.' God foresaw that the Israelites would not remain content after receiving the law but would keep laboring to produce new forms of righteousness alongside it, unless they were firmly restrained. So He declared that the law contained the perfection of righteousness — and this declaration should have been the strongest possible check on their presumption, yet they did not stop the very boldness they were so strictly forbidden. What about us? We are certainly under the same charge. There is no doubt that the Lord has claimed the complete doctrine of righteousness for His law, and yet we, not content with it, keep monstrously laboring to forge and coin new good works one on top of another. The best remedy for this fault is to have this thought firmly fixed in us: the law has been given by God to teach us a perfect righteousness; no righteousness is taught in it except what is measured by the appointed rule of God's will; therefore new forms of works invented to win God's favor are entirely in vain, since true worship consists in obedience alone; and the pursuit of good works that wanders outside God's law is an intolerable corruption of God's righteousness and of true righteousness. Augustine speaks most truly when he calls the obedience rendered to God sometimes the mother and guardian, and sometimes the source, of all virtues.

After we have expounded the law of the Lord, what I said earlier about the purpose and use of the law will be confirmed more fittingly and more convincingly. But before I discuss each commandment individually, it is good to lay down some principles that apply to understanding the law as a whole. First, let it be firmly established that the law of the Lord instructs human life not merely in outward behavior but in inward, spiritual righteousness. No one would deny this, yet very few actually observe it. This happens because people do not look to the Lawgiver, by whose nature the nature of the law itself ought to be understood. If a human king issues a proclamation forbidding adultery, murder, or theft, I grant that if a person merely conceives in his mind a desire to commit one of these things but does not act on it, he has not violated the prohibition. The reason is that a mortal lawmaker's foresight extends only to outward conduct — his commands are not broken unless the outward offense is actually committed. But God, from whose sight nothing is hidden, and who looks not so much to outward show as to the purity of the heart — in forbidding fornication, murder, and theft — also forbids lust, anger, hatred, covetousness, deceit, and everything like them. For since He is a spiritual Lawgiver, He addresses the soul no less than the body. The murder of the soul is anger and hatred; the theft of the soul is evil desire and covetousness; the fornication of the soul is lust. Someone may object: human laws also consider intentions and motives, not just what happens outwardly. I grant this — but only intentions and motives that have in some way broken out into outward action. Human laws examine the intent behind an outward act, but they do not search out secret thoughts. They are therefore satisfied when a person simply keeps his hands from wrongdoing. The

heavenly law, by contrast, is made for our minds, and restraining our minds is what its keeping chiefly requires. But many people, even while they put on a great show of keeping the law, arrange their eyes, feet, hands, and all their bodily members in some degree of outward compliance, while their hearts remain completely untouched by obedience. They think themselves fully discharged if they keep hidden from other people what they are doing in the sight of God. They hear: 'You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal.' They do not draw a sword to kill, they do not join themselves with prostitutes, they do not lay hands on another's property. So far, so good. But in their hearts they breathe out murder, burn with lust, cast their eyes covetously over all others' goods, and devour them with longing. In this, the very chief point of the law is missing. Where does such gross blindness come from, except that they measure righteousness by their own standards rather than looking to the Lawgiver? Against this Paul cries out with force, declaring that the law is spiritual — meaning it demands not merely outward obedience of soul, mind, and will, but a kind of angelic purity that, having wiped away all the filthiness of the flesh, savors nothing except what is of the Spirit.

When we say this is the meaning of the law, we are not inserting a new interpretation of our own — we are following Christ, the law's best expositor. The Pharisees had infected the people with the false opinion that whoever commits no outward violation of the law has fulfilled it. Christ rebuked this most dangerous error and declared that looking at a woman with lust is adultery; He testified that those who hate their brother are murderers — making guilty of judgment those who have merely conceived anger in their hearts, guilty before the council those who have let any sign of dis-

pleasure escape in murmuring or grumbling, and guilty of hellfire those who break out into open rage with insults and abuse. Those who have not grasped this have imagined Christ to be a second Moses — the giver of a Gospel law that made up for the deficiencies of the law of Moses. From this comes the common notion that the Gospel law of perfection far surpasses the old law — a most dangerous opinion. When we gather up the summary of the commandments later, it will become evident from Moses himself how shamefully those people dishonor the law of God. That opinion suggests that all the holiness of the fathers amounted to little more than hypocrisy, and it leads us away from the one perfect rule of righteousness. The error is easy enough to refute: those people thought Christ was adding to the law, when in fact He was restoring it to its original integrity — setting it free and cleansing it from the lies and corruption of the Pharisees' leaven.

Our second principle is this: each commandment and prohibition always contains more than its words literally express — though this must be handled carefully, so that our interpretation does not become like a rule of wax, which can be bent any direction, allowing us to make Scripture say whatever we like. Many people, through this kind of undisciplined freedom, have caused some to lose respect for Scripture's authority and others to despair of understanding it. We must therefore find an approach that leads us by a straight and proper path to the will of God. We must determine how far our interpretation may go beyond the literal words, so that it clearly appears not as men's additions attached to Scripture but as a faithful rendering of the lawgiver's pure and natural meaning. In nearly every commandment the figurative character of the language is so plain that anyone who would restrict the

law's meaning to the bare words would deserve to be ridiculed. It is therefore clear that sound interpretation does extend beyond the literal words — but how far is difficult to judge unless a clear standard is established. I believe the best standard is to direct interpretation to the intent of the commandment: in every commandment, weigh the purpose for which it was given. For example, every commandment is either a positive command or a prohibition; the true scope of both types will be found by considering their intent or goal. The intent of the fifth commandment is that honor should be given to those to whom God assigns it. The summary of the commandment is therefore this: it is right and pleasing to God that we honor those to whom He has given a position of excellence, and He abhors contempt and stubbornness toward them. The intent of the first commandment is that God alone be honored. The summary of the commandment is therefore this: true godliness — that is, the true worship of His majesty — pleases God, and ungodliness displeases Him. So in every commandment we must first note what subject it addresses; then we must look for the end, until we find what the lawgiver specifically declares pleases or displeases Him; and finally we must draw a conclusion to the contrary along these lines: if this pleases God, then the opposite displeases Him; if this displeases Him, then the opposite pleases Him; if He commands this, then He forbids the opposite; if He forbids this, then He commands the opposite.

What has been touched on somewhat abstractly here will become very clear in practice as we expound the commandments, so it is enough to have mentioned it briefly. One final point, however, needs a short proof — without which it might not be understood, or if understood, might initially seem like an absurdity. It needs no

proof that when a good thing is commanded, its evil opposite is forbidden — everyone will grant that. Common judgment will also readily accept that when evil things are forbidden, the opposite duties are commanded. It is generally understood that virtues are commended when their corresponding vices are condemned. But we require something more than what those common forms of expression usually mean to people. Most people take the virtue opposite to any vice to be simply refraining from that vice. We say that it goes further — to positive duties and positive actions. So in the commandment 'You shall not murder,' common understanding sees nothing beyond this: that we must abstain from all harm and from any desire to do harm. I say it also contains this: that we should by every possible means support and preserve the life of our neighbor. And lest I say this without support, here is the proof: God forbids that our brother be harmed, because He wills that our neighbor's life be precious and dear to us. He therefore also requires all acts of love that are within our power for the preservation of that life. So we see how the intent of a commandment always reveals to us everything we are commanded or forbidden to do within it.

Why God in such half-commandments has pointed to His will indirectly through figures rather than expressing it plainly — there are many reasons usually given for this, but one pleases me above the rest. The flesh always tries to minimize the ugliness of sin and cover it with fine pretexts, except where sin is so blatant that it cannot be hidden. Therefore God has placed in each category of offense the most wicked and abominable example — one that strikes our senses with horror at first hearing — in order to imprint in our minds a deeper detestation of every kind of sin. We are often de-

ceived in assessing vices, because when they are somewhat hidden or subtle we make them appear small. The Lord exposes these self-deceptions by training us to refer the whole multitude of vices to these chief categories, which best reveal how abominable each kind truly is. For example: anger and hatred do not seem so terrible when they are called by their own names. But when they are forbidden under the name of murder, we better understand how abominable they are before God — who places them in the same category as so horrible an offense. Moved by His judgment, we learn to assess more rightly the seriousness of faults that previously seemed light to us.

Third, we should consider the significance of God's law being divided into two tables — a division that all thoughtful people will acknowledge is not mentioned incidentally or without purpose. We have a ready explanation that leaves no room for doubt. God divided His law into two parts containing the whole of righteousness: the first covers the duties of religion that specifically pertain to the worship of His Godhead; the second covers the duties of love that belong to our dealings with other people. The worship of God is the first foundation of righteousness. When that foundation is overturned, all the other parts of righteousness collapse and fall apart, like the timbers of a house when the frame is disjointed. What kind of righteousness is it to refrain from robbing and defrauding people, while at the same time stripping God's majesty of His glory through wicked sacrilege? To keep your body from adultery, while your blasphemies profanely abuse God's holy name? To murder no one, while laboring to destroy and blot out the memory of God? Righteousness without religion is an empty boast — no better than presenting a headless mutilated body as something

beautiful. Religion is not merely the chief part of righteousness; it is the very soul by which righteousness breathes and lives. Without the fear of God, people do not maintain equity and love among themselves. We therefore say that the worship of God is the beginning and foundation of righteousness, because when it is removed, all the fairness, self-control, and moderation that people practice among themselves is worthless and trivial before God. We also say that it is the source and living breath of righteousness, because through the reverence of God as the Judge of right and wrong, people learn to live temperately and without harming one another. In the first table, God therefore instructs us in godliness and the proper duties of religion by which His majesty is to be worshipped. In the second, He prescribes how, out of reverence for His name, we are to conduct ourselves in our life together with other people. This is why our Lord — as the Evangelists record — summed up the whole law in two principal points: that we should love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength; and that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. So you see how of the two parts in which He sums up the whole law, He directs one toward God and assigns the other toward people.

Although the whole law is contained in these two principal points, God was pleased — in order to remove all pretense of excuse — to set out more fully and plainly in the Ten Commandments everything that belongs both to honoring, fearing, and loving Him, and to the love He commands us to bear toward other people for His sake. It is worth knowing how the commandments are divided, provided you remember that this is a matter on which every person should be free to form their own judgment, and over which we should not quarrel contentiously with those

who think differently. We must address the question, however, so that readers will not be surprised or dismissive of the arrangement we use as if it were something new and recently invented. That the law is divided into ten words is beyond dispute, since it is repeatedly confirmed by God's own authority — so the number is not in question, only the manner of dividing them. Those who assign three commandments to the first table and seven to the second either eliminate the commandment about images altogether or absorb it into the first commandment — even though the Lord clearly set it apart as a distinct commandment. They then split the tenth commandment against coveting into two. This manner of dividing was unknown in the purer ages of the church, as will soon be evident. Others, like us, count four commandments in the first table, but they treat the prologue as the first commandment rather than a preface. For my part — since I can find no convincing reason to read the ten words in Moses as anything other than ten commandments — I believe I see them arranged in a fitting order. Leaving others to their opinion, I will follow the arrangement I find most defensible: what those in the second group call the first commandment will serve here as a preface to the whole law, followed by four commandments of the first table and six of the second, in the order they will be presented. Augustine, writing to Boniface, agrees with us, rehearsing the commandments in this order: that God alone be served with religious obedience, that no idol be worshiped, and that the Lord's name not be taken in vain — having already discussed the shadowy commandment of the Sabbath separately. In another place he does prefer the other division, but for too weak a reason — because if the first table contains three commandments, the mystery of the Trinity appears more plainly. Yet in that same

place he does not hesitate to admit that on other grounds he prefers our division. The author of the Imperfect Work on Matthew is also on our side. Josephus, undoubtedly following the common opinion of his time, assigns five commandments to each table. But this is contrary to reason, because it blurs the distinction between religion and love of neighbor, and it is also refuted by the authority of the Lord Himself, who in Matthew places the commandment to honor parents in the second table. Now let us hear God Himself speaking in His own words.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me.

Whether you treat the opening sentence as part of the first commandment or read it as a separate preface makes little difference to me, so long as you grant that it serves as an introduction to the whole law. When laws are made, care must be taken that they not quickly fall into contempt. God therefore first provides that the majesty of the law He is about to give will never be held in contempt. To establish this, He uses three kinds of argument. First, He claims for Himself the power and right of dominion, by which He may bind His chosen people in a necessary obligation to obey. Then He holds out a promise of grace, with its sweetness, to draw them toward the pursuit of holiness. Third, He recalls the benefit He did for them, in order to convict the Jews of ingratitude if they do not answer His kindness with obedience. In the name Jehovah — the Lord — His authority and rightful dominion are expressed. Since all things are from Him and exist in Him, it is right that all

things be referred to Him, as Paul says (Romans 11:36). This name alone is enough to bring us under the yoke of God's majesty, for it would be monstrous to try to withdraw ourselves from the government of the One from whom we cannot escape.

After showing that it is He who has authority to command and to whom obedience is due, He does not appeal only to necessity but also draws with sweetness by declaring Himself to be the God of the church. This phrase contains a hidden mutual relationship expressed in the promise: 'I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' On this basis Christ proves that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have immortal life — because God testified that He is their God (Jeremiah 31:33; Matthew 22:32). It is therefore equivalent to His saying: 'I have chosen you to be My people — not merely to do you good in this present life, but to give you the blessedness of the life to come.' Where this leads is made clear in various places throughout the law. When the Lord condescends to deal with us so graciously as to call us into the company of His people, He chooses us — as Moses says — to be a people peculiar to Himself, a holy people who keep His commandments (Deuteronomy 7:6). From this also comes the exhortation: 'Be holy, for I am holy' (Leviticus 19). From these two elements comes the protest in the prophet: 'A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due Me? If I am a master, where is the respect due Me?' (Malachi 1:6)

Next comes the recalling of His benefit — which ought to carry even greater weight because ingratitude is so detestable even among people. He reminded Israel of a great benefit recently received, one so miraculously great that it deserved to be remembered forever and to remain effective for their descendants. And it

fits perfectly with the present subject. For the Lord seems to be saying: they were delivered from miserable bondage precisely so that they would honor with obedience and willing service the one who delivered them. He also employs specific titles — to hold us firmly to the true worship of Him alone — by which He reveals His sacred majesty as distinct from all idols and invented gods. As I said before, our inclination toward vanity is so ready, joined with reckless presumption, that the moment God is named our minds cannot keep from wandering off to some empty invention. Therefore, when the Lord means to remedy this evil, He describes Himself with specific titles and so encloses us within certain boundaries, so that we will not wander here and there and rashly construct some new god for ourselves by forsaking the living God and setting up an idol. For this reason, whenever the prophets intend to point specifically to Him, they clothe Him and enclose Him within those marks by which He made Himself known to the people of Israel. When He is called the God of Abraham or the God of Israel, when He is present in the temple at Jerusalem among the cherubim, these and similar expressions do not confine Him to one place or one people — they are set for this single purpose: to anchor the thoughts of the godly in that God who, through His covenant with Israel, has revealed Himself in such a way that it is not lawful to depart from that pattern. But let this be firmly fixed: the mention of the deliverance was made so that the Jews would more willingly devote themselves to the God who rightfully claims them as His own. As for us — lest we think this has nothing to do with us — we should recognize that the bondage of Egypt is a picture of the spiritual captivity in which we are all held bound, until our heavenly deliverer frees us by the power of His arm and brings

us into the kingdom of liberty. Just as in ancient times He gathered the scattered Israelites to worship His name by delivering them from the unbearable tyranny of Pharaoh, so now He delivers all those to whom He declares Himself God from the deadly power of the devil — which was foreshadowed by that physical bondage. Therefore every person ought to have his heart stirred to attend to the law that he hears coming from the sovereign King. From Him all things take their beginning, and so it is fitting that all things be directed toward Him as their end. Every person ought to eagerly embrace the Lawgiver, in whose service he is taught he has been specially chosen; from whose bounty he looks for an abundance of all good things and the glory of immortal life; and by whose marvelous power and mercy he knows himself to have been rescued from the jaws of death (Exodus 3:6; Amos 1:2; Habakkuk 2; Psalm 80:2; 29:1; Isaiah 37:16).

After establishing and securing the authority of His law, God sets forth the first commandment: that we have no other gods before Him. The purpose of this commandment is that God alone will have supremacy and will fully enjoy His own authority among His people. To this end, He commands that all ungodliness and superstition — by which the glory of His Godhead is either diminished or obscured — be kept far from us. By the same logic, He commands us to worship and honor Him with genuine devotion. The very simplicity of the words expresses this. We cannot have God without encompassing everything that properly belongs to Him. In forbidding us to have other gods, He means that we must not give elsewhere what belongs to Him. Although the things we owe to God are countless, they may fittingly be gathered under four principal headings: adoration, trust, invocation, and thanksgiving. By

adoration I mean the reverence and worship each person renders to God when he submits himself to God's greatness — and I rightly include under this heading the submission of our consciences to His law. Trust is a settled confidence in Him that rests on acknowledging His attributes: placing all wisdom, righteousness, power, truth, and goodness in Him, and counting ourselves blessed through participation in Him alone. Invocation is the turning of our minds to His faithfulness and help as our only resource, whenever any need presses us. Thanksgiving is the gratitude by which all praise for every good thing is given to Him. In all four of these, God tolerates nothing being transferred elsewhere — He commands that all of them be given entirely to Himself. It is not enough merely to abstain from having a foreign god, as many wicked contemners do who think the surest way is to mock all religion. True religion must go first — the religion by which our minds are directed to the living God. Armed with knowledge of God, our minds aspire to reverence, fear, and worship His majesty; to embrace the sharing of all His good gifts; to seek His help everywhere; to acknowledge and celebrate the greatness of His works in thankful praise — and to make this the sole aim of everything we do in life. Then we must beware of perverse superstition, by which minds wander away from the true God and are pulled toward various invented gods. If we are content with one God, let us remember what was said earlier: all invented gods are to be driven far away, and the worship that He alone claims for Himself must not be divided. It is not lawful to take away from His glory even the smallest part — everything that belongs to Him must remain entirely with Him. The phrase 'before My face' makes the offense even more serious, for God is provoked to jealousy whenever we

thrust our own inventions into His place — like an unfaithful wife who inflames her husband's anger by bringing in a lover openly before his eyes. Therefore, when God declared that He watched over His chosen people with His present power and grace, He warned them — all the more to deter them from the wicked act of falling away — that no new gods can be introduced without Him witnessing and beholding the sacrilege. The boldness of such people is compounded by great wickedness: they think they can escape God's eyes by fleeing from Him. But God cries out that whatever we purpose, whatever we undertake, whatever we practice, comes before His sight. Let our consciences therefore be clean even from the most secret thought of turning away from Him, if we desire our religion to please the Lord. For He requires the glory of His Godhead to remain whole and uncorrupted — not only in outward confession, but before His eyes, which behold the most hidden corners of hearts.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.

In the first commandment He declared that He is the one God and that no other gods are to be invented or worshiped. Now He declares more openly what kind of God He is and what kind of worship He requires — so that we will not presume to fashion any earthly image of Him. The purpose of this commandment is that the true worship of God not be profaned with superstitious practices. In summary, it calls and draws us away from the earthly ob-

servances our foolish minds are inclined to invent when they conceive of God according to their own coarseness. It shapes us instead toward the true worship of God — that is, the spiritual worship He Himself has appointed. The commandment addresses the most blatant form of this offense: outward idolatry. It has two parts. The first restrains our freedom, so that we do not presume to make God subject to our senses or represent Him in any form, since He is incomprehensible. The second part forbids us to honor any images for religious purposes. He briefly lists all the forms in which the superstitious and pagan nations were accustomed to represent Him in visible shape. By 'things in heaven above' He means the sun, moon, and other stars — and perhaps birds also, as His explanation in Deuteronomy 4:15 includes birds alongside the stars. I mention this only because I have seen some people wrongly apply it to angels. I will pass over the other parts since they are clear enough on their own. We have already shown plainly in the first book that whatever visible forms of God people devise are directly contrary to His nature, and that therefore as soon as images appear, true religion is corrupted and defiled.

The penalty that follows should do much to shake off our laziness. God threatens that He is the Lord our God, a jealous God, who visits the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate His name, and shows mercy to thousands of those who love Him and keep His commandments. This is the same as if He had said that He alone is the one upon whom we ought to depend. To drive us to that end, He speaks of His power, which does not allow itself to be scorned or diminished without punishment. Here the name El, which means God, is used. But since it is derived from a word meaning strength, I translated

it that way to better express the sense. Then He calls Himself jealous, meaning He cannot tolerate any rival. Third, He declares that He will avenge His majesty and glory if anyone transfers it to creatures or to carved images. This will not be a short or light vengeance, but one that extends to the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren -- that is, to all who follow their fathers' ungodliness. Likewise, He promises perpetual mercy and generosity to the long line of descendants of those who love Him and keep His law. It is common for God to present Himself as a husband to us. The bond by which He joins Himself to us when He receives us into His church is like a holy marriage that must be upheld by mutual faithfulness. Just as He performs all the duties of a faithful and true husband, so He requires from us the love and faithfulness that marriage demands -- that we not surrender our souls to Satan, to lust, or to the filthy desires of the flesh. This is why, when the prophet rebukes the apostasy of the Jews, he complains that they threw away their faithfulness and were defiled with adulteries. Therefore, just as a husband who is himself holy and faithful burns with greater anger when he sees his wife's heart turning to another lover, so the Lord, who has joined us to Himself in truth, testifies that He burns with intense jealousy whenever we neglect the purity of His holy marriage and defile ourselves with wicked lusts. This is especially true when we transfer to something else, or corrupt with any superstition, the worship of His name, which should remain perfectly pure. By doing this, we not only break the faith we pledged in marriage, but we also defile the marriage bed itself by bringing adulterers into it.

In this threat, we must consider what God means when He says He will visit the sin of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Besides the fact that it would contradict the fairness of God's justice to punish the innocent for another's offense, God Himself also says that He will not make the son bear the father's wickedness. Yet this statement about extending the punishment of the ancestors' sins to future generations is repeated more than once. Moses frequently speaks to God this way: Lord, Lord, who brings the sin of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. Jeremiah likewise says: You who show mercy to thousands, who bring the sin of the fathers into the lap of the children after them. Many people, struggling to untie this knot, think it refers only to earthly punishments. If children suffer these for their parents' faults, they say, it is no contradiction, since such punishments are often laid on them for their own salvation. This is true. Isaiah told Hezekiah that his sons would be stripped of the kingdom and carried into exile because of the sin Hezekiah had committed. The households of Pharaoh and Abimelech were struck with plagues for offending Abraham. But when this explanation is offered as a solution to the question, it is more of an evasion than a true interpretation. For in this passage and others like it, God threatens a punishment too severe to be limited within the bounds of this present life. It should therefore be understood this way: the just curse of the Lord falls not only on the head of the wicked person, but also on his whole family. When the curse rests on them, what else can be expected but that the father, lacking the Spirit of God, lives in complete wickedness, and the son, likewise abandoned by the Lord because of the father's

fault, follows the same path of destruction? And finally, the grandson and the great-grandson, that cursed offspring of detestable people, rush headlong after them?

First, let us consider whether this kind of vengeance is inconsistent with God's justice. If all of human nature is worthy of condemnation, we know that destruction awaits those to whom the Lord does not grant His grace. Yet they perish because of their own unrighteousness, not because of any unjust hatred on God's part. There is no reason to complain about why they are not helped by God's grace to salvation as others are. Since this punishment falls on wicked evildoers for their offenses -- that their households are deprived of God's grace for many generations -- who can accuse God of injustice in this? But the Lord also declares that the punishment of the father's sin will not pass over to the son. Notice what is being discussed there. When the Israelites had been tormented with many calamities for a long time, they began to use a proverb: that their fathers had eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth were set on edge. By this they meant that their fathers had committed sins, and they -- being otherwise righteous and undeserving -- were suffering the punishment, more from God's unrelenting wrath than from measured severity. The prophet tells them this is not the case. They are punished for their own offenses, and it contradicts God's justice for a righteous son to suffer punishment for his wicked father's sin. This is also not what the present commandment contains. In the visitation mentioned here, God removes from the house of the wicked His grace, the light of His truth, and other helps of salvation. Because the children, blinded and forsaken by Him, follow in their fathers' footsteps, they suffer curses for their fathers' offenses. But when they are subjected to earthly

miseries and ultimately to eternal destruction, they are punished by God's just judgment not for the sins of others, but for their own wickedness.

On the other side, a promise is offered to extend God's mercy to a thousand generations. This promise is also found often in the Scriptures and is included in the solemn covenant of the church: I will be your God, and the God of your offspring after you. Solomon, with this in mind, writes that the children of the righteous will be blessed after their parents' death -- not only because of holy upbringing (which also contributes greatly), but also because of the blessing promised in the covenant: that God's grace will rest eternally in the households of the godly. From this comes great comfort to the faithful and great fear to the wicked. If the memory of both righteousness and wickedness carries such weight with God even after death that the curse of one and the blessing of the other extends to their descendants, how much more will it rest on the heads of those who actually committed the deeds! But it does not contradict our position that the children of the wicked sometimes turn out well, and the children of the faithful sometimes go astray. The lawgiver did not intend to establish an unchangeable rule here that would override His free election. It is enough for the comfort of the righteous and the fear of the sinner that the penalty is not empty or without effect, even though it does not always apply in every case. Just as the earthly punishments laid on a few wicked people are testimonies of God's wrath against sin and of the judgment that will one day fall on all sinners -- though many escape unpunished to the end of their lives -- so when God gives even one example of showing mercy to a child for the father's sake, He gives proof of His constant and perpetual favor toward those

who worship Him. And when He once pursues the father's wickedness in the son, He shows what judgment awaits all the reprobate for their own offenses. This assurance was His primary concern in this passage. And by the way, He commends to us the greatness of His mercy, which He extends to a thousand generations, while He assigned only four generations to vengeance.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

The purpose of this commandment is that God wills the majesty of His name to be holy among us. The summary, then, is that we must not defile it by using it with contempt or irreverence. Connected to this prohibition is the positive command that we take care to reverence it with godly devotion. We should therefore order ourselves in both mind and speech so that we neither think nor say anything about God Himself or His mysteries without reverence and great sobriety. When we consider His works, we should think of nothing but what is honorable toward Him. These three things we must carefully observe: first, whatever our mind conceives of Him and whatever our tongue speaks should reflect His excellency, agree with the holy greatness of His name, and ultimately serve to magnify Him. Second, we must not rashly or carelessly misuse His holy word and sacred mysteries for our own ambition, greed, or trivial purposes. Instead, since they bear the stamp of His name, they should maintain their honor and respect among us. Third, we must not criticize or speak against His works, as wretched people are prone to do with their scornful complaints. Rather, whatever we report about His deeds, we should speak with words of praise for His wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. This

is what it means to sanctify the name of God. When the opposite is done, it is defiled with empty and perverse misuse. It is violently torn from the proper use for which alone it was appointed. Even if no other harm is done, it is stripped of its dignity and gradually brought into contempt. Now, if there is so much evil in this reckless habit of using God's name carelessly, how much more wicked it is when it is put to evil uses! This is what those do who make it serve the superstitions of sorcery, cruel curses, unlawful spells, and other wicked enchantments. But swearing is specifically mentioned in the commandment as the thing in which the perverse misuse of God's name is most detestable, so that by this example we may be completely scared away from all defiling of it. That this commandment concerns the worship of God and the reverence of His name -- and not the truthfulness and fairness that must be kept among people -- is clear from the fact that He later condemns perjury and false witness in the second table, where harm is done to human relationships. It would be pointless to repeat it if this commandment were about the duty of charity. The division of the law itself requires this. As has been said, God did not arrange two tables for His law without purpose. From this we gather that in this commandment He claims His own right for Himself and defends the holiness of His name, rather than teaching what people owe to one another.

First, we must learn what an oath is. An oath is calling God as a witness to confirm the truth of what we say. Those cursed outbursts that contain open insults against God are not worthy of being counted among oaths. That such calling of God to witness, when done properly, is a form of worshiping God, is shown in many places of Scripture. For example, when Isaiah prophesies

about the calling of the Assyrians and Egyptians into the fellowship of the covenant with Israel, he says: "They shall speak in the language of Canaan and shall swear in the name of the Lord." That is, by swearing in the Lord's name, they would confess their devotion to His religion. Again, when Isaiah speaks of the expansion of God's kingdom, he says: "Whoever blesses himself shall bless in the God of the faithful, and he who swears in the land shall swear in the true God." Jeremiah says, "If they teach the people to swear in My name, as they taught them to swear by Baal, they shall be built up in the midst of My house." There is good reason for saying that when we call on the Lord's name as a witness, we are declaring our devotion to Him. By doing so, we confess that He is the eternal and unchangeable truth. We call on Him not only as the most reliable witness of truth above all others, but also as its only defender -- the one who can bring hidden things to light and who knows the heart. Where human testimony fails, we turn to God as our witness, especially when something must be proven that lies hidden in the conscience. For this reason, the Lord is bitterly angry with those who swear by foreign gods, and He treats this kind of swearing as a clear departure from His allegiance: "Your children have forsaken Me and swear by those who are no gods." He declares the seriousness of this offense by threatening punishment: "I will destroy those who swear by the name of the Lord and also swear by Molech."

Now that we understand that the Lord intends our oaths to be a form of worship of His name, we must be all the more careful that our oaths contain honor rather than dishonor, contempt, or degradation of His name. It is no small dishonor when perjury is committed in swearing by Him. Therefore, the law calls it profana-

tion. What is left to the Lord when He is robbed of His truthfulness? He would then cease to be God. But truly He is robbed of His truthfulness when He is made an approver and confirmer of falsehood. Therefore, when Joshua wanted to compel Achan to confess the truth, he said: "My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel," meaning that the Lord is grievously dishonored when someone swears falsely by Him. And no wonder. For we do, as far as it lies in us, stain His holy name with a lie. That this phrase was commonly used among the Jews whenever someone was called to take an oath is clear from the similar words the Pharisees use in the Gospel of John. The oath formulas used in the Scriptures instruct us to be careful: "The Lord lives," "The Lord do these things to me and add these things," "The Lord be witness against my soul." These show that we cannot call God to witness our words without also wishing Him to take vengeance on our perjury if we speak deceitfully.

The name of the Lord is cheapened and made common when it is used in unnecessary oaths, even if they are true. In such cases, it is still taken in vain. Therefore, it is not enough to refrain from swearing falsely. We must also remember that swearing was permitted and established not for pleasure but for necessity. Those who apply it to unnecessary matters go beyond its lawful use. No other necessity can be claimed except where it serves either religion or charity. In this, people today offend far too freely. The problem has grown so much worse because, through long custom, it has ceased to be considered an offense at all -- yet before God's judgment seat, it is not taken lightly. Everywhere, the name of God is defiled in trivial conversation. People do not think they are doing wrong, because through long-tolerated and unpunished bold-

ness, they have come to settle comfortably into such great wickedness. But the Lord's commandment remains in force, and the penalty stands strong. It will one day take effect, for a special vengeance is declared against those who use His name in vain. This commandment is also broken in another way: when in our oaths we put God's holy servants in the place of God, with open ungodliness. By doing this, we transfer the glory of His deity to them. It is not without reason that the Lord specifically commanded us to swear by His name and specifically prohibited swearing by any foreign gods. The apostle clearly testifies the same when he writes that people, in swearing, call upon one higher than themselves, and that God, having no one greater than His own glory to swear by, swore by Himself.

The Anabaptists, not content with this moderate approach to swearing, reject all oaths without exception, because Christ's prohibition is general: "I say to you, do not swear at all, but let your word be yes, yes, and no, no; whatever is more than this is from evil." But in doing this, they thoughtlessly set Christ against His Father, as if He had come down from heaven to repeal His Father's decrees. The eternal God not only permits swearing in the law as something lawful -- which would be enough -- but He also commands it when necessary. Yet Christ declares that He and His Father are one, that He brings nothing different from what His Father commanded, and that His teaching is not His own. What then? Will they make God contradict Himself, later forbidding and condemning in human conduct the very thing He had previously approved by commanding it? But since there is some difficulty in Christ's words, let us weigh them carefully. We will never arrive at the truth here unless we fix our eyes on Christ's intent and pay at-

tention to what He was addressing. His purpose was not to loosen or tighten the law, but to restore it to its true and natural meaning, which had been greatly corrupted by the false interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees. If we keep this in mind, we will not think that Christ utterly condemned oaths, but only those oaths that break the law's rule. From this it is clear that the people of that time avoided only perjury, while the law forbids not only perjury but also all idle and superstitious oaths. Therefore, the Lord -- the most reliable interpreter of the law -- warns them that it is wrong not only to swear falsely but also to swear carelessly. But how wrong? To swear in vain. As for those oaths that the law commends, He leaves them safe and free. Some think they argue more strongly by seizing on the word "at all," but it does not refer to the word "swear." It refers to the types of swearing listed afterward. Part of the people's error was that when they swore by heaven and earth, they thought they were not touching the name of God. So after addressing the main offense against this commandment, the Lord also cuts off all their evasions. They should not think they have escaped guilt by avoiding God's name while calling heaven and earth to witness. It should also be noted here that although the name of God may not be expressly stated, people do swear by Him indirectly -- as when they swear by the light they see, by the bread they eat, by their baptism, or by other signs of God's generosity toward them. When Christ forbids them to swear by heaven, earth, and Jerusalem, He is not correcting superstition, as some wrongly think. Rather, He is refuting their clever excuse. They thought it was harmless to throw out indirect oaths, as though they were sparing God's holy name -- a name that is engraved on all His gifts. It is different, however, when a mortal person, a dead person, or

an angel is put in the place of God. Among pagan nations, flattery devised the corrupt practice of swearing by the life or soul of the king. In such cases, the false creation of gods obscures and diminishes the glory of the one true God. But when we simply intend to support our statements with the holy name of God, even if done indirectly, His majesty is offended in all such careless oaths. Christ removes all pretense of excuse from this recklessness by forbidding swearing "at all." James serves the same purpose, quoting the same words of Christ I mentioned above, because this same reckless boldness has always existed in the world -- a profane misuse of God's name. If you apply the word "at all" to the substance, as if it were absolutely and without exception unlawful to swear, why does the explanation that follows say: "Neither by heaven nor by earth," etc.? This clearly shows that those evasions are being addressed by which the Jews thought their fault could be excused.

Therefore, no one with sound judgment can doubt that the Lord in that passage only reproved the oaths forbidden by the law. He Himself, who showed in His life an example of the perfection He taught, did not hesitate to swear when the occasion required it. His disciples, who undoubtedly obeyed their Master in all things, followed the same example. Who would dare to say that Paul would have sworn if swearing had been completely forbidden? Yet when the situation required it, he swore without hesitation, sometimes even adding a solemn curse. But this question is not yet settled, because some believe that only public oaths are exempt from this prohibition -- such as those we take when a magistrate requires them. This category includes the oaths princes take when establishing treaties, the oaths people swear in pledging allegiance to their ruler, and the oaths soldiers take for faithful military ser-

vice. They also rightly include in this category oaths like Paul's, which confirm the dignity of the Gospel, since the apostles in their office were not private individuals but public ministers of God. I certainly do not deny that these are the safest oaths, because they are supported by the strongest testimonies of Scripture. The magistrate is commanded to put a witness under oath in a doubtful case. The witness in turn must answer under oath. And the apostle says that people's disputes are settled by this means. In this commandment, both parties receive full approval of their duties. It is worth noting that among ancient pagans, public and solemn oaths were held in great respect, while common oaths spoken casually were given little or no regard. They thought that casual oaths had nothing to do with God's majesty. But it would be too extreme to condemn private oaths that are taken soberly, reverently, and out of genuine necessity. These are supported by both reason and examples. If it is lawful for private individuals in a weighty and serious matter to appeal to God as judge between them, it is surely also lawful to call Him as witness. Consider this scenario: your brother accuses you of breaking faith. You try to clear yourself as charity requires, but he refuses to be satisfied no matter what. If your good reputation is in danger because of his stubborn hostility, you may without offense appeal to God's judgment, asking Him to make your innocence known in due time. Now, if we consider the weight of the words, calling God as witness is a lesser matter than calling Him as judge. Therefore, I see no reason to say that calling Him as witness is unlawful in such a case. We have many examples of this. Though the oath of Abraham and Isaac with Abimelech was made on behalf of a public community and does not exactly serve our purpose, Jacob and Laban were private men who established a

covenant between themselves with mutual oaths. Boaz was a private man who confirmed his promise of marriage to Ruth in the same way. Obadiah was a private man, a just and God-fearing person, who affirmed something to Elijah by oath to persuade him. Therefore, I have no better rule than this: oaths should be measured so that they are not taken carelessly, are not common or careless, are not used from raging desire or for trivial matters, but serve genuine necessity -- such as when the Lord's glory must be upheld or when a brother's spiritual growth must be advanced. This is the purpose toward which the law's commandment directs us.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days you shall work and do all your work. But on the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work. Etc.

The purpose of this commandment is that we, being dead to our own desires and works, should devote ourselves to meditating on the kingdom of God, and that we should practice this meditation through the means He has established. But because this commandment requires a different approach from the rest, it must also have a different method of explanation. The early church fathers used to call it a ceremonial commandment, because it contains the outward observance of a day, which was taken away by Christ's coming along with the other ceremonial figures. I agree they are right about this, but they only touch on half the matter. Therefore, we must dig deeper for the explanation. I believe there are three reasons behind this commandment, as I see it. First, the heavenly lawgiver intended, through the rest of the seventh day, to give the

people of Israel a picture of the spiritual rest by which the faithful should cease from their own works and allow God to work in them. Second, He wanted them to have one appointed day on which they would gather to hear the law and participate in ceremonies -- or at least dedicate it especially to meditating on His works. Through this regular practice of remembrance, they would be trained in godliness. Third, He thought it good to grant a day of rest to servants and those living under the authority of others, so they could have some relief from their labor.

We are taught in many ways that the spiritual rest was the principal point of the Sabbath. The Lord required the keeping of no commandment more strictly than this one. When the prophets want to show that all religion has been overthrown, they complain that His Sabbaths are polluted, defiled, unkept, and unsanctified -- as if once this act of worship was neglected, nothing remained by which He might be honored. He praised the observance of the Sabbath with the highest commendations. For this reason, the faithful held the revelation of the Sabbath in remarkably high regard among all the other commandments. In Nehemiah, the Levites said in a solemn assembly: "You showed Your holy Sabbath to our fathers, and gave them commandments, ceremonies, and the law through Moses." You see how the Sabbath is given a special place of honor among all the commandments of the law. All of this serves to emphasize the dignity of the mystery, which Moses and Ezekiel express very well. In Exodus you find this: "See that you keep My Sabbath day, because it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. Keep My Sabbath, for it is holy to you." "Let the children of Israel keep the Sabbath and celebrate it

throughout their generations. It is an everlasting covenant between Me and the children of Israel, and a perpetual sign." Ezekiel speaks even more extensively about this. But his point comes down to this: that the Sabbath is a sign by which Israel would know that God is the One who sanctifies them. If our sanctification consists in putting to death our own will, then there is a perfectly fitting connection between the outward sign and the inward reality it represents. We must completely rest so that God may work in us. We must abandon our own will, surrender our hearts, and banish all desires of the flesh. In short, we must cease from all the activities of our own minds so that God may work in us and we may rest in Him, as the apostle also teaches.

This perpetual rest was represented to the Jews by the keeping of one day out of seven. To make its observance more devoted, the Lord confirmed it by His own example. It is no small motivation for human effort to know that we are striving to follow our Creator. If anyone looks for a hidden meaning in the number seven, since that number in Scripture represents perfection, it was not chosen without reason to signify everlasting continuance. This also fits with the fact that Moses, on the day he described the Lord resting from His works, stops naming the succession of days and nights. Another likely explanation for the number is that the Lord meant to show the Sabbath would never be perfectly fulfilled until the last day. In this present life, we begin our blessed rest, and we continue to make progress in it daily. But since we still wage a constant war against the flesh, it will not be completed until the saying of Isaiah is fulfilled -- about the continuing of new moon with new moon and Sabbath with Sabbath -- even when God will be all in all. It may be, then, that the Lord used the seventh day to set before His

people the future perfection of His Sabbath on the last day, so that our whole life might aspire to this perfection through continual meditation on the Sabbath.

If anyone dislikes this interpretation of the number as too speculative, I will not argue. They may take it more simply: that the Lord appointed one certain day on which His people, under the training of the law, could practice the continual meditation of spiritual rest. He assigned the seventh day either because He thought it was sufficient, or because by presenting the likeness of His own example He could better motivate the people to keep it, or at least to remind them that the Sabbath had no other purpose than to make them like their Creator. The specific number matters little, so long as the mystery remains that the commandment primarily teaches: the perpetual rest from our own works. The prophets would occasionally call the Jews back to this truth, so they would not think they had fulfilled the commandment by merely stopping physical labor. Besides the passages already mentioned, you find this in Isaiah: "If you turn your foot from the Sabbath, if you do not pursue your own desires on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor Him by not going your own way or seeking your own pleasure or speaking your own words, then you will delight yourself in the Lord," and so on. But there is no doubt that by the coming of our Lord Christ, everything ceremonial in this commandment was set aside. He is the truth, by whose presence all figures vanish. He is the body, the sight of which makes shadows disappear. He, I say, is the true fulfillment of the Sabbath. Being buried with Him through baptism, we are grafted into the fellowship of His death, so that as partakers of His resurrection we may walk in newness of life.

Therefore, in another place the apostle writes that the Sabbath was a shadow of a thing to come, and that the true body -- that is, the perfect substance of truth -- is in Christ, which he has clearly explained in the same passage. This is not contained in one day, but in the whole course of our life, until we are utterly dead to ourselves and filled with the life of God. Therefore, superstitious observance of days should be far from Christians.

But since the two latter purposes should not be counted among the old ceremonial shadows and belong equally to all ages, the following still applies to us even though the Sabbath is set aside: we should meet on appointed days to hear the word, to break the mystical bread, and for public prayer; and servants and laborers should be granted rest from their work. There is no doubt that in commanding the Sabbath, the Lord had both of these things in mind. The first is proven well enough by the practice of the Jews alone. The second is stated by Moses in Deuteronomy: "That your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. Remember that you yourself served in Egypt." Again in Exodus: "That your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your servant may take a breath." Who can deny that both of these apply to us just as much as to the Jews? Church gatherings are commanded by God's word, and the necessity of them is clear from the very experience of life. Unless they are set at appointed and regular times, how can they be maintained? The apostle says that all things among us must be done properly and in order. But it is so far from true that order can be maintained without this arrangement that the church would immediately fall into trouble and ruin if it were abandoned. Now, if the same need exists among us that led the Lord to establish the Sabbath for the Jews, let no one say it has

nothing to do with us. Our most caring and tender Father wanted to provide for our needs no less than He did for the Jews. But you might ask: why not meet daily, so the distinction between days could be removed? I wish that were possible. Devoting time daily to spiritual growth would certainly be worthy. But since the weakness of many prevents daily meetings, and the rule of charity does not allow us to demand more of them, why should we not follow the pattern that we see laid upon us by God's will?

I am forced to spend some time on this point, because in our day many restless people stir up trouble over Sunday. They complain that Christian people are being nurtured in a Jewish spirit because they observe certain days. But I reply that we observe these days without any trace of Jewish practice, because in this matter we are far different from the Jews. We do not keep the day as a strict religious ceremony in which we think some spiritual mystery is represented. Instead, we maintain it as a necessary tool for preserving order in the church. Paul teaches that Christians should not be judged for keeping such days, because the Sabbath was a shadow of things to come. For this reason, he feared he had labored in vain among the Galatians because they still observed special days. He also tells the Romans that it is superstitious to make distinctions between days. But who, aside from these extremists, cannot see what kind of observance the apostle means? Those people did not consider the practical purpose and church order. Instead, they kept the days as shadows of spiritual things, and in doing so they obscured Christ's glory and the light of the Gospel. They did not stop working because work would distract them from holy studies and meditation. Rather, they stopped out of a kind of religious ritual, imagining that by resting they were

preserving the mysteries handed down to them from ancient times. The apostle, I say, attacks this disordered observance of days, not the lawful choice of days that serves the peace of Christian fellowship. In the churches he himself established, the Sabbath was kept for this practical purpose. He appointed the same day for the Corinthians to gather their collection for the relief of the brothers in Jerusalem. If they fear superstition, there was more danger of it in the Jewish feast days than in the Sundays Christians now observe. As was fitting for the overthrow of superstition, the day the Jews religiously observed was removed. And as was necessary for keeping order and peace in the church, another day was appointed for the same use.

The early fathers had good reason for replacing the Sabbath with the day we call Sunday. Since the fulfillment of the spiritual rest that the old Sabbath foreshadowed is found in Christ's resurrection, Christians are reminded by that same day -- the day that ended the shadows -- that they should no longer cling to the ceremonial shadow. Yet I do not cling so rigidly to the number seven that I would bind the church to it. Nor will I condemn churches that have other special days for their gatherings, as long as they are free from superstition. They will be free from superstition if they are used only for maintaining discipline and good order. Let the summary be this: as the truth was given to the Jews through a figure, so it is delivered to us without any shadows at all. First, throughout our entire lives we should meditate on a continual Sabbath -- a rest from our own works -- so that the Lord may work in us by His Spirit. Second, every person should privately exercise themselves in devout reflection on God's works as often as they have time. We should also all observe the lawful order the church

has established for hearing the word, for the administration of the sacraments, and for public prayer. Third, we should not unkindly oppress those under our authority. This is how the foolish ideas of the false prophets collapse -- those who in past ages infected the people with a Jewish mindset. They claimed that only the ceremonial aspect of this commandment was removed (what they called the designation of the seventh day), while the moral aspect remains (the keeping of one day per week). But in effect, this amounts to nothing more than changing the day to reproach the Jews while still keeping the same sense of holiness in their minds. The same mysterious significance of the day remains among them as it did among the Jews. And truly, we see what good their teaching has done. Those who cling to their rules end up surpassing the Jews in crude and carnal Sabbath superstition. The rebukes found in Isaiah apply no less to them today than to those the prophet originally criticized. But this general principle must be maintained above all: religion must not be allowed to decline or grow weak among us. Therefore, holy gatherings must be diligently kept, and those outward helps that nourish the worship of God must be maintained.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

Honor your father and your mother, that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God shall give you.

The purpose of this commandment is that because the Lord delights in preserving His established order, He wills that the ranks of authority He has ordained not be violated. The summary, then, is that we should reverence those whom the Lord has set over us, and give them honor, obedience, and gratitude. From this it fol-

lows that we are forbidden to take anything from their dignity through contempt, stubbornness, or ingratitude. The word "honor" has a very broad meaning in Scripture. When the apostle says that elders who rule well are worthy of double honor, he means not only that reverence is owed to them, but also the compensation their ministry deserves. Because this commandment of submission is most contrary to the perverseness of human nature -- which swells with eagerness to climb high and can barely endure being brought low -- God has set the most naturally lovable and least offensive form of authority as an example. By this He could more easily humble and train our minds to accept submission. Therefore, through the easiest form of obedience, the Lord gradually trains us for all lawful submission, since the same principle applies to all authority. To whoever He gives any position of authority, He shares His own name with them insofar as it is needed to maintain that authority. The titles of Father, God, and Lord belong to Him alone, so that whenever we hear any of these names, our minds should be struck with a sense of His majesty. Therefore, those He makes sharers in these titles He causes to shine with a certain spark of His brightness, so that each may be honored according to their rank. So in the one who is our father, we should see something of the nature of God, because he does not bear God's name without reason. The one who is our prince or lord shares in some measure of God's honor.

Therefore, there should be no doubt that God here sets a general rule: whenever we recognize that someone has been placed over us by His appointment, we should give them reverence, obedience, gratitude, and whatever other duties we can perform. It makes no difference whether they are worthy or unworthy.

Whatever sort they may be, they have not attained that position without God's providence. For this reason, the lawgiver wills that they be honored. He has specifically commanded reverence toward parents, who brought us into this life. Nature itself should practically instruct us in this reverence. Those who break the authority of parents through dishonor or stubbornness are monsters, not human beings. Therefore, the Lord commanded all who disobey their parents to be put to death, as people unworthy of enjoying the light of life who refuse to acknowledge the ones through whom they received it. Several additions in the law confirm what we have already noted: that there are three parts to the honor spoken of here -- reverence, obedience, and gratitude. God establishes the first part when He commands that anyone who curses his father or mother be put to death, for there He punishes contempt and dishonor toward parents. He confirms the second part when He assigns the death penalty for disobedient and rebellious children. The third part is found in Christ's saying in Matthew 15, that it is God's commandment to do good to our parents. And whenever Paul mentions this commandment, he explains that obedience is what it requires.

An attached promise serves to commend this commandment, reminding us how pleasing to God the submission commanded here is. Paul uses this same incentive to stir up our dullness when he says that this is the first commandment with a promise. The promise that appeared earlier in the first table was not specific to one commandment but extended to the whole law. This promise should be understood as follows: the Lord spoke specifically to the Israelites about the land He had promised them as their inheritance. If possessing the land was a pledge of God's generosity, we

should not be surprised that it pleased God to demonstrate His favor by granting length of life, through which a person could long enjoy His gift. The meaning, then, is this: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may enjoy possession of the land for a long time, which will serve as a testimony of My grace." But since the whole earth is blessed to the faithful, we rightly count this present life among God's blessings. Therefore, this promise applies to us as well, since long life is proof of God's goodwill. Long life is not promised to us -- nor was it promised to the Jews -- as though blessedness were found in it alone, but because it is customarily a sign of God's tender love. So if it happens that an obedient child is taken from this life before reaching old age -- as often occurs -- God is no less faithful in keeping His promise than if He rewarded someone who was promised one acre with a hundred acres. Everything comes down to this: long life is promised to us insofar as it is a blessing from God, and it is a blessing insofar as it is proof of His favor -- which He demonstrates even more fully and perfectly to His servants through death.

Furthermore, when the Lord promises the blessing of this present life to children who honor their parents as they should, He is also quietly declaring that a sure curse hangs over stubborn and disobedient children. To make sure this is carried out, He declares them subject to the death penalty through His law and commands their execution. And if they escape that judgment, He Himself takes vengeance on them by one means or another. We see how many of that kind are killed in wars and fights, while others are tormented in strange and unusual ways. Nearly all of them prove that this threat is not empty. But even if some escape to old age, since they are deprived of God's blessing in this life and do nothing

but miserably waste away -- and are reserved for greater punishments hereafter -- they are far from sharing in the blessing promised to godly children. This should also be noted along the way: we are not commanded to obey parents except in the Lord. This is clear from the foundation already laid. Parents sit in the high place where the Lord has advanced them by sharing a portion of His honor with them. Therefore, the submission we show to them should be a stepping-stone toward honoring that supreme Father. So if they push us to break the law, they rightly cease to be regarded as parents and become strangers trying to pull us away from obedience to the true Father. The same principle applies to princes, lords, and all kinds of superiors. It would be shameful and unreasonable for their authority to overpower His, since their authority depends entirely on His and should only serve to lead us toward Him.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

You shall not kill.

The purpose of this commandment is that since God has bound all humanity together in a certain unity, every person should regard the safety of all others as something entrusted to their care. In summary, all violence, injury, and harm by which our neighbor's body may be hurt is forbidden. We are therefore commanded to faithfully use whatever power we have to defend our neighbors' lives, to seek their wellbeing, to watch out for any harm that might come to them, and to help them when they are in danger. If you consider that God the lawgiver says this, then also remember that He intends this rule to govern your soul as well. It would be foolish to think that He who sees the thoughts of the

heart and cares about them above all would instruct only the body in true righteousness. Therefore, murder in the heart is also forbidden by this law, and we are commanded to feel a genuine desire to preserve our brother's life. The hand carries out the murder, but the mind conceives it when it is infected with wrath and hatred. Ask yourself whether you can be angry with your brother without burning with desire to harm him. If you cannot be angry without wanting to harm him, then you cannot hate him either, since hatred is nothing but deep-rooted, settled anger. Although you pretend otherwise and try to excuse yourself with empty arguments, wherever anger or hatred exists, there is a desire to cause harm. If you still try to dodge with excuses, the mouth of the Holy Spirit has already declared that anyone who hates his brother in his heart is a murderer. The mouth of the Lord Christ has declared that whoever is angry with his brother is guilty of judgment, that whoever says "Raca" is guilty before the council, and that whoever says "You fool" is guilty of the fire of hell.

Scripture points to two principles of fairness on which this commandment is grounded. Since a person is both the image of God and our own flesh, we must treat them as sacred if we do not want to defile God's image, and we must care for them as our own flesh if we do not want to abandon our own humanity. The kind of encouragement that comes from the redemption and grace of Christ will be discussed in another place. God intended us to naturally consider two things about every person that should persuade us to preserve their life: that we should both respect the image of God stamped on them and embrace them as our own flesh. No one has escaped the guilt of murder simply by not shedding blood. If you do anything in action, attempt anything through effort, or con-

ceive anything in desire and intention that threatens another person's safety, you are guilty of murder. And again: if you do not work as much as you can and as the occasion allows to defend someone's life, you break the law with equal seriousness. If such great care is taken for the safety of the body, we should gather from this how much effort and labor is owed to the safety of the soul, which in the Lord's sight infinitely surpasses the body.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

You shall not commit adultery.

The purpose of this commandment is that since God loves purity and cleanness, all impurity should be far from us. The summary, then, is that we should not defile ourselves with any impurity or lustful excess of the flesh. The corresponding positive commandment is that we chastely and modestly order every part of our lives. God specifically forbids fornication by name, because all unchaste desire leads to it. By condemning what is most crude and obvious -- since it also defiles the body -- He brings us to hate all lustful desire. Since human beings were created not to live alone but to have a partner joined to them, and since the curse of sin has made this need even more pressing, the Lord has provided sufficient help in this area. He established marriage, sanctifying with His blessing the companionship that was begun by His authority. From this it follows that every sexual union between a man and woman outside of marriage is cursed before God, and that marriage itself was established as a remedy for our weakness, so that we would not run headlong into uncontrolled lust. Therefore, let us not deceive ourselves, since we hear that no one can be joined to another outside of marriage without God's curse.

Since by the condition of our nature, and even more so by the lust kindled after the fall, we are doubly prone to desire the company of women -- except those whom God by His special grace has exempted from this -- let each person carefully consider what has been given to them. Virginity, I grant, is a virtue not to be despised. But since it is denied to some and granted to others only for a time, those who struggle with sexual temptation and cannot overcome it should turn to marriage as the help for maintaining chastity according to their station in life. Those who cannot receive this word, if they do not address their lack of self-control with the remedy that is offered and granted to them, are fighting against God and resisting His plan. Let no one object to me, as many do today, that with God's help a person can do all things. God's help is present only for those who walk in His ways -- that is, in the calling from which all these people withdraw, who reject God's appointed helps and try to master their needs through empty, reckless boldness. The Lord declares that sexual self-control is a unique gift from God, and of the kind that is not given generally to the whole body of the church, but to a few of its members. First, He says that there is a certain kind of person who has made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven -- that is, so they may more freely and fully devote themselves to the affairs of the heavenly kingdom. But so that no one would think such self-control is within human power, He had shown a little before that not everyone can receive this, but only those to whom it is specifically given from heaven. He concludes: "Let the one who is able to receive it, receive it." Paul affirms this even more plainly when he writes that every person has their own gift from God -- one this way, and another that way.

Since we are plainly warned that it is not in every person's power to remain chaste while single -- no matter how hard they try -- and that this is a unique grace God gives only to certain people so they may be more available for His work, are we not fighting against God and the nature He has established if we do not match our way of living to the measure of our ability? Here the Lord forbids fornication, and so He requires purity and chastity from us. The only way to maintain these is for each person to measure themselves by their own capacity. No one should despise marriage as something useless or unnecessary, nor should they desire the single life unless they are truly able to live without a spouse. Even in this, they should not merely seek the comfort and convenience of the flesh, but should remain unmarried only so they may be more ready and prepared for every duty of godliness. Since the gift of celibacy is given to many for only a limited time, each person should abstain from marriage only as long as they are fit to maintain the single state. If they lack the strength to control their desires, let them understand that the Lord has now placed upon them the necessity of marrying. The apostle shows this when he commands that to avoid fornication, every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband. If anyone cannot live in self-control, they should marry in the Lord. First he declares that the majority of people are prone to the weakness of sexual desire. Then, of those who are prone to it, he excludes no one, but commands all of them to turn to marriage as the only remedy against impurity. Therefore, if those who lack self-control neglect to help their weakness through this means, they sin by disobeying the apostle's command. And let no one flatter himself who does not touch a woman, thinking he cannot be accused of impurity

while his mind burns inwardly with lust. Paul defines chastity as purity of mind joined with purity of body. "An unmarried woman," he says, "thinks about the things of the Lord, since she is holy both in body and in spirit." Therefore, when he gives a reason to support the previous command, he does not merely say that it is better for a man to take a wife than to defile himself with a prostitute. He says it is better to marry than to burn.

Now if married couples acknowledge that their union is blessed by the Lord, they are reminded not to defile it with uncontrolled and excessive lust. Although the honor of marriage covers the shame of sexual weakness, it should not become a license for it. Therefore, married couples should not think that everything is permissible between them. Rather, let each husband conduct himself with his wife soberly, and each wife with her husband. In doing so, let them commit nothing unfitting to the honor and modesty of marriage. Marriage made in the Lord should be kept within the bounds of moderation and decency, not allowed to overflow into every kind of extreme indulgence. Ambrose rebuked this indulgence with a saying that was indeed severe but not unfitting: he called a husband who shows no regard for modesty or decency in the marriage bed the adulterer of his own wife. Finally, let us consider who the lawgiver is that condemns fornication here. It is He who by His own right ought to possess us entirely, and who requires purity of soul, spirit, and body. Therefore, when He forbids fornication, He also forbids using provocative clothing, indecent gestures, and filthy speech to ensnare another person's chastity. Archelaus' remark to a young man who was excessively flashy and showy in his dress is worth remembering: he said it made no difference which part of his body was defiled by impurity. We should

keep this in mind if we have any regard for God, who hates all filthiness wherever it appears, whether in our soul or body. And to remove all doubt, remember that the Lord here commends chastity. If the Lord requires chastity from us, then He condemns everything that opposes it. Therefore, if you want to show obedience: do not let your mind burn inwardly with evil desire, do not let your eyes wander after corrupt attractions, do not let your body be dressed up to lure others, do not let your tongue with filthy talk entice your mind to similar thoughts, and do not let gluttony inflame you with lack of self-control. All these vices are like stains that soil the purity of chastity.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

You shall not steal.

The purpose of this commandment is that since God hates injustice, each person should receive what rightly belongs to them. The summary, then, is that we are forbidden to covet other people's goods, and we are commanded to faithfully work to preserve each person's property. We should think of it this way: whatever each person possesses has not come to them by chance, but by the distribution of the sovereign Lord of all things. Therefore, no one's goods can be taken from them by evil means without committing an offense against God's arrangement. There are many kinds of theft. One consists of violence, when another person's goods are seized through force and reckless robbery. Another kind consists of malicious deceit, when goods are slyly stolen away. Another kind involves a more hidden cunning, when goods are wrested from the owner under the guise of law. Another kind uses flattery, when goods are drained away under the pretense of a gift.

But rather than listing every kind of theft in detail, let us recognize this: all crafty methods by which our neighbor's possessions and money are diverted to us -- whenever they stray from sincere intentions toward a desire to cheat or cause harm -- must be considered theft. Although such people may win their case in a court of law, God does not evaluate things the same way. He sees the long, cunning schemes by which a deceitful person begins to entangle the simpler mind until they finally draw them into their net. He sees the harsh and unfair laws by which the powerful oppress and crush the weak. He sees the seductive lures by which the clever person catches the unsuspecting, like baited hooks. All these things are hidden from human judgment and never come to human knowledge. This kind of wrongdoing occurs not only with money, merchandise, or land, but with every right a person has. We defraud our neighbor of their goods whenever we withhold the services we owe them. If a lazy or dishonest manager wastes his master's resources, or is not diligent in managing them, or wrongfully squanders or recklessly destroys what was entrusted to him; if a servant mocks his master, reveals his secrets, betrays his life or property -- and conversely, if a master cruelly oppresses his household -- all these people are guilty of theft before God. For whoever fails to fulfill their obligations according to their calling both withholds and diverts what belongs to another.

We will rightly obey this commandment if, being content with our own situation, we seek only honest and lawful gain. We must not covet growing rich through injustice, nor try to strip our neighbor of their goods to increase our own. We must not try to heap up cruel wealth squeezed from other people's blood. We must not endlessly scrape together everything we can, by right or by wrong,

to fill our greed or satisfy our wasteful spending. On the other side, let this be our constant aim: to faithfully help all people by counsel and action to keep what is theirs, as far as we are able. If we are dealing with dishonest and deceitful people, let us rather be willing to give up some of our own than fight with them. And not only that, but let us share with those in need, and from our resources relieve the hardship of those we see oppressed by poverty. Finally, let each person consider what they owe to others by duty, and faithfully pay it. For this reason, let the people hold in honor all those set over them, patiently bear their governance, obey their laws and commands, and refuse nothing they can bear while keeping God's favor. In return, let rulers care for their people, preserve public peace, defend the good, restrain the wicked, and manage all things as those ready to give an account of their office to the supreme judge. Let the ministers of churches faithfully carry out their ministry and not corrupt the doctrine of salvation, but deliver it pure and sincere to the people of God. Let them instruct not only through teaching but also through the example of their lives. In short, let them watch over their people as good shepherds watch over their sheep. Let the people in turn receive them as messengers and apostles of God, give them the honor that the highest Master has granted them, and provide for their needs. Let parents take up the responsibility to feed, govern, and teach their children as those entrusted to them by God. Let them not provoke or embitter their children with harshness, but instead cherish and embrace them with the kindness and tenderness that befits their role. We have already discussed how children owe obedience to their parents in the same way. Let young people respect old age, as the Lord willed that age should be honored. Let older people also guide the

weakness of youth with their wisdom and experience -- in which they surpass the young -- not with rough and loud scolding, but by balancing strictness with gentleness and kindness. Let servants show themselves diligent and willing to obey, not just when they are being watched, but from the heart, as serving God Himself. And let masters not be irritable and impossible to please, nor oppress their servants with excessive harshness, nor treat them with insult. Instead, let them recognize that servants are their brothers and fellow servants under the heavenly Lord, whom they ought to love and treat gently. In this way, I say, let every person consider what they owe to their neighbors in their position and place, and let them pay what they owe. Furthermore, our minds should always keep the lawgiver in view, so we may know that this law is made for our hearts as well as our hands -- that people should devote themselves to protecting and advancing the well-being and profit of others.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

The purpose of this commandment is that since God, who is truth, hates lying, we must practice truthfulness without any deceptive disguise. The summary, then, is that we must not harm anyone's reputation through slander or false reports, nor hinder them in their goods through lying. In short, we must not wrong anyone through a love of gossip or busybody talk. Connected to this prohibition is the positive command: as far as we are able, we should faithfully work to defend everyone's reputation and property by affirming the truth. The Lord seems to have explained this commandment in Exodus 23: "You shall not spread a false report,

nor join your hand to speak false witness for the wicked." Again: "You shall flee from lying." In another place, He does not merely call us away from lying by warning us not to be accusers or gossips among the people. He also forbids anyone from deceiving their neighbor, prohibiting both kinds of wrong in separate commandments. There is no doubt that just as God has forbidden cruelty, sexual sin, and greed in the earlier commandments, here He restrains falsehood. Falsehood has two parts, as we noted before. Either we damage our neighbor's good name through malicious desire to slander, or we hinder their interests through lying and sometimes through hostile speech. It makes no difference whether formal, judicial testimony is meant here, or the ordinary testimony used in private conversation. We must always return to this principle: among all the general categories of a vice, one specific example is highlighted. It is chosen especially because the ugliness of the fault is most obvious in that example. Though it would be appropriate to extend this more broadly to slander and hostile gossip that wrongfully hurts our neighbors -- since courtroom lying is never without perjury. But perjury, insofar as it profanes and defiles the name of God, has already been sufficiently addressed in the third commandment. Therefore, the right use of this commandment is that our tongue should serve both our neighbor's good name and well-being by affirming the truth. The fairness of this is more than obvious. If a good reputation is more precious than any treasure, then being stripped of a good name harms a person no less than being robbed of their goods. And sometimes false testimony damages a person's resources just as much as violent theft. Yet it is remarkable how carelessly people commonly offend in this area. Very few people are not seriously infected with

this disease. We are so delighted by a poisonous sweetness in both searching out and exposing other people's faults. Let us not think it is excuse enough if we do not outright lie. The One who forbids your neighbor's name from being stained with lies also wants it preserved unharmed, as far as the truth will allow. However much a person may guard against lying themselves, by doing only that they silently admit they have some responsibility for their neighbor. But this should be enough to keep our neighbor's good name safe: that God cares about it. Therefore, all malicious speech is utterly condemned. By malicious speech, we do not mean the rebuke used for correction, nor accusation or legal proceedings seeking a remedy for wrongdoing, nor public criticism aimed at making other sinners afraid, nor revealing faults to those who need to be warned for their own safety. We mean only spiteful accusation that arises from malice and a willful desire to gossip. This commandment also extends to this: we must not use mocking humor mixed with bitter taunts, stinging others under the pretense of fun. Many people seek a reputation for wit at the expense of others' shame and even grief. Through such reckless ridicule, neighbors are often seriously harmed. Now if we turn our eyes to the lawgiver -- who by rightful authority must rule our ears and minds no less than our tongues -- we will find that eagerness to hear slander and a hasty readiness to make harsh judgments are equally forbidden. It would be very foolish to think that God hates the fault of evil speech on the tongue but does not disapprove of the fault of malice in the heart. Therefore, if we have a true fear and love of God, let us strive as far as we can -- as far as is fitting and as charity allows -- to give neither our tongues nor our ears to slander and bitter mockery. Let us not rashly yield our minds to unfounded suspi-

cions. Instead, as fair-minded interpreters of everyone's words and actions, let us protect their honor with gentleness in our judgment, our hearing, and our speech.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house, etc.

The purpose of this commandment is that since the Lord wills our entire soul to be possessed by the desire to love, all desire contrary to charity must be driven out of our minds. The summary, then, is that no thought should creep into us that might move our minds with a harmful longing that turns toward another person's loss. The corresponding positive command is that whatever we conceive, intend, desire, or pursue should be joined with the benefit and advantage of our neighbors. But here a difficult problem seems to arise. If what we said earlier is true -- that the names "fornication" and "theft" already include the desire to fornicate and the intention to deceive and steal -- then it might seem unnecessary to separately forbid coveting other people's goods. But the distinction between intention and coveting easily resolves this. Intention, as we have described it in the previous commandments, is deliberate consent of the will after desire has taken hold of the mind. But coveting can occur without any such deliberate decision or agreement. It happens when the mind is merely pricked and stirred by empty and perverse attractions. Therefore, just as the Lord previously commanded that the rule of charity should govern our wills, our efforts, and our works, now He commands that even the conceptions of our minds be directed by the same rule. None of them should be crooked or twisted in a way that might tempt our minds in another direction. Just as He previously forbade our

minds from being led toward wrath, hatred, fornication, robbery, and lying. He now forbids us from being even slightly moved toward them.

It is not without good reason that God requires such great uprightness. Who can deny that it is right for all the powers of the soul to be filled with charity? But if any of them strays from charity's aim, who can deny that something is wrong? Where do so many desires harmful to your neighbor come from, if not from this: that you neglect your neighbor and care only for yourself? If your mind were completely saturated with charity, none of it would be open to such thoughts. Therefore, to the extent that it entertains coveting, it must be lacking in charity. But someone will object that it hardly seems right to condemn the random thoughts that are tossed around in a person's mind without order and eventually vanish, since the heart is where coveting truly resides. I answer that we are talking about the kind of thoughts that, while present in our minds, simultaneously bite and stir our hearts with desire. Our minds never wish for anything without our hearts being stirred up and leaping along with them. Therefore, God commands an extraordinary intensity of love. He will not allow it to be entangled by even the smallest snares of coveting. He requires a remarkably well-ordered mind, which He does not allow to be even slightly stirred against the law of love by the faintest provocations. Augustine first opened the way for me to this interpretation, so that you will not think it lacks the support of a serious authority. Although the Lord's purpose was to forbid all wrongful coveting, in describing it He specifically named the things that most commonly deceive us with a false image of pleasure. He wanted to leave nothing for coveting to feed on, so He drew it away from the things on

which it most strongly rages and triumphs. Here then is the second table of the law, which teaches us well enough what we owe to others for God's sake. The whole rule of charity depends on this. Therefore, you will call in vain for the duties contained in this table unless your teaching rests on the fear and reverence of God as its foundation. As for those who seek to find two commandments in the prohibition of coveting, the wise reader, even without my comment, will judge that they are wrongly splitting apart what was a single commandment. And it makes no difference to our case that the phrase "You shall not covet" is repeated a second time. After first naming the house, God lists its parts, beginning with the wife. This makes it perfectly clear that the whole passage -- as the Hebrews rightly read it -- should be taken as one sentence. In essence, God commands that everything each person possesses should remain safe and untouched, not only from wrongful actions and desire to defraud, but even from the very slightest craving that might stir our minds.

Now it is not hard to see what the whole law aims at: the fulfillment of righteousness, so that it might shape human life after the pattern of God's purity. God has painted a portrait of His own nature in the law. If a person carries out in action what is commanded there, they will in a sense express an image of God in their life. When Moses wanted to summarize the law for the Israelites, he said: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you, but that you fear the Lord and walk in His ways?" "Love Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, and keep His commandments?" He never stopped repeating this same message whenever he wanted to point out the law's purpose. The doctrine of the law focuses on this: joining a person to God -- or as Moses

puts it elsewhere, making them cling to God -- in holiness of life. Now, the perfection of that holiness consists in the two principal points already discussed: that we love the Lord God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. The first and most important thing is that our soul be filled in every part with love for God. From that, love for our neighbor naturally flows. The apostle shows this when he writes that the goal of the law is love from a pure conscience and a sincere faith. You see how conscience and sincere faith -- that is, in a word, true godliness -- are placed at the head, and from there charity is derived. Therefore, anyone who thinks that the law teaches only basic introductions to righteousness, merely getting people started in their moral education without directing them to the true goal of good works, is mistaken. Beyond the statement of Moses and this one of Paul, you could not wish for anything more in terms of the highest perfection. How far will someone go who is not satisfied with this instruction -- which teaches people to fear God, to worship Him spiritually, to obey His commandments, to follow the uprightness of the Lord's way, and finally to pursue purity of conscience, sincere faith, and love? This confirms the interpretation of the law that searches for and finds in the commandments all the duties of godliness and love. Those who follow only the dry and bare letter, as if the law taught only half of God's will, do not understand its purpose, as the apostle testifies.

But when Christ and the apostles summarize the law, they sometimes leave out the first table, which misleads many people. They try to stretch these words to cover both tables. In Matthew, Christ calls the chief points of the law mercy, judgment, and faith. Under the word "faith" here, I have no doubt He means truthfulness.

ness or faithfulness toward others. But some interpreters, wanting to extend the statement to the whole law, take it to mean devotion toward God. They labor in vain. Christ is speaking about the works by which a person should demonstrate their righteousness. Once we recognize this, we will also stop wondering why, when a young man asked Him which commandments lead to life, He answered with only these: "You shall not kill." "You shall not commit adultery." "You shall not steal." "You shall not bear false witness." "Honor your father and your mother." "Love your neighbor as yourself." The obedience of the first table consisted almost entirely either in the heart's inner devotion or in ceremonies. The heart's devotion was not visible, and the hypocrites constantly performed the ceremonies. But works of charity are the kind by which we can demonstrate genuine righteousness. This appears so frequently in the prophets that it should be familiar to any moderately experienced reader. When the prophets call people to repentance, they almost always set aside the first table and simply call for faithfulness, justice, mercy, and fairness. By doing this, they do not skip over the fear of God, but they require genuine proof of it through its visible results. It is well known that when the prophets speak about keeping the law, they usually focus on the second table, because obedience to righteousness and integrity is most clearly demonstrated there. There is no need to list specific passages, because everyone can easily see what I am saying for themselves.

But you might ask: is living innocently among people more important for perfect righteousness than honoring God with true godliness? Not at all. But since a person cannot easily maintain charity in all its aspects without earnestly fearing God, their charity proves they also have godliness. Beyond that, since the Lord

well knows that no benefit we offer can reach Him -- which He also testifies through the prophet -- He does not require such duties for Himself. Instead, He exercises us in good works toward our neighbor. For this reason, the apostle rightly places the whole perfection of the saints in charity. And not inappropriately, in another place he calls charity the fulfillment of the law, adding that the person who loved their neighbor has fulfilled the law. Again: "The whole law is summed up in this one word: Love your neighbor as yourself." He teaches nothing different from what Christ says: "Whatever you want others to do for you, do the same for them." "For this is the law and the prophets." It is certain that in the law and the prophets, faith and everything that belongs to the true worship of God holds the chief place, and that love stands below it in a lower position. But the Lord's point is that the law prescribes for us an observance of right and fairness through which we demonstrate our godly fear of Him, if there is any in us.

Let us hold firmly to this: our lives will be best conformed to God's will and the rule of His law when they are in every way most beneficial to our brothers and sisters. In the entire law, there is not a single syllable that prescribes any rule about what a person should do or avoid for the benefit of their own flesh. And certainly, since people are naturally born with a disposition that carries them too far in self-love -- and no matter how much they fall from the truth they still keep that self-love -- no law was needed to further inflame a love that was already naturally excessive beyond measure. From this it is clear that keeping the commandments means not loving ourselves but loving God and our neighbor. The person who lives most holily is the one who lives and labors least for themselves. And no one lives worse or more wickedly than the per-

son who lives and labors only for themselves, thinking and seeking only their own interests. The Lord, in order to express how earnestly we should love our neighbors, set the measure by our love for ourselves as a standard. He had no other more intense or stronger affection to measure it by. The force of this expression must be carefully weighed. He does not, as certain thinkers have foolishly imagined, give self-love the first rank and charity the second. Rather, the natural affection of love we all direct toward ourselves, He redirects toward others. That is why the apostle says charity does not seek its own. Their argument that the thing regulated is always inferior to its rule is not worth a moment's consideration. God does not make self-love a rule to which charity toward others must submit. Rather, since our natural tendency was to focus all our love on ourselves, He shows that it must now be spread abroad. We should be ready to do good to our neighbor with no less cheerfulness, passion, and care than we show toward ourselves.

Since Christ has shown in the parable of the Samaritan that the word "neighbor" includes every person, no matter how much a stranger they may be, there is no reason to limit the command to love within the bounds of our own friendships and acquaintances. I do not deny that the closer someone is to us, the more they should be helped through our efforts to do good. The order of human life requires that people share more duties of friendship as they are bound together by closer ties of family, familiarity, or community -- and this is not offensive to God, whose providence practically drives us to it. But I say that all of humanity without exception must be embraced with one feeling of charity. In this regard, there is no distinction between foreigner and native, worthy

and unworthy, friend and enemy, because all people must be considered in relation to God, not to themselves. When we turn away from this perspective, it is no wonder we become tangled in many errors. Therefore, if we want to practice the true way of loving, we must not look at the person -- whose sight would more often make us hate than love -- but at God, who commands that the love we offer to Him be poured out among all people. Let this be a permanent foundation: whatever kind of person someone may be, they still deserve to be loved because God is loved.

Therefore, it was a most harmful product of either ignorance or malice that the medieval scholars turned these commandments about not seeking revenge and loving enemies -- which were given to the Jews in old times and are equally binding on all Christians -- into mere counsels. They claimed these were optional rather than obligatory. They passed the duty of obeying these commands exclusively to monks, who were supposedly more righteous than ordinary Christians in at least this one respect: they willingly bound themselves to keep these counsels. Their reason for not treating these as binding laws was that they seemed too burdensome and heavy, especially for Christians who are under the law of grace. Do they dare to set aside God's eternal law of loving our neighbors? Is there any such distinction anywhere in the law? Are there not rather commandments found everywhere that most strictly require us to love our enemies? What else does it mean when we are commanded to feed our enemy when hungry? To set his wandering oxen or donkeys back on the right path, or to help them when they collapse under their burden? Should we do good to an enemy's animals for his sake, yet have no goodwill toward him? What about this? Is not the word of the Lord eternal: "Leave vengeance to Me,

and I will repay"? This is stated even more plainly in another place. "Do not seek revenge, and do not hold grudges against your fellow citizens." Either let them blot these things out of the law, or let them acknowledge that the Lord was a lawgiver, and stop falsely pretending He was merely a counselor.

And what do they mean by the things they have dared to mock with their tasteless interpretation? "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you, bless those who curse you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven." Who cannot agree with Chrysostom that the weightiness of this reason clearly shows these are commandments, not mere suggestions? What is left for us if we are struck from the list of God's children? By their reasoning, only monks would be the children of the heavenly Father. Only monks would dare to call upon God as their Father. What would become of the church in the meantime? By the same logic, the church would be sent off to join the Gentiles and tax collectors. For Christ says: "If you are friendly only to your friends, what reward do you expect? Do not even the Gentiles and tax collectors do the same?" We would certainly be well off if the title of Christian were left to us while the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven were taken away! Augustine's argument is equally strong. When God forbids fornication, he says, He forbids it no less with the wife of your enemy than with the wife of your friend. When He forbids theft, He gives no permission to steal anything at all, whether from friend or from enemy. But Paul brings both of these -- not stealing and not committing adultery -- under the rule of love, and teaches that they are contained in the commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Therefore, either Paul was a false interpreter of the law, or it nec-

essarily follows that we must love even our enemies by commandment, just as we love our friends. Those who so freely throw off the common obligation of God's children truly show themselves to be children of Satan. It is hard to say whether they proclaimed this teaching with greater stupidity or shamelessness. None of the early church fathers failed to declare these as definite commandments. That this was not doubted even in Gregory's time is clear from his own statement, for he treats them as commandments without any debate. And how foolishly they reason! They say these commands are too heavy a burden for Christians. As if anything could be more demanding than loving God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. Compared to this law, anything else may be counted easy -- whether loving our enemies or banishing all desire for revenge from our minds. Indeed, everything is high and hard for our weakness -- even the least letter of the law. It is the Lord in whom we find strength. Let Him give what He commands, and command what He will. For Christians to be under the law of grace does not mean wandering without law. Rather, it means being grafted into Christ, by whose grace they are free from the curse of the law and by whose Spirit they have the law written on their hearts. Paul improperly called this grace a law, comparing it with the law of God against which he set it. But these people dispute about the word "law" over a matter of no importance.

Similarly problematic is their classification as merely venial sin of both secret ungodliness against the first table and the direct breaking of the last commandment. They define venial sin as a desire without deliberate consent that does not linger long in the heart. But I say that such desire cannot even enter the heart unless there is a deficiency of the things the law requires. We are forbid-

den to have foreign gods. When the mind, shaken by temptation and distrust, looks elsewhere -- when it is touched by a sudden desire to place its blessedness somewhere else -- where do these impulses come from, even if they quickly vanish, except from the fact that the soul has some emptiness where such temptations can enter? To avoid drawing out this argument any further: there is a commandment given to love God with all our heart, all our mind, and all our soul. If all the powers of our soul are not bent toward the love of God, we have already departed from obedience to the law. The enemies that rise up within us against God's kingdom and interrupt His decrees prove that God does not have His throne firmly established in our conscience. As for the last commandment, we have already shown that it properly belongs to this discussion. Has any desire of the mind pricked us? We are already guilty of coveting, and by that we have become lawbreakers. God forbids us not only to plot and scheme anything that could harm another, but even to be pricked and stirred with desire for it. But the curse of God always hangs over every breaking of the law. We cannot therefore prove that even the slightest desires are free from the sentence of death. "In weighing sins," Augustine says, "let us not bring false scales to weigh what we want and how we want at our own pleasure, saying: this is heavy and this is light." "Rather, let us bring God's scales from the holy Scriptures, as from the Lord's treasury, and weigh them there. Or better yet, let us not weigh them at all, but acknowledge what the Lord has already weighed." But what does Scripture say? When Paul says that the wages of sin is death, he clearly shows he knew nothing of this cor-

rupt distinction. Since we are already far too inclined to hypocrisy, this kind of self-comfort should not have been added to soothe our lazy consciences.

I wish they would consider what Christ's saying means: "Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be counted least in the kingdom of heaven." Are they not that very type of person when they dare to minimize the breaking of the law as though it were not worthy of death? But they should have considered not only what is commanded, but who it is that commands. God's authority is diminished in every transgression of the law He has given, no matter how small. Is it a small thing to them that God's majesty is offended in any way? Furthermore, if God has declared His will in the law, then whatever contradicts the law displeases Him. Will they imagine God's wrath to be so powerless that the punishment of death will not immediately follow? God Himself has pronounced it plainly, if they would rather listen to His voice than muddy the clear truth with their pointless arguments. "The soul that sins," He says, "shall die." And again, as I just quoted: "The wages of sin is death." Although they admit these are sins -- because they cannot deny it -- they stubbornly insist they are not deadly sins. Since they have already indulged their foolishness too much in this matter, let them at least learn to grow wiser. But if they persist in their delusion, we will leave them alone. Let the children of God learn this: all sin is deadly, because it is a rebellion against the will of God that inevitably provokes His wrath. It is a violation of the law, upon which God's judgment is pronounced without exception. The sins of the saints are forgivable -- not by their own nature, but because they receive pardon through the mercy of God.

THE. IX. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT CHRIST,
ALTHOUGH HE WAS KNOWN TO THE
JEWES VNDER THE LAW, YET WAS
DELIUERED ONLY BY THE GOSPELL.



Because God was pleased in ancient times to declare Himself a Father meaningfully through expiations and sacrifices, and not in vain did He consecrate a chosen people to Himself, He was undoubtedly known at that time in the same image in which He now appears to us in full brightness. For this reason Malachi, after urging the Jews to heed the law of Moses and continue studying it — since after his death there would be a gap in the prophetic office — immediately declared that a Sun of Righteousness would arise. By those words he taught that the law serves to hold the godly in expectation of Christ's coming, but that far greater light was to be hoped for when He actually came. This is why Peter says that the prophets searched and inquired carefully about the salvation now made known through the Gospel, and that it was revealed to them that they were ministering not to themselves or their own generation, but to us — those things that the Gospel has declared. Not that their teaching was unprofitable to the ancient people or of no benefit to themselves — but because

they did not enjoy the treasure God sent to us through their hands. Today the grace to which they testified is set clearly before our eyes. While they could only sip a little of it, we are offered a far richer share. Therefore Christ Himself, who affirms that Moses bore witness to Him, still extols the degree of grace by which we surpass the Jews. Speaking to His disciples, He said: 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, and blessed are the ears that hear what you hear. For many kings and prophets longed to see it and did not.' It is no small commendation of the revelation of the Gospel that God has placed us above the holy fathers who excelled in extraordinary godliness. This statement does not conflict with the passage where it is said that Abraham saw the day of Christ and rejoiced. Though the sight of something so distant was somewhat dim, he lacked nothing for the assurance of sure hope. And from that hope came the joy that accompanied this holy patriarch to his death. John's statement — 'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made Him known to us' — does not exclude the godly who had already died from participating in the understanding and light that shines in the person of Christ. Rather, by comparing their condition with ours, he teaches that the mysteries they saw only dimly under shadows are now made plain to us — as the author of the letter to the Hebrews explains well: 'God spoke in various ways and at many times through the prophets in the past, but now He has spoken through His beloved Son.' Although the only begotten Son — who is today to us the radiance of glory and the exact imprint of God the Father's nature — was known to the Jews in ancient times (as we have cited from Paul elsewhere: that He was the guide of their ancient deliverance), it is nonetheless true, as Paul teaches

elsewhere, that 'God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' For when He appeared in this His image, He made Himself visible in a way that far exceeds the dim and shadowy form in which He had previously been known. All the more foul and detestable, then, is the ingratitude and stubbornness of those who remain blind at midday. Therefore Paul says that their minds are darkened by Satan, so that they cannot see the glory of Christ shining in the Gospel, even though no veil stands between them and it.

I take the Gospel to mean the clear disclosure of the mystery of Christ. I grant that in the sense Paul calls the Gospel 'the doctrine of faith,' all the promises found here and there in the law concerning the free forgiveness of sins — by which God reconciles people to Himself — are counted as parts of it. For he sets faith over against those terrors that would trouble and torment the conscience if salvation had to be sought by works. It follows that in this broad sense, the term 'Gospel' encompasses all the testimonies God gave to the fathers in ancient times of His mercy and fatherly favor. But in its most precise and excellent meaning, I say it refers to the proclamation of the grace given in Christ. That meaning is not only the one commonly accepted but also rests on the authority of Christ and the apostles. So it is properly said of Him that He preached the Gospel of the kingdom. And Mark begins his account with these words: 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.' There is no need to pile up passages to prove what is well enough known. Christ therefore, through His coming, has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. By these words Paul does not mean that the fathers were drowned in the darkness of death

until the Son of God took on flesh. Rather, he is claiming this high honor for the Gospel — that it is a new and extraordinary kind of message, through which God fulfilled what He had promised, so that the truth of His promises was accomplished in the person of the Son. Although the faithful have always experienced what Paul says — that in Christ all the promises are 'Yes and Amen,' because they were sealed in their hearts — yet because He accomplished every part of our salvation in His flesh, this living delivery of those blessings rightly earned a new and singular title of praise. Hence Christ's saying: 'From now on you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.' Although He seems to be alluding to the ladder shown in vision to the patriarch Jacob, He describes the excellence of His coming by this mark: that He opened the gate of heaven to all people, so that the entrance is now freely accessible to all.

We must, however, guard against the devilish fantasy of Servetus, who, in attempting — or at least pretending to attempt — to magnify the greatness of Christ's grace, abolishes the promises entirely, as though they ended together with the law. He claims that the Gospel's faith brings us the fulfillment of all the promises, as if there were no difference between our condition and Christ's. I did acknowledge just now that Christ left nothing unfinished in the whole sum of our salvation. But it is wrong to conclude from this that we already enjoy the benefits He purchased — as if Paul's statement were false that our salvation is hidden in hope. I grant that by believing in Christ we have already passed from death to life. But we must also hold to John's statement: that although we know we are children of God, it has not yet appeared what we will be, until we are made like Him — that is, until we see Him as He is.

Therefore, although Christ offers in His Gospel a present fullness of spiritual blessings, the enjoyment of them remains hidden under hope until, stripped of this corruptible flesh, we are transformed into the glory of the One who goes before us. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit bids us to rest upon the promises, whose authority ought to silence all the barking of that unclean dog. As Paul testifies, godliness holds a promise both of the life to come and of the present life. For this reason he boasts of being an apostle of Christ according to the promise of life that is in Him. In another place he reminds us that we have the same promises that were given to the holy men of old. Finally, he sets this as the sum of blessedness: that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Yet we possess Christ only in the measure that we embrace Him clothed with His promises. The result is that He dwells in our hearts, and yet we are still traveling away from Him — for we walk by faith, not by sight. These two things fit together well: that we possess in Christ everything that belongs to the perfection of the heavenly life, and yet that faith is a seeing of things not yet seen. There is only this difference to note in the nature of the promises: the Gospel points to what the law had shadowed under figures.

This also refutes the error of those who compare the law and the Gospel only as they compare the merits of works with the free imputation of righteousness. That contrast is not to be rejected — for Paul often uses the word 'law' to mean the rule of righteous living in which God requires what is His, offering no hope of life unless we obey it in every point, and adding a curse for the slightest deviation. In such passages Paul is arguing that we please God freely and are counted righteous through pardon, because the obedience to which the reward is promised is found nowhere. So Paul

rightly sets the righteousness of the law and of the Gospel in opposition to each other. But the Gospel did not succeed the whole law in a way that introduced a different means of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and sealed as effective whatever the law had promised, and joined the body to the shadows. When Christ says that the law and the prophets were until John, He is not making the fathers subject to the curse that enslaved servants of the law cannot escape. He is only saying they were trained in certain basics and therefore stood far below the height of the Gospel's teaching. So Paul, calling the Gospel the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, immediately adds that it has the testimony of the law and the prophets. And at the end of that same letter, although he shows that the glory of Jesus Christ is the revelation of the mystery kept secret for ages, he qualifies that by adding that it is now openly shown through the writings of the prophets. From this we gather that when we consider the whole scope of the law, the Gospel differs from it only in the clarity of its disclosure. And yet, given the immeasurable abundance of grace poured out for us in Christ, it is not without good reason that we say His coming erected the heavenly kingdom of God on earth.

Between the law and the Gospel stood John, whose office was a bridge between them, related to both. When he called Christ the Lamb of God and the sacrifice for the cleansing of sins, he was setting forth the heart of the Gospel. Yet because he did not declare that incomparable power and glory that finally appeared in the resurrection, Christ says that he was not equal to the apostles. That is what Christ's words mean: though John is greater than any son born of women, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matthew 11:11). He is not comparing individuals there —

rather, after placing John above all the prophets, He elevates the preaching of the Gospel to the highest rank, which in another passage is signified by the phrase 'the kingdom of heaven.' When John calls himself merely a voice (John 1:23), as though he were inferior even to the prophets, he does not do so out of false humility. He means to teach that the proper office of the ambassador was not given to him — he only served as a herald preparing the way, as Malachi foretold (Malachi 4:5): 'Behold, I will send Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.' Throughout the entire course of his ministry he did nothing other than labor to win disciples for Christ — which Isaiah also confirms was the task appointed to him by God. In this sense Christ is called a lamp burning and shining (John 5:35) — because the full light of day had not yet broken. Yet this does not prevent John from being counted among the proclaimers of the Gospel, just as he used the same baptism that was later given to the apostles. But what he began was not brought to completion until the apostles carried it forward freely, after Christ had been taken up from them into heavenly glory.

THE. X. CHAPTER. ¶OF THE LIKE- NESSE OF THE OLDE AND NEWE TESTAMEN[•].



From what has been said, it is now clear that all the people God adopted from the beginning of the world were bound to Him in covenant by the same law and the same teaching that remains in force among us today. But because it is no small matter to have this point well established, I will add a further discussion. The fathers shared the same inheritance with us and hoped for the same salvation through the grace of the same Mediator — yet their condition differed from ours within that fellowship. Although the testimonies we have gathered from the law and the prophets make it plain that there was never any other rule of religion and godliness in God's people, writers frequently say things about the difference between the old and new covenant that may leave readers of less sharp judgment uncertain. We will therefore rightly set aside a specific place to examine this matter more carefully. This has been made necessary not only by its inherent importance but also by the monstrous claims of Servetus and various deluded people among the Anabaptists, who regard the people of Israel as no better than a herd of swine — whom they absurdly imagine the Lord fattened up

on this earth with no hope of heavenly immortality. To keep this deadly error away from godly minds, and to remove the doubts that commonly arise when the differences between the old and new covenant are mentioned, let us look at what they have in common and where they differ — and what covenant the Lord made with the Israelites before the coming of Christ, and what covenant He has made with us since Christ has been openly revealed.

Both points can be stated in a single sentence: the covenant of all the fathers differs from ours in nothing as to its substance and essential content — it is wholly one and the same — but the administration of it is different. Such brevity alone would be enough to confuse rather than clarify, so we must proceed with a fuller explanation if we are to do any good. In showing how the two are alike — or rather, how they are one — it would be unnecessary to repeat all the particulars already discussed, and it would be premature to mix in things still to be treated elsewhere. We must rest chiefly on three main points. First: the Jews were not appointed to aim at earthly wealth and happiness as their final goal — they were chosen by adoption to the hope of immortality, and the truth of that adoption was confirmed for them by the oracles, the law, and the prophets. Second: the covenant by which they were joined to the Lord rested not on any merit of theirs but on the mercy alone of the God who called them. Third: they both possessed and knew Christ the Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and made partakers of His promises. The second point has perhaps not yet been sufficiently established, and it will be treated fully in the proper place. There we will confirm with many clear testimonies from the prophets that whatever good the Lord did or promised to the people of Israel was entirely from His own pure goodness and

tender favor. The third point has already been touched on clearly in various places, and the first has not been left entirely undressed either.

In setting out this first point, which most directly belongs to the present topic and on which the most controversy centers, we will apply the most careful attention. But we will also supply along the way, or at the appropriate place, anything that remains lacking in the explanation of the other points. The apostle removes all doubt when he says that God the Father long before had promised the Gospel through the prophets in the holy Scriptures, and afterward published it according to the appointed time. He also says that the righteousness of faith obtained through the Gospel itself has the testimony of the law and the prophets. For the Gospel does not anchor people's hearts in the joys of this present life — it lifts them to the hope of immortality. It does not fasten them to earthly pleasures — it proclaims to them a hope laid up in heaven and, in a sense, transports them there. As Paul defines it elsewhere: 'When you believed the Gospel, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.' Again: 'We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love toward the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard in the true message of the Gospel.' Again: 'He called us through the Gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The Gospel is therefore called the word of salvation, the power of God to save the faithful, and the kingdom of heaven. Now if the teaching of the Gospel is spiritual and opens the entry into the possession of an incorruptible life, let us not suppose that those to whom it was promised and proclaimed passed over the care of their souls and lay dully

like animals in the pursuit of bodily pleasures. Nor should anyone object that the promises sealed in the law and the prophets concerning the Gospel were intended for the new people only. For shortly after speaking of the Gospel promised in the law, the apostle adds that everything the law contains is undoubtedly directed to those who are under the law. I grant this is a different argument. But Paul was not so forgetful that, having said all that the law contains belongs to the Jews, he would have forgotten what he had affirmed just a few verses earlier about the Gospel promised in the law. The apostle therefore shows most clearly that the old covenant was chiefly directed toward the life to come, when he says the promises of the Gospel are contained within it.

For the same reason it follows that the old covenant rested on the free mercy of God and was confirmed through Christ. For the very preaching of the Gospel declares nothing other than that sinners are justified by the fatherly kindness of God, without any deserving of their own — and the whole sum of the Gospel is fulfilled in Christ. Who then would dare make the Jews strangers to Christ, when we hear that the covenant of the Gospel was made with them, and that Christ is its only foundation? Who would dare exclude them from the benefit of free salvation, when we hear that the doctrine of the righteousness of faith was ministered to them? But rather than dispute at length about something so plain, we have the Lord's remarkable statement: 'Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was glad.' What Christ testifies of Abraham, the apostle shows was common to all the faithful people when he says that Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is not speaking there only of the eternal Godhead of Christ, but of His power, which was continually opened to the faithful. Therefore

both the blessed Virgin and Zechariah in their songs declare that the salvation revealed in Christ is the fulfillment of the promises God had made to Abraham and the patriarchs in ancient times. If the Lord in giving His Christ discharged the oath He had sworn of old, it cannot be denied that the end and goal of that oath was always Christ and eternal life.

The apostle goes further and places the Israelites on equal footing with us not only in the grace of the covenant but also in the significance of the sacraments. He intends, by citing examples of the punishments with which the Israelites were corrected in ancient times, to warn the Corinthians not to fall into similar offenses. He begins with this foundation: we have no reason to think ourselves above the vengeance of God that fell on the Israelites, since the Lord granted them not only the same benefits but displayed His grace among them with the same outward signs. It is as though he said: if you feel safe because the baptism with which you were marked and the Supper you receive have excellent promises, while you despise God's goodness and live licentiously — know that the Jews also had such sacraments, yet the Lord still executed His judgments against them most severely. They were baptized when they passed through the sea and under the cloud that sheltered them from the burning sun. Some say that crossing was a physical baptism that corresponds in some proportion to our spiritual baptism. But if that were true, the apostle's argument would fail — his whole point is to take away from Christians any claim to surpass the Jews by virtue of baptism. Nor is what follows open to this objection: that the Israelites ate the same spiritual food that we eat, and drank the same spiritual drink — which he explains to be Christ.

To overthrow Paul's statement, some object what Christ says: 'Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead; whoever eats My flesh will never die.' These two passages are easily reconciled. The Lord was speaking to people who sought only to fill their stomachs and had no care for the food of the soul. He therefore adapted His speech somewhat to their level, and in particular He shaped the comparison between manna and His own body according to their way of thinking. They were demanding that He establish His credentials with a miracle like the one Moses performed in the wilderness when he obtained manna from heaven. But all they understood in the manna was a remedy for the physical hunger that was afflicting the people — they did not penetrate to the higher mystery Paul has in view. So Christ, to show how much greater a benefit they ought to expect from Him than what Moses gave their fathers, framed the comparison this way: if it seemed to you a great miracle worth remembering that through Moses the Lord provided food from heaven to sustain His people for a short time so they would not die of hunger in the wilderness — consider how much more excellent is the food that gives immortality. We see why the Lord passed over the most important aspect of the manna and spoke only of its lowest benefit. The Jews had cast Moses in His face as a reproach, pointing to how he had relieved the people's need with manna. Christ answered that He is the minister of a far higher grace, in comparison with which the physical feeding of the people — the only thing they valued — ought rightly to be counted as nothing. Paul, however, knew that when the Lord rained manna from heaven, He did not provide it merely to fill their stomachs but also distributed it as a spiritual mystery — a figure of the spiritual life found in Christ. So Paul did

not pass over the part that was most worthy of attention. Therefore it follows clearly and certainly that the same promises of eternal and heavenly life that the Lord now grants to us were not only communicated to the Jews but were also sealed by truly spiritual sacraments. Augustine discusses this matter at length against Faustus the Manichee.

If readers would rather have testimonies from the law and the prophets showing that the spiritual covenant was common to the fathers — as we hear from Christ and the apostles — I will gladly supply them. I will do so all the more willingly because by that means the opponents will be more thoroughly convinced, leaving them no room to evade. I will begin with a proof that the Anabaptists in their pride will likely dismiss as foolish and laughable, but which will carry great weight with readers who are willing to learn and have sound judgment. I take as a settled principle that God's Word carries such life-giving power that whoever God grants a share in it receives life for their souls. This is why Peter's statement has always held true — that the Word is the incorruptible seed that abides forever, as he gathers from the words of Isaiah. Now since God in ancient times bound the Jews to Himself with this holy bond, there is no doubt that He also enrolled them in the hope of eternal life. When I say they embraced the Word that would join them to God, I am not speaking of the general working of God's Word that is poured out through heaven and earth and all creatures — which, though it quickens all things each according to its nature, does not deliver them from the necessity of decay. I am speaking of the special working by which the souls of the godly are both enlightened to the knowledge of God and in a sense joined to Him. Since Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, and the other fathers

cleaved to God through this illumination of the Word, I say there is no doubt they had entry into the immortal kingdom of God. For this was a genuine communion with God — and genuine communion with God cannot exist apart from the blessing of eternal life.

If that seems too tangled, let us come to the very form of the covenant, which will satisfy sober minds and thoroughly refute the ignorance of those who resist. God has always covenanted with His servants in these words: 'I will be your God, and you will be My people.' The prophets themselves consistently explain that in those words are contained life, salvation, and the whole sum of blessedness. David does not without reason repeatedly declare: 'Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord; blessed is the nation He has chosen as His inheritance' — and not because of earthly happiness, but because He delivers from death, preserves forever, and shows enduring mercy to those He has taken as His people. As the other prophets say: 'You are our God; we shall not die. The Lord is our king, our lawgiver; He will save us. Blessed are you, O Israel, because you are saved in the Lord your God.' And not to labor unnecessarily: the sound teaching of the prophets everywhere is that we will lack nothing for full abundance of good things and assurance of salvation, provided the Lord is our God. Rightly so — for if His face, the moment it begins to shine, is an immediate pledge of salvation, to what person will He openly show Himself as God without also opening to him the treasure of salvation? For He is our God on this condition: that He dwells in our midst, as He declared through Moses. But such a presence cannot be obtained without life being part of the possession as well. Even if nothing more were stated, these words — 'I am your God' — contain a plain enough promise of spiritual life. For He did not declare that He would be a

God to their bodies only, but chiefly to their souls. And souls that are not united to God through righteousness remain estranged from Him in death. But on the other side, when that union is present, it brings everlasting salvation with it.

Beyond this, He did not merely testify that He was their God — He also promised that He would be so forever, so that their hope would not stop at present blessings but extend to eternity. Many passages show that when the verb was in the future tense it carried this force — as when the faithful comforted themselves not only in present troubles but for the future as well, on the ground that God would never fail them. Regarding the second part of the promise: He made it even more plainly certain that God's blessing would extend to them beyond the limits of this life when He said: 'I will be the God of your descendants after you.' For if He intended to show His goodwill toward them after their death by blessing their offspring, He would certainly not withhold that favor from them personally. God is not like people, who love their friends' children because death has cut short their own ability to show kindness to those they cherished. God's generosity is not stopped by death — He does not withhold from the dead themselves the fruit of His mercy, which He pours out to a thousand generations for their sake. The Lord's will was therefore to give them, through a striking demonstration, a vision of the greatness and abundance of His goodness that they would experience after death — showing it to be so overflowing that it would pour out to all their descendants. And the Lord then sealed and, in a manner, brought forth the fulfillment of this promise when He named Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob long after their death. For what sense would it make to name Himself their God if they had utterly per-

ished? That would have been equivalent to saying, 'I am the God of those who are nothing.' This is why the Evangelists record that with this single argument the Sadducees were so cornered that they could not deny that Moses testified to the resurrection of the dead — for they had learned from Moses that all the saints were in God's hand. It was easy to conclude from this that those whom the judge of life and death had taken into His protection and care would not be destroyed by death.

Now — and this is the central point on which the controversy turns — let us consider whether the faithful themselves were so instructed by the Lord that they understood they would have a better life elsewhere, and therefore, looking toward that other life, did not cling to this one. First, the very conditions of life God assigned them were a continual exercise designed to remind them that they were the most miserable of all people if this life was all their happiness had to offer. Adam, already wretched from the mere memory of the happiness he had lost, barely sustained his need through painful labor. And lest he be crushed entirely under God's curse in those labors, he was given one remaining comfort — which itself became a source of deep sorrow. Of his two sons, one was killed by his brother's wicked violence; the other remained alive, but Adam rightly detested and was horrified by his sight. Abel, cruelly murdered in the very flower of his life, became an example of human wretchedness. Noah, while the whole world carelessly indulged itself in pleasure, spent a large portion of his life with great weariness building the ark. That he escaped death came at the cost of greater torment than dying a hundred deaths would have brought. For besides the ark serving as his tomb for ten months, there is nothing more unpleasant than being confined for so long sur-

rounded by the filth of animals. After passing through such enormous difficulties, he met fresh grief — he saw himself mocked by his own son and was forced with his own mouth to curse the one whom God's great mercy had delivered safe through the flood.

Abraham alone might be worth more than a hundred thousand, if we consider his faith — which is held out to us as the supreme rule of believing and through whose line we must be counted to be children of God. But what could be more absurd than for Abraham to be the father of all the faithful while not possessing so much as the smallest corner of land among them? And yet he cannot be removed from that number, not even from the most honored rank, without the entire church being destroyed. Consider the experiences of his life. When God first called him, He pulled him away from his country, his parents, and his friends — the things in which people think the chief sweetness of life consists — as if God had deliberately set out to strip him of all life's pleasures. As soon as he arrived in the land where he was commanded to live, famine drove him out. He fled for help to a place where, in order to save himself, he was forced to surrender his wife to be dishonored — something which, we may well wonder, was perhaps more bitter to him than many deaths. When he returned to his own land, famine drove him out again. What kind of happiness is it to dwell in a land where one must so often go hungry, and where he must flee or face starvation? Then came the necessity with Abimelech: he was forced to ransom his life at the cost of his wife. Through the long years of wandering here and there in uncertainty, continual quarreling between his servants compelled him to send away his nephew, whom he loved as his own son. That parting he felt no differently than if he had suffered the amputation of

one of his own limbs. Shortly after, he heard that this same nephew had been taken captive by enemies. Wherever he went, he encountered neighbors so savagely hostile that they would not allow him even to drink from wells he himself had dug with great labor — for he would not have had to buy the right to use them from king Gerar had he not first been forbidden. When old age came, he experienced what is most painful and bitter in that season of life: being punished with childlessness — until, beyond all hope, he fathered Ishmael. But even that birth he paid for dearly, enduring Sarah's constant quarreling, as though by supporting his servant's stubbornness he himself had caused the household's trouble. At last Isaac was born — but on the condition that his firstborn Ishmael must be cast out of the house like a castaway. When only Isaac remained — in whom this weary old man might finally rest — he was shortly afterward commanded to kill him. What greater misery can the human mind devise than a father being made the executioner of his own son? If Isaac had died of illness, who would not have thought the old man most pitiable — given a son in mockery, only to have his grief over childlessness doubled? If Isaac had been killed by a stranger, the cruelty of the circumstances would have greatly multiplied his misery. But to have him killed by his own father's hand surpasses every example of wretchedness. In short, throughout the whole course of his life Abraham was so tossed and tormented that if someone wanted to paint a portrait of a miserable life, they could find no better model. And let no one object that he was not truly unhappy because he eventually came safely through so many storms — for we cannot call a person's life

blessed when it consists of painfully enduring endless troubles through a long stretch of years, but only when someone quietly enjoys present good things without suffering.

Isaac, who suffered fewer troubles than his father, still barely tasted any sweetness in life. He too experienced the same vexations that prevent a person from being blessed on earth. Famine drove him out of the land of Canaan; his wife was violently taken from his side; his neighbors repeatedly troubled and oppressed him, so that he was forced to fight for his water rights. At home, his sons' wives brought him constant grief; disputes between his sons wore him down; and he could find no remedy for so great a misery except by exiling the very son he had blessed. Jacob's life is nothing less than a striking example of extreme misery. He spent his childhood in unrest at home, threatened and terrified by his older brother, until at last he was forced to flee. Exiled from his parents and homeland — which was painful enough on its own — he found nothing kinder or gentler in his uncle Laban's household. And seven years of hard and cruel service was not enough — he was also cheated out of his promised wife by deception. For another wife's sake he was compelled to serve again, enduring scorching heat all day and cold and sleepless nights, as he himself complained. Through twenty years of this harsh life, he was daily tormented by fresh injuries from his father-in-law. Even his own home gave him no peace — it was divided and torn apart by the hatred, quarreling, and jealousy of his wives. When he was commanded to return to his homeland, he had to watch for an opportunity to slip away like someone fleeing in shame, and even then he could not escape his father-in-law's unjust treatment, enduring his rebukes and accusations in the middle of the journey. Then he

fell into even greater distress. As he drew near to his brother, he saw before him as many deaths as a vengeful and bitter enemy might inflict. He was wrung with agonizing fear through the long waiting for his brother's arrival, and when the moment finally came he fell at his feet as if half dead — until he found his brother more favorable than he had dared to hope. Added to all this, at his very first entry into the land he lost his dearly beloved wife Rachel. Then came word that the son he had by her — the son he loved above all the rest — had been torn apart by wild beasts. How deep his grief was he made plain when, after weeping at length, he stubbornly closed himself to all consolation, resolving only to go down mourning to his son in the grave. And in the meantime, what cause for grief, dread, and weary distress was the rape and dishonoring of his daughter, and the violent revenge his sons took — which not only made him hated in the eyes of all the inhabitants of the land but exposed him to immediate danger of total destruction. Then followed the horrible and outrageous offense of Reuben, his first-born — a wickedness worse than any that could befall a man. For if the violation of a man's wife is counted among the heaviest misfortunes, what is to be said when such wickedness is done by one's own son? Shortly after, his house was stained with another unnatural adultery — so many disgraces as could well have broken even the most steadfast and sorrow-hardened heart. Near the end of his life, while seeking relief from famine for himself and others, he was struck with fresh misfortune: one of his sons was imprisoned, and to recover him he was compelled to give up his only remaining darling, Benjamin. Who could think that amid such an avalanche of calamities he had a single moment to breathe freely? He himself, his own best witness, told Pharaoh that his days on earth had

been few and evil. Now one who declares he has spent his life in continual misery is denying that he experienced the prosperity the Lord had promised him. Therefore either Jacob ungratefully failed to appreciate God's grace, or he honestly declared that he had been miserable on earth. If what he said was true, it follows that his hope was not fixed on earthly things.

If these holy fathers looked for a blessed life at the hand of God — as they certainly did — then they both thought and saw that it was a different kind of blessedness than the blessedness of earthly life. The apostle also shows this superbly: 'By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country — he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.' By saying this, they showed that they were seeking a country of their own. If they had been longing for the land they had left, they could have returned. Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, because He has prepared a city for them. They would have been duller than blocks of wood to pursue God's promises so earnestly, with no earthly hope of seeing them fulfilled, unless they had been looking for fulfillment elsewhere. And the apostle especially presses the point — not without reason — that they called this life a journey away from home, as

Moses himself records. For if they were strangers and foreigners in the land of Canaan, where does the Lord's promise of making them heirs of it stand? He makes plain, therefore, that the Lord's promise concerning possession of that land had a meaning beyond the earthly. They purchased not one foot of land in Canaan except for burial — by which they testified that they did not expect to receive the fruit of the promise until after death. This is why Jacob so earnestly desired to be buried there that he made his son Joseph promise and swear to do so, and why Joseph, many generations later, when his bones had long since turned to dust, directed that they be carried there.

In short, it is clear throughout all the struggles of their lives that they had always set before them the blessedness of the life to come. Why else would Jacob have so greatly desired the rights of the firstborn, and risked so much to obtain them, when those rights brought him nothing but exile and near-total estrangement from his family — nothing but harm — unless he was looking to a higher blessing? And he showed this was exactly his meaning in the words he spoke with his dying breath: 'I look for Your salvation, Lord.' What salvation could he have been looking for, lying at the point of death, unless he had seen in death the beginning of a new life? But why do we dispute about the holy ones and children of God, when even someone hostile to the truth showed a taste of this understanding? What did Balaam mean when he said: 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his'? He meant the same thing David later expressed: that the death of the saints is precious in the Lord's sight, while the death of the wicked is very evil. If death were the final boundary for all, there could be

no difference noted between the righteous and the wicked — they differ from each other precisely because of the different conditions that await them both after death.

We have not yet moved past Moses — whom these opponents claim had no other task than to persuade an earthly-minded people to worship God by promises of fertile soil and material abundance. And yet — unless someone deliberately averts his eyes from the light that offers itself plainly — a clear expression of the spiritual covenant is already present in Moses. When we come down to the prophets, eternal life and the kingdom of Christ shine out with the fullest brightness. David came first in time, and according to God's ordering, he expressed the heavenly mysteries more dimly in shadows than those who came after him. Yet with what clarity and certainty does he direct all his utterances to that end? His view of earthly dwelling is expressed in this saying: 'I am a foreigner and stranger here, as all my fathers were. Every person is vanity; every one walks about like a shadow. But now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.' One who confesses that nothing in the earth is sound or lasting, yet maintains a firm hope in God, is storing up his happiness somewhere else. David regularly calls all the faithful to this kind of consideration whenever he means to offer them true comfort. In another place, after speaking of the brevity and fleeting, vanishing nature of human life, he adds: 'But the mercy of the Lord is everlasting upon those who fear Him.' Similar is Psalm 102: 'In the beginning, Lord, You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You abide; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like clothing, and they will pass away, but You remain the same, and Your years will not end. The children of Your servants

will dwell securely, and their offspring will be established before You.' If the godly are to remain established before the Lord even after the decay of heaven and earth, it follows that their salvation is joined to the eternity of God. But that hope cannot stand at all unless it rests on the promise set forth in Isaiah: 'The heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants will die like flies. But My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be broken' — where everlastingness is given to righteousness and salvation not merely in the sense that they remain with God, but in the sense that they will be experienced by people.

The things David regularly says about the prosperous outcome awaiting the faithful must be understood as pointing to the open display of heavenly glory. Consider these sayings: 'The Lord guards the souls of the righteous; He will deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. The righteousness of the godly endures forever; his horn will be exalted in honor, while the desire of the wicked will perish.' Again: 'The righteous will give thanks to Your name, and the upright will dwell in Your presence.' Again: 'The righteous will be remembered forever.' Again: 'The Lord redeems the souls of His servants.' For the Lord often leaves His servants at the mercy of the wicked — not merely to be troubled, but to be torn apart and destroyed. He allows the good to languish in darkness and misery while the wicked seem to shine like stars. He does not so brighten them with the light of His face that they enjoy unbroken and lasting gladness. David himself does not conceal that if the faithful fix their eyes on the present state of things, they are struck by a severe temptation — as though innocence received no favor or reward

from God. Wickedness so often prospers and flourishes, while the company of the godly is crushed with shame, poverty, contempt, and every kind of trial. 'My feet had nearly slipped,' he says, 'my steps had almost stumbled, when the prosperity of the wicked troubled me.' After rehearsing these things at length, he concludes: 'I tried to understand this, but it was painful to me — until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final end.'

From this confession of David let us learn that the holy fathers under the old covenant were not ignorant of how rarely — or never — God fulfills His promises to His servants in this world. They therefore lifted their minds to God's sanctuary, where what does not appear in the shadow of this present life was stored up for them. That was God's final judgment, which they could not see with their eyes but were content to understand by faith. Trusting in that assurance, they did not doubt that a time would come when God's promises would be fulfilled — whatever happened in the world in the meantime. This is what such sayings as these attest: 'I will behold God's face in righteousness; I will be satisfied when I see Your likeness.' Again: 'I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.' Again: 'The righteous will flourish like a palm tree and grow tall like a cedar of Lebanon, planted in the house of the Lord; they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green.' David had just said: 'How deep are Your thoughts, O Lord, while the wicked spring up like grass, and all evildoers flourish — that they may be destroyed forever.' Where is the beauty and flourishing of the faithful to be found, except when the face of this world is overturned by the revealing of God's kingdom? When they turned their eyes toward that eternity, they despised the brief and fleeting hardship of

present miseries and boldly declared: 'You will not allow the righteous to perish forever, but You will cast the wicked headlong into the pit of destruction.' Where is this pit of eternal destruction in the present world? Among the blessings counted for the wicked elsewhere is that they end their lives in a moment, without long lingering illness. Where is the great steadfastness of the saints, whom David himself complains throughout are not merely troubled but crushed and utterly broken? Clearly, David was not looking at the changing and unstable course of this world — more shifting than the tides — but at what the Lord will do when He sits in final judgment over heaven and earth. In another place he describes it excellently: 'Fools trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches. Yet no man can redeem the life of another or give to God his ransom price. Though they see that the wise die, that the foolish and the brutish alike perish and leave their wealth to others, their heart is still that their houses will last forever, that their dwellings will endure to all generations. Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the path of those who have foolish confidence — yet their followers approve of their boasts. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd. But when the morning comes, the upright will rule over them, and their beauty will fade; Sheol will be their dwelling.' This mockery of fools who rest on the slipping and rolling goods of this world shows that the wise must seek a far different happiness. And David more plainly uncovers the mystery of the resurrection where, after describing the destruction of the wicked, he sets the godly up to reign. For what else can we call that rising of light but the revealing of the new life that follows the end of this present one?

From this arose the comfort the faithful often used in their sufferings and as a remedy for patience: 'His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime.' How could they declare that afflictions would end in a moment when they spent nearly their whole lives in affliction? Where did they find such lasting experience of God's kindness when they had scarcely tasted the smallest trace of it? Had they fixed their eyes on the earth, they could have found no such thing. But because they looked toward heaven, they recognized that the Lord's exercise of His holy ones through the cross lasts only a moment, while His mercies — in which they are gathered up — endure for ages. They also foresaw the eternal and endless destruction of the ungodly, who were happy for a single day as in a dream. Hence these sayings: 'The memory of the righteous will be blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot.' 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, but the death of the wicked is very evil.' And in Samuel: 'The Lord will guard the feet of His holy ones, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness.' These show that the faithful clearly understood: however much the saints were tossed about in this world, their final end is life and salvation, while the prosperity of the wicked is a pleasant road along which they gradually slide into the chasm of death. Therefore they called the death of the wicked the destruction of the uncircumcised — of those from whom the hope of resurrection had been cut away. So David could devise no more terrible curse than this: 'Let them be blotted out from the book of life, and not be written with the righteous.'

Above all others, remarkable is Job's declaration: 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and on the last day I will rise out of the earth, and in my flesh I will see God my Savior. This hope is laid up in my

heart.' Some who enjoy displaying their cleverness object that this should not be understood as referring to the final resurrection, but to the day when Job hoped God would be more favorable to him. Even if we partially grant this, we will still compel them to admit, willing or not, that Job could not have reached such breadth of hope if his thoughts had rested on this earth. We must therefore acknowledge that he lifted his eyes to the immortality to come — for he saw that his Redeemer would be present with him even lying in the grave. To those whose hope is fixed only on this life, death is the final despair. But death could not cut off Job's hope: 'Though He slay me,' he said, 'yet I will hope in Him.' And let no one trivially object that these were only the words of a few individuals, which do not prove that such teaching was common among the Jews. I will answer at once: these few were not uttering some secret wisdom accessible only to specially gifted minds. As teachers of the people appointed by the Holy Spirit, they publicly proclaimed the mysteries of God that were meant to be universally learned and to serve as the basic principles of the common religion. Therefore, when we hear the public oracles of the Holy Spirit — in which He spoke of spiritual life so clearly and plainly in the church of the Jews — it is intolerable stubbornness to restrict them to a merely earthly covenant, in which nothing is mentioned but the earth and earthly prosperity.

When I come to the later prophets, we may walk freely, as on our own ground. If it was not difficult to prevail in the testimony of David, Job, and Samuel, here it will be far easier still. For God kept this pattern and order in unfolding the covenant of His mercy: the closer it drew in time to its full fulfillment, the more clearly He revealed it day by day with ever greater increases of light. In the be-

ginning, when the first promise of salvation was made to Adam, only small sparks of it glimmered out. As more was added, a greater spread of light began to shine forth, breaking out more and more widely, until at last all the clouds were driven away and Christ the Sun of Righteousness fully illumined the whole world. We have no need to fear a shortage of prophetic testimony for our case. But since I can see that an enormous amount of material would arise, forcing me to linger far longer than my intended scope can bear — it would grow into a large volume on its own — and since I have already, by what I have said, opened a clear enough path even for readers of average ability, I will spare them the tedium of a lengthy discussion. Let the readers simply remember to open their own way with the key already placed in their hands: whenever the prophets speak of the blessedness of the faithful people — blessedness of which scarcely the faintest trace is seen in this present life — they should apply this principle: the prophets, to better express God's goodness, painted it for the people in the shadow of temporal blessings, like a rough sketch of the full portrait. But the complete image they painted was one designed to lift people's minds above the earth and above the elements of this perishing world, and necessarily raise them to the contemplation of the happiness of the spiritual and eternal life to come.

One example will be enough. When the Israelites were carried away to Babylon, their exile seemed like death to them. They could hardly shake the belief that Ezekiel's prophecy about their restoration was nothing but a fable, because they thought it was the same as claiming that rotting corpses would be brought back to life. To show that even this difficulty could not stop Him from carrying out

His purpose, the Lord showed the prophet a vision of a field full of dry bones. In an instant, by the power of His word alone, He restored breath and life to them. The vision served to correct their unbelief at that time. But it also reminded the Jews how far the Lord's power reached beyond what the people could imagine -- He who so easily brought life to scattered, rotting bones with just a nod. Therefore compare that with another passage from Isaiah. The dead shall rise; my body, they shall rise again. Awake and rejoice, you who dwell in the dust, because the dew of the green field is your dew, and you shall bring down the land of the giants into ruin. So my people, enter into your tents. Shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself a little while, until my anger passes over. For behold, the Lord shall come out from His place to punish the wickedness of those who dwell on the earth, and the earth shall reveal her blood and shall no longer hide her slain.

However, it would be foolish to try to force every passage into one single interpretation. For some passages openly reveal, without any covering, the immortality that is prepared for the faithful in God's kingdom. We have already quoted some of these, and most of the rest are similar -- especially these two. The first is from Isaiah. As the new heaven and the new earth which I make shall stand before Me, so shall your descendants stand. There shall be month after month, and Sabbath after Sabbath. All flesh shall come to worship before My face, says the Lord. And they shall go out and see the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against Me, whose worm shall not die and whose fire shall not be quenched. The second is from Daniel. At that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, shall rise up. There shall come a time of distress such as has not oc-

curred since nations first began to exist. Then all your people who are found written in the book shall be saved. And of those who sleep in the dust of the earth, some shall awake to eternal life, and some to everlasting shame.

Now as for proving the other two points -- that the fathers had Christ as the guarantee of their covenant, and that they placed all their hope of blessing in Him -- I will not labor over these at all, since they are both less controversial and more clearly stated. Let us therefore boldly establish what no scheme of the devil can overturn: that the Old Testament, the covenant the Lord made with His people Israel, was not limited to earthly things but also contained the promise of spiritual and eternal life. The expectation of this must have been stamped on the minds of all who truly embraced the covenant. But let us completely reject this foolish and destructive idea -- that God set before the Jews nothing other than earthly promises, or that the Jews sought nothing more than a full stomach, physical pleasures, flourishing wealth, outward power, many children, and whatever else appeals to the natural person. For even today Christ promises no other kingdom of heaven to His people than one where they shall rest with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Peter declared that the Jews of his time were heirs of the grace of the Gospel because they were children of the prophets, included in the covenant that the Lord had made with His people in ancient times. And so that this would not be witnessed by words only, the Lord also confirmed it by action. For at the very moment He rose again, He granted many of the saints the honor of rising with Him and being seen in the city. This was a sure sign that everything He did and suffered to obtain eternal salvation belongs no less to the faithful of the Old Testament than to us. For as Peter

testifies, they were also given the same Spirit of faith by which we are regenerated into life. Now, since we know that the same Spirit who is in us a certain spark of immortality -- and is therefore also called the down payment of our inheritance -- likewise dwelt in them, how dare we deny them the inheritance of life? This makes it all the more astonishing that in ancient times the Sadducees fell into such a crude error as to deny both the resurrection and the existence of souls, even though both truths were sealed by such clear testimonies of Scripture. And equally astonishing at this present day would be the folly of that whole nation in looking for an earthly kingdom of Christ, if the Scriptures had not long before declared that this would be their punishment for rejecting the Gospel. For it was fitting, by the just judgment of God, that those minds should be struck with blindness who refused the light of heaven when it was offered to them and willfully brought themselves into darkness. Therefore they read Moses and continually study him, but a veil is placed between them and him so that they cannot see the light that shines in his face. And so his face shall remain covered and hidden from them until he is turned to Christ -- the very one from whom they now try to separate him as much as they can.

CHAPTER 11: OF THE DIFFERENCE OF THE ONE TESTAMENT FROM THE OTHER



What then? Does this mean there is no difference between the old covenant and the new? And what purpose do all those Scripture passages serve where they are compared as though they are opposites? I willingly accept the differences Scripture describes — but in a way that does not undermine the unity already established, as will become plain when we treat them in order. Those differences are, as far as I can identify, chiefly four in number — and if you wish to add a fifth, I have no objection. I say, and intend to prove, that they all relate to the manner of administration rather than to the substance. By this they will not prevent the promises of both the old and new covenant from remaining one and the same, with the same foundation: Christ. The first difference is this: although even in the old era the Lord's will was to direct His people's minds and lift them to the heavenly inheritance, He gave it to be seen — or rather tasted — through earthly blessings, the better to nourish their hope. But now, having revealed the grace of the life to come through the Gospel, He directs our minds more clearly and directly to the meditation of that life,

setting aside the more basic kind of training He used with the Israelites. Those who do not notice this purpose of God conclude that the ancient people aspired to nothing higher than bodily blessings. They hear the land of Canaan mentioned repeatedly as the grand — or even the only — reward for those who keep God's law. They hear that God's most severe threat to transgressors is banishment from that land and exile among foreign peoples. They see that virtually all the blessings and curses pronounced by Moses point in this direction. They therefore conclude that the Jews were set apart from other nations not for their own sake but for the sake of others — so that the church of Christ might have a visible type in which to see pictures of spiritual realities. But since Scripture itself often shows that God directed all the earthly blessings He gave the Israelites toward the very end of leading them by the hand to the hope of heavenly blessings, it is not merely unskillful — I will not say dull-witted — to ignore this divine arrangement. The real dispute with these people is this: they teach that possession of the land of Canaan was the supreme and final blessedness for the Israelites, and that only after the revealing of Christ does it figuratively signify the heavenly inheritance. We on the other hand affirm that in the earthly possession they enjoyed, as in a mirror, they saw the inheritance to come, which they believed was prepared for them in heaven.

This becomes clearer from the comparison Paul uses in Galatians. He compares the Jewish nation to an heir who is still a minor — not yet able to manage his own affairs and therefore placed under a tutor or guardian. Though Paul applies that comparison to the ceremonies, nothing prevents it from fitting the present purpose equally well. The same inheritance was appointed

for them as for us — but they were not yet old enough to enter and enjoy it. The same church existed among them, but still in its childhood. Therefore the Lord kept them under this training: He gave them the spiritual promises not naked and open, but wrapped in earthly promises. So when He called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants to the hope of immortality, He promised them the land of Canaan as their inheritance — not to fix their hopes there, but so that in beholding it they might exercise and confirm themselves in the hope of the true inheritance that had not yet appeared. And lest they be deceived, a higher promise was given to testify that the land was not God's greatest gift. Abraham was not permitted to rest lazily in the promise of the land — his mind was lifted up by a greater promise to the Lord. For Abraham heard this: 'I am your shield; your reward will be very great.' Here we see that the end of Abraham's reward is set forth as the Lord Himself, so that he would not count on a passing and unstable reward in the elements of this world, but would think of his reward as something that cannot fade. The promise of the land was added afterward for no other purpose than to serve as a token of God's goodwill and a figure of the heavenly inheritance. That this was the holy men's understanding is shown by their own words. David rises from temporal blessings to that highest and final blessing: 'My heart and my flesh cry out for You. God is my portion forever.' Again: 'The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; You hold my lot.' Again: 'I cry to You, O Lord; I say, You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.' Those who dare speak this way are without doubt declaring that their hope rises above the world and all its present goods. But the prophets often describe the blessedness of the world to come using the figures they had received from

the Lord. So are these sayings to be understood: that the godly will inherit the land and the wicked will be cut off from it; that Jerusalem will overflow with every kind of riches and Zion with abundance of all things. These cannot properly be spoken of the land of our earthly pilgrimage or of the earthly Jerusalem, but of the true homeland of the faithful and the heavenly city where the Lord has commanded blessing and life forever.

This is why we read that the holy men of the old covenant valued mortal life and its blessings more than we might consider fitting today. Although they knew well that their race did not end there, yet when they reflected on the marks of God's grace He had pointed to in earthly things — training them according to their tender capacity — they felt a greater sweetness in those things than if they had considered them purely on their own terms. But just as the Lord, by testifying His goodwill toward the faithful through present blessings, expressed the shadow of spiritual happiness through figures and signs, so on the other side He used physical sufferings to display examples of His judgment against the reprobate. Therefore, as God's blessings were to be seen in earthly things, so too were His punishments. Those who do not weigh this correspondence — this balance, as I may call it — between punishments and rewards, are troubled by what appears to be a great change in God. They see that in ancient times He was so swift to take vengeance on every human offense with severe and terrible punishments, yet now seems to have set aside His former anger, punishing both more gently and less frequently. Indeed, for this very reason, they nearly imagine two different gods — one of the old and one of the new covenant, as the Manichees actually did. But we will easily be freed from such perplexities if we keep in

mind the orderly arrangement of God I have described — whose will it was for a time to represent in figure both the grace of eternal happiness through temporal blessings, and the severity of spiritual death through physical punishments. In this way He delivered His covenant to the Israelites still, in a manner, folded up.

Another difference between the old and new covenant is said to lie in the figures: the old covenant offered only an image in the absence of the reality, and a shadow in place of the substance. The new covenant gives the reality itself, present and substantial. This difference is mentioned whenever the new covenant is compared with the old, but it is treated at greatest length in the letter to the Hebrews. There the apostle argues against those who thought the practices of Moses's law could not be removed without bringing down all of religion with them. To refute this error, he appeals to what the prophet had foretold about the priesthood of Christ. Since an eternal priesthood was given to Him, it is certain that the prior priesthood — in which one successor after another was continually installed — has been ended. He then proves that the institution of this new priesthood is superior because it was established with an oath. He further adds that with the change of priesthood comes also a change of covenant. And he proves that this was necessary because the weakness of the law was such that it could not bring anything to perfection. He then explains what that weakness was: the law had only outward requirements concerning the flesh, which could not perfect the consciences of those who observed them; and through the blood of animals, it could neither wipe away sins nor obtain true holiness. He concludes therefore that the law contained a shadow of the good things to come, but not the living image of the things themselves — and so its only office was to

serve as an introduction to a better hope, which is delivered in the Gospel. Here we see the precise point of comparison between the law's covenant and the Gospel's covenant, between the ministry of Christ and the ministry of Moses. If the comparison concerned the substance of the promises, there would be a vast difference between the two covenants. But since the argument points in a different direction, we must press toward the truth. Let us therefore set forth the covenant He has established as eternal, never to perish. Its fulfillment — by which it attains stability and lasting force — is Christ. While that fulfillment was still in expectation, the Lord appointed ceremonies through Moses as solemn signs of confirmation. The question then arose: should the ceremonies ordained in the law give way to Christ or not? Although the ceremonies were only attendant features — additions and accessories to the covenant — because they were instruments of its administration, they took the name of the covenant itself, as similar things are commonly attributed to other sacraments. In short, in this passage the old covenant refers to the solemn form of confirming the covenant, contained in ceremonies and sacrifices. The apostle says that because nothing in it is perfect unless we press further, it was necessary that those ceremonies be discontinued and abrogated to make room for Christ — the guarantor and mediator of a better covenant, through whom eternal sanctification was once and for all purchased for the elect, and the transgressions that remained under the law were blotted out. Or to put it another way: the Lord's old covenant was what was delivered wrapped up in the shadowy and preparatory observance of ceremonies. It was therefore temporary, because it remained in suspense, waiting to be confirmed by something more solid and enduring. It was made new and eter-

nal only when it was consecrated and established by the blood of Christ. This is why Christ called the cup He gave His disciples at the supper 'the cup of the new covenant in My blood' — to show that the covenant of God then attained its reality, becoming new and eternal, when sealed with His blood.

This makes plain in what sense the apostle said that under the training of the law, the Jews were being brought to Christ before He appeared in the flesh. He acknowledges that they were children and heirs of God — but children who, on account of their young age, had to remain under the custody of a guardian. It was fitting that before the Sun of Righteousness had fully risen, there should be neither so great a brightness of revelation nor so deep an understanding. God therefore gave them His Word's light in measure, so that they saw it still from far off and dimly. Paul expresses this limited understanding through the metaphor of childhood — the Lord's will was to exercise them with the outward elements of this world and with external observances, as instruction suited to children, until Christ would shine out, under whom the knowledge of God's people would grow to full maturity. This distinction is what Christ Himself had in mind when He said that the law and the prophets were until John, and that from then on the kingdom of God has been proclaimed. What did the law and the prophets open to the people of their time? They gave a taste of the wisdom that would be plainly disclosed in due time, and they pointed to it as something twinkling far in the distance. But when the time came that Christ could be pointed to directly, the kingdom of God was thrown open. For in Him are laid open the treasures of all wisdom and understanding, by which we attain, in a sense, to the very inner rooms of heaven.

It is no objection that hardly anyone in the Christian church can be found who equals Abraham in excellence of faith, or that the prophets excelled in such spiritual power that even today they illuminate the whole world. Our question here is not what grace the Lord bestowed on a select few, but what ordinary manner of teaching He used with His people — the manner described in the very prophets who were endowed with a special knowledge above the rest. For even their preaching is obscure and wrapped in figures, as of things seen from far away. Moreover, however extraordinary a knowledge appeared in them compared to others, since they were compelled to submit themselves to the same childish instruction common to the whole people, they too were reckoned among the children. There was never so clear a vision granted to anyone in that era that it did not in some measure carry the darkness of that age. Hence Christ said: 'Many kings and prophets longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.' It was fitting that the presence of Christ should carry this distinctive privilege: that from it would spring the clear revealing of heavenly mysteries. This is also the point of what we cited earlier from Peter's first letter — that it was opened to the prophets that their labor was profitable primarily for our age.

Now I come to the third difference, drawn from Jeremiah, whose words are these: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke,

though I was their husband. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be merciful to their iniquity, and no longer will each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know Me, from the least to the greatest.' From these words the apostle drew his comparison between the law and the Gospel: he called the law a letter and the Gospel a spiritual doctrine; the law written on tablets of stone, the Gospel written on hearts; the law the ministry of death, the Gospel the ministry of life; the law the ministry of condemnation, the Gospel the ministry of righteousness; the law fading away, the Gospel enduring. Since the apostle's purpose was only to explain the prophet's meaning, it is enough to weigh the words of one of them to understand both. Yet there is some difference in their tone. The apostle speaks more harshly about the law than the prophet does — not because of the law as such, but because there were certain misguided men whose distorted zeal for the law, and their perverse attachment to the ceremonies, was obscuring the brightness of the Gospel. He is describing the nature of the law according to their error and foolish thinking. That specific context in Paul is worth noting. But both the prophet and the apostle, when they set the old and new covenants in contrast, consider the law only in what properly belongs to it. For instance: the law commonly contains promises of mercy throughout, but because those promises are borrowed from elsewhere, they are not counted as part of the law when the law's own nature is under discussion. What they attribute to the law alone is this: it commands what is right, forbids what is wicked, promises reward to those who pursue

righteousness, and threatens punishment for those who transgress — but in the meantime it neither changes nor amends the perverseness of heart that is naturally in all people.

Let us now go through the apostle's comparison piece by piece. The old covenant is called the letter because it was published without the effective working of the Spirit; the new is called spiritual because the Lord has spiritually engraved it on the hearts of people. This second contrast is thus a further explanation of the first. The old covenant brings death because it can do nothing but wrap all of humanity under the curse. The new is the instrument of life because it delivers from the curse and restores us to favor with God. The old is the ministry of condemnation because it convicts all of Adam's children of unrighteousness. The new is the ministry of righteousness because it reveals the mercy of God by which we are made righteous. The final contrast is to be referred to the ceremonies. Because the old covenant contained an image of absent things, it was necessary that it should in time decay and vanish; but the Gospel, because it gives the true substance itself, maintains a firm and permanent stability. Jeremiah also calls even the moral law a weak and fragile covenant — but for a different reason: because the ungrateful people quickly broke it by their sudden falling away. But since that breaking was the fault of the people, it cannot rightly be charged against the covenant itself. The ceremonies, however, were dissolved by the coming of Christ because of a weakness that was inherent in themselves. Now the distinction between letter and spirit is not to be taken as though the Lord gave His law to the Jews with no fruit at all and converted none of them to Himself. It is a comparison designed to magnify the abundance of grace, by which the same Lawgiver, taking on a new character as

it were, gloriously set forth the preaching of the Gospel. If we count up the multitude of those whom the Lord from all nations has regenerated by His Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel and gathered into the fellowship of His church, we would say that in ancient Israel there were very few — almost none — who embraced the covenant of the Lord with wholehearted sincerity. Yet they were indeed a very great number when counted in their own right, apart from any comparison.

Out of the third difference arises the fourth. Scripture calls the old covenant the covenant of bondage because it produces fear in people's minds; the new is called the covenant of freedom because it lifts them to confidence and assurance. So Paul says in Romans 8: 'You did not receive the spirit of bondage again, leading to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba, Father.' To this belongs the statement in Hebrews that the faithful have not come to the physical mountain blazing with fire and darkness and wind and tempest — where nothing could be heard or seen without striking terror into people's hearts, so that even Moses trembled with fear at the terrible voice, and the whole people begged not to hear any more. Rather, we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. What Paul touches briefly in Romans he develops at greater length in Galatians through his allegory of Abraham's two sons: Hagar the slave woman represents Mount Sinai, where the people of Israel received the law; Sarah the free woman represents the heavenly Jerusalem, from which the Gospel proceeds. As the child born of Hagar is born into slavery and can never receive the inheritance, while the child born of Sarah is born free, to whom the inheritance belongs — so through the law we are brought into

bondage, and through the Gospel alone we are regenerated into freedom. In sum: the old covenant struck consciences with fear and trembling; through the benefit of the new covenant, consciences are made joyful. The old held consciences bound under the yoke of bondage; through the generosity of the new, they are released from bondage and brought into freedom. But if they point to the holy fathers from among the people of Israel, who — since they clearly had the same Spirit we have — must have been partakers of the same freedom and joy, our answer is that neither came from the law. When they felt themselves oppressed by bondage and worn down by troubled consciences through the law, they fled to the help of the Gospel, and so it was a particular fruit of the new covenant that, going beyond the common condition of the old, they were freed from those evils. We will also deny that they were so fully endowed with the spirit of freedom and confidence that they felt no fear or bondage from the law at all. However much they enjoyed the privilege they had obtained through the grace of the Gospel, they were still subject to the same bonds and burdens of outward observance as the common people. Since they were required to observe carefully those ceremonies that were signs of a training much like slavery — and the certificates by which they confessed their guilt in sin did not discharge them from that binding — it may rightly be said that in comparison with us they were under the covenant of bondage and fear, when we have in view the common ordering that the Lord then used with the people of Israel.

The last three comparisons we have cited contrast the law and the Gospel. So in them, the term 'old covenant' refers to the law and 'new covenant' refers to the Gospel. The first difference

stretched further, because it included the promises published before the law. But when Augustine argues that those earlier promises should not be placed under the heading of the old covenant, he thought well and meant the same thing we are now teaching — for he had regard to those passages in Jeremiah and Paul where the old covenant is distinguished from the word of mercy and grace. He very aptly adds in the same place that the children of promise — those regenerated by God, who through faith working through love have obeyed the commandments — belong to the new covenant from the very beginning of the world. Their hope was not fixed on earthly, temporal, or physical blessings, but on spiritual, heavenly, and eternal ones, believing above all in the Mediator through whom they were confident the Spirit was given them — both to do good and to obtain pardon whenever they sinned. This is precisely what I intended to affirm: all the saints whom Scripture records as chosen by God from the beginning of the world were partakers of the same blessing as we are for eternal salvation. The difference between our division and Augustine's is this: ours — following Christ's saying, 'The law and the prophets were until John; from then on the kingdom of God is proclaimed' — distinguishes the clarity of the Gospel from the darker distribution of the word that preceded it. Augustine's distinction covers only the weakness of the law as compared to the strength of the Gospel. We must also note about the holy fathers that though they lived under the old covenant, they did not stop there but always pressed forward toward the new and embraced a confident share in it. For the apostle condemns as blind and accursed those who, content with present shadows, did not stretch their minds up to Christ. To say nothing of the rest: what greater blindness can there be than to

hope for the cleansing of sin through the killing of an animal, or to seek the purifying of the soul through an outward sprinkling of water? Or to seek to appease God with cold ceremonies, as though He were greatly pleased by them? All of these absurdities befall those who cling to the observances of the law without any regard for Christ.

The fifth difference we may add is this: until the coming of Christ, the Lord had chosen out one nation within which He would keep the covenant of His grace distinct. 'When the Most High divided the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam,' says Moses, 'His own people fell to His possession — Jacob the lot of His inheritance.' In another place He says to the people: 'Behold, the heavens and the earth and everything in them belong to the Lord your God. Yet He set His love on your fathers and chose their descendants after them — you above all peoples.' He therefore was pleased to grant knowledge of His name to that people alone, as if they alone of all people belonged to Him. He placed His covenant, as it were, in their bosom; He openly showed them the presence of His Godhead; He honored them with every privilege. But to set aside His other benefits and speak only of what is relevant here: He bound them to Himself by communicating His Word, so that He could rightly be called and counted their God. Meanwhile, He allowed the other nations to walk in their emptiness, as though they had no dealings with Him and nothing to do with Him. He withheld from them even the only remedy for their destruction — the preaching of His Word. Israel was then the Lord's son, His beloved; the others were strangers. Israel was known to Him and received into His care and protection; the others were left in their own darkness. Israel was sanctified by God; the others were pro-

fane. Israel was honored with the presence of God; the others were excluded from coming near to Him. But when the fullness of time appointed for the restoration of all people arrived, and the Reconciler of God and humanity had actually been given, the dividing wall was torn down — the wall that had long kept God's mercy enclosed within the borders of Israel. Peace was proclaimed to those who were far off, as well as to those who were near, so that both, having been reconciled to God, might grow together into one people. Therefore now there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, but Christ is all and in all — to whom the nations are given as His inheritance and the ends of the earth as His possession, that He might reign universally and without distinction from sea to sea and from the rivers to the ends of the world.

The calling of the Gentiles is therefore a notable sign that clearly demonstrates the superiority of the new covenant over the old. It had indeed been foretold beforehand by many plain oracles of the prophets, but in such a way that its fulfillment was still deferred to the kingdom of Messiah. Christ Himself did not move toward it at the beginning of His ministry but put it off until all the parts of our redemption had been accomplished and the time of His humiliation had ended — when He received from the Father the name above every name, before whom every knee should bow. For this reason, when that appointed time had not yet arrived, He told the Canaanite woman that He had been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And at their first sending out, He did not permit His apostles to cross those bounds: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or into any town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Yet even though the calling of

the Gentiles had been announced beforehand by so many testimonies, when the apostles first had to carry it out, it seemed so new and strange to them that they shrank from it as from something monstrous. They approached it with great fear and reluctance. No wonder — for it seemed contrary to reason that the Lord, who had set Israel apart from all other nations through so many ages, should now reverse that choice as if suddenly changing His purpose. The prophecies had spoken of it, but they could not attend to the prophecies with enough care to be unmoved by the strangeness of what they were now seeing. The examples the Lord had previously shown of calling individual Gentiles were not sufficient to prepare them. For beyond the fact that He had called very few, He had in a sense grafted those into the household of Abraham, adding them to His people as members of it. But in this general calling, the Gentiles were not only made equal with the Jews — it appeared that they were actually taking the place of the Jews, who had fallen away. Yet none of the foreign converts God had previously brought into the body of the church had ever been made equal with the Jews in that way. It is therefore not without good reason that Paul so magnifies this mystery — hidden for ages and generations — which he says is marvelous even to the angels.

In these four or five points I believe I have set forth faithfully and clearly the whole difference between the old and new covenants, to the extent that a basic treatment of the subject requires. But because many people cite this variety in governing the church — this different manner of teaching and this great change in practices and ceremonies — as a serious objection, they must be answered before we move on. This can be done briefly, since the objections are not strong enough to require a labored refutation.

They say: it is inconsistent that God — who always agrees perfectly with Himself — should tolerate so great a change, afterward disapproving the very things He had both commanded and commended before. My answer is that God should not on this account be considered changeable, since He adapted different forms to different ages as He knew to be fitting for each. If a farmer assigns one kind of work to his household in winter and a different kind in summer, do we therefore accuse him of inconsistency or think he has deviated from the sound principles of farming that are in harmony with the natural order of the seasons? Likewise, if a father of a family governs and instructs his children one way in childhood, another way in youth, and another way in adulthood, we cannot say that he is fickle or has abandoned his own purpose. Why then do we charge God with the fault of inconsistency simply because He marked off different seasons with fitting and appropriate signs? The last comparison ought to satisfy us completely. Paul compares the Jews to children and Christians to young men. What disorder is there in God's governance — that He kept the Jews in the childish lessons suited to their stage of development, while He trains us with a stronger and more mature discipline? In all of this God's consistency is displayed: He taught the same doctrine in every age and continues to require the same worship of His name that He commanded from the beginning. The fact that He changed the outward form and manner of that worship does not show that He Himself changed — rather, He adapted Himself to the capacity of humanity, which is itself varied and changeable.

But where does this diversity come from, they ask, except from God's own will? Could He not, just as well from the beginning as after the coming of Christ, have revealed eternal life in plain words

without figures, instructed His people with a few easily understood sacraments, given His Holy Spirit, and spread His grace throughout the whole world? This is like quarreling with God for creating the world so late, since He could have created it from the beginning — or for choosing to alternate winter with summer, and day with night. For our part, as every godly person ought to think, let us not doubt that whatever God has done is done wisely and rightly, even when we often do not know the reason why it had to be done that way. To demand to know would be to presumptuously take too much upon ourselves — refusing to allow God to keep the reasons for His own purposes hidden from us. But they find it strange, they say, that God now rejects and abhors the sacrificing of animals and all the furnishings of the Levitical priesthood — things in which He appeared to take delight in ancient times. As if outward and temporary things actually gave God delight or stirred any affection in Him! We have already said that He instituted none of these things for His own sake but arranged them all for the salvation of people. If a physician heals a young man from a disease by one very good method, and then uses a different approach with the same man when he is old, do we say that he has rejected the method that pleased him before? No — he remains consistent in his practice but takes the man's age into consideration. So it was fitting that while Christ was absent, He should be expressed in one kind of signs pointing to His future coming, and fitting that now He has actually been given, He should be represented in another kind. As for God's calling being now, at Christ's coming, spread more widely among all peoples than before, and the graces of the Holy Spirit being poured out more abundantly — who could deny that it is right for God to hold in His own hand and will the dispo-

sition of His own graces? To shed light upon whatever nations He pleases? To raise up the preaching of His Word in whatever places He pleases? To grant what teaching and however much fruit of teaching He pleases? And in whatever ages He will, to withdraw knowledge of His name from the world in response to ingratitude? And when He wills, to restore it again in His own mercy? We see therefore that the quibbles by which wicked people disturb the minds of simple believers — trying to cast doubt on either God's righteousness or the trustworthiness of Scripture — are entirely without merit.

THE. XII. CHAPTER. ¶THAT IT BE-
HOUED, THAT CHRIST, TO PERFORME
THE OFFICE OF THE MEDIATOUR,
SHOULD BE MADE MAN.



It was absolutely necessary for our Mediator to be both God and man. If someone asks about the necessity of this, it was not a simple or absolute necessity in the philosophical sense, but one that arose from the heavenly decree on which all human salvation depended. The most merciful Father appointed what was best for us. Our iniquities had cast a darkness between Him and us, shutting us completely out of the kingdom of heaven. No one could serve as the interpreter to restore our peace except one who could reach God. But who could reach Him? Could any of Adam's sons? All of them, like their father, shunned the sight of God in fear. Could any of the angels? They too needed a head through whose binding power they could perfectly and inseparably cleave to God. What then? There was no hope at all unless God's own majesty descended to us — for we could not ascend to it. It was therefore necessary that the Son of God become for us Immanuel — God with us — and in such a way that His divinity and human nature would grow together into one. Otherwise the closeness

would not be close enough, nor the connection strong enough, for us to hope that God dwells with us. So great was the distance between our filth and God's most pure holiness. Even if mankind had stood undefiled without any stain, his condition would have been too low to reach God without a Mediator. What then could he do, plunged down into death and hell by his deadly fall, defiled with so many corruptions, sunk in his own depravity, and overwhelmed with every curse? Therefore it was not without reason that Paul, when he wanted to present Christ as the Mediator, specifically called Him a man: 'For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' He could have said 'God,' or at least could have omitted the title 'man' just as he might have omitted 'God.' But because the Holy Spirit, speaking through his mouth, knew our weakness, He provided for it in the best possible way by setting among us the Son of God as one familiar to us — as one of us. Therefore, so that no one would be troubled wondering where to seek the Mediator or how to come to Him, the naming of Him as man reminds us that He is near — so near that He touches us, since He is our own flesh. He means the same thing there that is expressed more fully elsewhere: that we have a High Priest who is not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, since He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.

This becomes even more evident when we consider how weighty the Mediator's task was: to restore us into God's favor so as to make children of God out of children of men, and heirs of heaven out of heirs of hell. Who could do this unless the Son of God also became the son of man, taking what was ours upon Himself in order to convey what was His to us — making ours by grace what was His by nature? Therefore in this pledge we trust

that we are children of God: the natural Son of God formed for Himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that He might be altogether one with us. He did not despise taking on what was ours in order to restore to us what was His — so that in fellowship together with us He might be both Son of God and son of man. From this comes the holy brotherhood He proclaims with His own lips: 'I am going to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.' By this means the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven is assured to us — for the only Son of God, to whom it entirely and rightly belonged, has adopted us as His brothers. And if we are brothers, then we are partakers of the inheritance. Moreover, it was for the same reason very necessary that our Redeemer be both truly God and truly man. It was His office to swallow up death — who could do that but Life itself? It was His office to overcome sin — who could do that but Righteousness itself? It was His office to defeat the powers of the world and the air — who could do that but a power above both world and air? And in whose possession is life, or righteousness, or sovereignty over heaven? In God's alone. Therefore when the most merciful God willed to redeem us, He made Himself our Redeemer in the person of His only begotten Son.

Another central element of our reconciliation with God was this: that the man who had fallen through disobedience should provide a remedy through obedience, should satisfy the judgment of God, and pay the penalty of sin. Therefore our Lord came forth as the true man; He took on Adam's person and bore his name in order to stand in his place, to obey the Father, to present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God's just judgment, and in that same flesh to suffer the punishment we had deserved. Since as God

alone He could not experience death, and as man alone He could not conquer death, He united human nature with divine nature — so that He might present the one as subject to death to atone for sins, and by the power of the other wrestle with death and win victory for us. Those who rob Christ of either His divinity or His humanity diminish either His majesty and glory or obscure His goodness. And on the other side they do equal harm to people, whose faith they weaken and overthrow — for faith cannot stand unless it rests on this foundation. Beyond this, it was necessary that the Redeemer be the son of Abraham and of David, as God had promised in the law and the prophets. Through this, godly minds draw a further fruit: being led by His actual genealogy back to David and Abraham, they know with greater certainty that this is the same Christ spoken of in so many oracles. But what I stated just now is what must chiefly be kept in mind: that the nature He shares with us is the pledge of our fellowship with the Son of God; that clothed in our flesh He conquered both death and sin, so that the victory might be ours and the triumph ours; and that He offered up in sacrifice the flesh He received from us, so that having made satisfaction He might wipe away our guilt and appease the just wrath of His Father.

Anyone who carefully weighs these things as they should will easily disregard the wandering speculations that attract restless and novelty-seeking minds — such as the claim that Christ would have become man even if there had been no need to redeem mankind. I grant that in the original order of creation, in the state of uncorrupted nature, He was set as head over both angels and men, which is why Paul calls Him the firstborn over all creation. But since all of Scripture cries out that He was clothed with flesh in

order to be the Redeemer, it is too rash a presumption to imagine any other cause or purpose. Why Christ was promised from the beginning is plain enough: to restore the world that had fallen into ruin and to save lost humanity. Therefore in the law His image was set forth through sacrifices, so that the faithful might hope God would be merciful to them when, after sin had been atoned for, He was reconciled. And since in all ages — even before the law was published — the Mediator was never promised without blood, we conclude that He was appointed by the eternal counsel of God to cleanse the filthiness of humanity, since the shedding of blood is the sign of atonement. The prophets proclaimed Him as the reconciler of God and humanity. One especially notable testimony from Isaiah will stand for all the rest: he foretells that Christ would be stricken by the hand of God for the sins of the people, that the punishment for our peace would be upon Him, that He would be a Priest who offers Himself as a sacrifice, that healing for others would come from His wounds, and that because all have strayed and wandered like sheep, it therefore pleased God to punish Him so that He might bear the iniquities of all. Since we hear that Christ was specifically appointed by God to help wretched sinners, whoever ventures beyond these boundaries is pursuing empty curiosity. And when He came, He confirmed this as the purpose of His coming: to appease God and to gather us from death into life. The apostles testified to the same thing. John, before he teaches that the Word became flesh, first declares the fall of humanity. But Christ Himself is to be heard above all others, when He says: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' And: 'The hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of

the Son of God, and those who hear will live.' 'I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live.' And: 'The Son of Man came to save the lost.' And: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician.' I could never finish if I were to cite all the passages. The apostles all with one voice point us to this source. And truly, if He had not come to reconcile God, His high priestly office would come to nothing. For the priest is appointed as a mediator between God and man to make intercession — and He would not be our righteousness unless He had been made a sacrifice for us so that God would not impute our sins to us. Apart from this, He would be stripped of all the honorable titles with which Scripture adorns Him. Paul's statement would also be rendered meaningless — that what was impossible for the law, God accomplished by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to satisfy for us. Nor would this hold, what Paul teaches elsewhere: that God's goodness and His infinite love toward humanity appeared in this mirror — that Christ was given to be the Redeemer. In short, Scripture everywhere assigns no other reason why the Son of God would take on our flesh and receive this commission from His Father, except to be made a sacrifice to reconcile His Father to us. 'So it is written: the Christ should suffer, and repentance be proclaimed in His name.' 'For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life for the sheep — this commandment I received from My Father.' 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.' And: 'Father, save Me from this hour — but for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your Son' — where He speaks plainly of the purpose for which He took on flesh: to be a sacrifice and satisfaction to do away with sin. In the same manner Zechariah de-

clares that He came according to the promise given to the fathers, to give light to those sitting in the shadow of death. Let us remember that all these things are spoken of the Son of God, in whom Paul elsewhere testifies that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, and beyond whom he glories in knowing nothing.

If someone objects that none of these things rule out the possibility that the same Christ who redeemed condemned humanity might also, by taking on human flesh, have shown His love toward humanity had they remained safe and preserved — the answer is brief: since the Holy Spirit declares that by God's eternal decree these two things were bound together — that Christ should be our Redeemer and also a sharer of our nature — we are not at liberty to search further. Whoever is itching to know more, not content with God's unchangeable ordinance, shows thereby that he is not content with the Christ who was given to us as the price of our redemption. But Paul does not merely recount the purpose for which Christ was sent — he also climbs to the high mystery of predestination and fittingly restrains all restlessness and curiosity in human minds: 'The Father chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to make us His sons by adoption, according to the purpose of His will; and He accepted us in His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood.' Here the fall of Adam is not set forward as primary in time — rather, what is shown is what God determined before all ages when He willed to help the misery of mankind. If the opponent objects again that this purpose of God depended on the fall of man that He foresaw, it is more than enough for me to say: whoever ventures to imagine a new Christ of their own devising, seeking to know more of Christ than God has

appointed them by His secret decree, is breaking through with wicked boldness. And Paul had good reason, after having discoursed on Christ's proper office, to wish for the Ephesians the spirit of understanding — to comprehend the length, height, breadth, and depth, even the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge. It is as if he deliberately set up barriers around our minds, so that whenever Christ is mentioned, they would not swerve by even the smallest degree from the grace of reconciliation. Therefore, since it is a trustworthy saying — as Paul testifies — that Christ came to save sinners, I gladly rest in that. And since the same apostle teaches elsewhere that the grace now disclosed through the Gospel was given to us in Christ before the ages began, I determine to abide there constantly to the end. Osiander unjustly attacks this restraint. He has in our own time unhappily reopened this question, which had been briefly stirred by a few others before. He accuses of presumption those who say the Son of God would not have appeared in the flesh if Adam had not fallen, on the grounds that this claim is not expressly refuted by any Scripture text. As though Paul did not bridle curiosity when, after speaking of redemption purchased by Christ, he immediately commands us to avoid foolish questions. Some people's madness went so far that, in their disorderly desire to appear clever, they raised the question whether the Son of God could have taken on the nature of a donkey. This monstrous idea — which all the godly rightly abhor as detestable — let Osiander refute on the ground that it is not expressly refuted in Scripture. As though Paul, who counts nothing precious or worth knowing except Christ crucified, thereby endorses a donkey as the author of salvation. Therefore the one who elsewhere reports that Christ by the eternal counsel of His

Father was ordained as the head to gather all things together will never acknowledge another Christ who has been assigned no office of redemption.

As for the principle Osiander boasts of, it is very thin. He argues that man was created after the image of God because he was fashioned after the pattern of Christ who was to come — so that man might resemble Him whom the Father had already decreed to clothe with our flesh. From this he concludes that even if Adam had never fallen from his original uncorrupted state, Christ would still have become man. How weak and forced this argument is, all people of sound judgment can see for themselves. In the first place, he thinks he has understood what the image of God is — imagining that God's glory did not merely shine in the excellent gifts with which Adam was adorned, but that God Himself essentially dwelt in him. For my part, although I grant that Adam bore the image of God in that he was joined to God — which is true and highest dignity — I say that the likeness of God is to be sought nowhere other than in those marks of excellence with which God had adorned Adam above all other living creatures. Everyone agrees with one voice that Christ was then the image of God, and therefore that whatever excellence was engraved in Adam proceeded from this: that through the only begotten Son he drew near to the glory of his Creator. Man was therefore created after the image of God, in whom the Creator's will was to have His glory seen as in a mirror. To this degree of honor man was raised by the benefit of the only begotten Son. But I say further: the same Son was a common head over both angels and men, so that the same dignity bestowed upon man also belonged to angels. For when we hear them called the children of God, it would be unfitting to deny that

there is something in them in which they resemble their Father. Now if God's will was to have His glory represented in both angels and men, and to be seen in both natures, Osiander is talking foolishly when he says the angels fell short of men because they did not bear the image of Christ. For they could not continuously enjoy the direct beholding of God unless they were like Him. And Paul teaches that people are renewed after the image of God only by being united with the angels and cleaving together under one head. Finally, if we believe Christ, our ultimate blessedness will be to be conformed to the angels when we are received into heaven. But if Osiander concludes that the original pattern of the image of God was in Christ as man, then by the same reasoning one could say that Christ must also have participated in the nature of angels, since the image of God applies to them as well.

Therefore Osiander has no cause to fear that God would be found a liar unless it had been first steadfastly decreed in His mind to have His Son become incarnate. For if Adam's integrity had not fallen, he would have been like God together with the angels — and yet it would not therefore have been necessary for the Son of God to become either man or angel. Osiander also fears the absurdity that unless God had decreed before the creation of man that Christ would be born not as Redeemer but as the first man, He would lose His prerogative. For in that case, Christ would have been born man only by an accidental cause — namely to restore lost mankind — and one could conclude that Christ was created after the image of Adam. But why should Osiander so strongly resist what Scripture so openly teaches — that Christ was made like us in all things, except sin? On this basis Luke does not hesitate to include Him as the son of Adam in his genealogy. And I would like to know why

Paul calls Christ the second Adam, unless it is because the condition of humanity was laid on Him so that He might raise Adam's posterity out of their ruin. If He had existed in order before the creation, He would have been called the first Adam. Osiander boldly claims that because Christ was already known as man in the mind of God, humanity was formed after that same pattern. But Paul, in calling Him the second Adam, places the fall of man between the first creation and the restoration we receive through Christ — the fall that gave rise to the necessity of restoring nature to its original state. From this it follows that this was the very reason the Son of God was born to become man. Meanwhile Osiander reasons poorly and oddly when he says that Adam, as long as he stood without falling, would have been the image of himself and not of Christ. I answer the opposite: even if the Son of God had never taken on flesh, both in the body and in the soul of man would have shone the image of God — in the bright beams of which it has always been clear that Christ is truly the head and holds the supreme preeminence in all things. So the foolish subtlety Osiander spreads about — that the angels would have lacked a head unless God had purposed to clothe His Son with flesh even apart from Adam's fall — is resolved. For he too rashly grasps at what no person in their right mind will grant: that Christ has no supremacy over the angels and serves as their Prince only insofar as He is man. It is easy to gather from Paul's words that insofar as He is the eternal Word of God, He is the firstborn of all creation — not that He is a creature or should be counted among creatures, but because the original state of the world in its integrity and beauty had no other origin. And then, insofar as He was made man, He became the firstborn from the dead. The apostle sets

forth both points in one brief clause: that all things were created through the Son, so that He might have dominion over the angels; and that He was made man so that He might become the Redeemer. Equally mistaken is Osiander's claim that people would not have had Christ as their King if He had not been man — as though the kingdom of God could not stand if the eternal Son of God, even without being clothed in human flesh, gathered angels and men together into the fellowship of His heavenly glory and life and bore the sovereignty. But he is always deceived by this false premise — or rather deceives himself: that the church would have been without a head unless Christ appeared in the flesh. As though, even as the angels enjoyed Him as their head, He could not likewise by His divine power govern humanity, quicken and nourish them by the secret force of His Spirit as His own body, until being taken up to heaven they might enjoy one life with the angels. These trifles, which Osiander considers the most powerful oracles — intoxicated as he is by the sweetness of his own speculations — are what I have been refuting. He brings forward what he considers a far stronger argument: the prophecy of Adam, who, upon seeing his wife, said: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.' But how does he prove this is a prophecy? Because in Matthew Christ applies the same saying to God. As though everything God has spoken through human beings automatically contains a prophecy! Let Osiander then find prophecies in every commandment of the law, which certainly came from God its author. Beyond this, Christ's interpretation would have been coarse and earthly had He rested on the literal sense. For He speaks not of the mystical union by which He has received His church, but only of faithfulness between husband and wife — and

He teaches that God declared husband and wife to be one flesh, so that no one should attempt to break that indissoluble bond through divorce. If Osiander dislikes this straightforwardness, let him blame Christ for not leading His disciples further into a mystery by expounding His Father's words more subtly. Nor does Paul support Osiander's error. After saying that we are flesh of Christ's flesh, Paul immediately adds that this is a great mystery — for his purpose was not to explain what Adam meant, but to use the figure and likeness of marriage to set forth the holy union that makes us one with Christ. And the words themselves show this: when he gives notice that he is speaking of Christ and His church, he by way of correction sets apart the spiritual joining of Christ and His church from the law of marriage. This unstable argument therefore easily vanishes. I do not think I need to sift through more chaff of the same kind, since all of it can be shown to be empty by this brief refutation. This sober truth will abundantly feed the children of God: that when the fullness of time came, the Son of God was sent, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.

THE .XIII. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT CHRIST TOKE VPON HIM THE TRUE SUB- STANCE OF THE FLESH OF MAN.



U nless I am mistaken, it would be superfluous to treat the divinity of Christ again here, since it has already been proved in many other places with clear and strong testimonies. What remains is to see how He, clothed in our flesh, fulfilled the office of Mediator. The truth of His human nature was attacked in ancient times by both the Manichees and the Marcionites. The Marcionites invented a phantom in place of Christ's body, while the Manichees dreamed that He had a heavenly flesh. But many strong testimonies of Scripture stand against them both. The blessing was not promised in a heavenly seed or in a counterfeit human form, but in the seed of Abraham and Jacob. The eternal throne was not promised to a man made of air, but to the son of David and to the fruit of his body. Therefore being born in the flesh, He is called the son of David and Abraham — not merely because He was born from the Virgin's womb and formed in the air, but because, as Paul expounds it, He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. The apostle likewise teaches elsewhere that He descended from the Jews. For this reason the Lord

Himself, not content with the bare title 'man,' frequently calls Himself 'the Son of Man' — meaning to express more plainly that He was truly a man who had come forth from the seed of humanity. Since the Holy Spirit has so often, through so many means, with such diligence and simplicity declared a thing that is not obscure in itself, who would have thought anyone would be so shameless as to try to cloud it with confusion? And we have still other testimonies at hand if we wished to heap more up — such as Paul's statement that God sent His Son born of a woman. And countless other passages show that He was subject to hunger, thirst, cold, and the other weaknesses of our nature. But out of many, those are especially to be chosen that most build up our minds in genuine confidence. For instance, where it is said that He did not take on the nature of angels, but took on our nature, so that in flesh and blood He might destroy through death the one who had the power of death. Again, that through the benefit of that shared nature we are counted as His brothers. Again, that He had to be made like His brothers in every way, so that He might be a merciful and faithful intercessor — and that we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. And similar passages. To the same purpose is what we touched on a moment ago: that it was necessary for the sins of the world to be cleansed in our flesh — which Paul plainly affirms. And truly, whatever the Father has given to Christ belongs to us because He is the head from which the whole body, joined together, grows into one. Otherwise, what is said would not cohere: that the Spirit was given to Him without measure, so that we all might draw from His

fullness. For it would be the greatest absurdity to say that God is enriched in His essence by any accidental gift. That is why Christ says elsewhere: 'I consecrate Myself for them.'

As for the passages the opponents bring forward to support their error, they twist them poorly, and their petty subtleties accomplish nothing when they try to do away with what I have put forward on our side. Marcion imagines that Christ put on a phantom body rather than a real one, because in some places it is said that He was made in the likeness of men and found in human form. But he does not at all weigh Paul's purpose in those passages. Paul's intention is not to teach what kind of body Christ took on, but that although He could have displayed His divinity openly, He made no such show — He appeared as a lowly and unremarkable man. To urge us to humility by His example, Paul shows that since Christ was God, He could have immediately displayed His glory to the world; but instead He voluntarily surrendered some of His own rights and humbled Himself, taking on the form of a servant, content with that humility, allowing His divinity to be hidden under the veil of flesh. He is not teaching what Christ was, but how He conducted Himself. And from the whole flow of the passage it is easy to gather that Christ was humbled in the true nature of man. For what does it mean that He was found in human form, except that for a time the glory of His divinity did not shine out, and only the form of a man in lowly and humble condition appeared? Otherwise Peter's statement could not stand: that He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit — if the Son of God had not been weak in human nature. Paul expresses this more plainly by saying that He suffered through the weakness of the flesh. And the exaltation confirms this: it is expressly said that

Christ attained a new glory after He had humbled Himself, which could not properly be said of anyone but a man having flesh and soul. The Manichees devised a body of air for Christ because He is called the second Adam — heavenly, from heaven. But the apostle in that passage is not referring to a heavenly substance of the body but to a spiritual power that, poured out by Christ, gives us life. As we have already seen, Peter and Paul distinguish this spiritual power from His flesh. In fact, the doctrine received among the true teachers concerning Christ's flesh is very well confirmed by that passage. For if Christ did not share the same bodily nature with us, Paul's argument — which he presses with such force — would be completely empty: that if Christ is risen, we also will rise; and that if we do not rise, then Christ has not risen either. Whatever twists and evasions the old Manichees or their modern disciples attempt, they will not wriggle out of this. It is a poor excuse when they foolishly claim that Christ is called the Son of Man only because He was promised from among men. For it is plain that in Hebrew idiom, 'son of man' means a true and real human being — and Christ without doubt kept the phrase of His own language. And there should be no question about what 'children of Adam' means. Without going far afield, the passage from Psalm 8 that the apostles apply to Christ is sufficient: 'What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?' In this figure the true humanity of Christ is expressed. For although He was not immediately begotten by a mortal father, His lineage came from Adam. Otherwise the passage we already cited could not stand: that Christ was made partaker of flesh and blood, in order to draw children to the service of God. In these words it is plainly established that Christ was made a fellow and sharer of the same nature

as we are. In the same sense He also says that both the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one. The text itself makes clear that this refers to sharing in nature, because He immediately adds: 'Therefore He is not ashamed to call them brothers.' For if He had first said the faithful were of God in such great dignity, why would there be any shame? But because Christ in His infinite grace joins Himself to the lowly and the ignoble, it is said He is not ashamed. The objection that by this reasoning even the wicked would become brothers of Christ is pointless, since we know that the children of God are born not of flesh and blood but of the Holy Spirit through faith. Flesh alone does not make a brotherly union. And although the apostle grants this honor of being one with Christ only to the faithful, it does not follow that the wicked cannot be born from the same origin. When we say Christ was made man to make us sons of God, this does not extend to all people, because faith is the means by which we are spiritually grafted into the body of Christ. They also raise a pointless quarrel over the title 'firstborn.' They say Christ would have had to be born of Adam from the very beginning to be the firstborn among His brothers. But the title of firstborn refers not to age but to rank of honor and excellence of authority. Their additional chatter — that Christ took on man and not angels because He received mankind into favor — has somewhat more color to it. For to highlight more fully the honor God was pleased to give us, He compared angels with us, who in this respect were placed behind us. But if Moses's testimony is rightly considered — where he says the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head — it settles the whole controversy. For it is not spoken of Christ alone but of all humanity. Because the victory was to be won by Christ on our behalf, He

speaks generally: that the offspring of the woman would overcome the devil. From this it follows that Christ came from humanity, because it was God's purpose there to raise up Eve — speaking to her with good hope, so that she would not faint in her grief.

The opponents are no less wicked than foolish when they entangle with allegory the testimonies that call Christ the seed of Abraham and the fruit of David's body. For if the word 'seed' were used allegorically, Paul would certainly not have left this unexplained where he plainly and without figure affirms that there are not many sons of Abraham as redeemers, but one Christ. Similarly, they claim He is called the son of David only because He was promised and in due time delivered. But when Paul, after naming Him the Son of God, immediately adds 'according to the flesh,' he is clearly speaking of nature. And in Romans 9, after calling Him the blessed God, he separately states that according to the flesh He descended from the Jews. Now if He were not truly begotten from the seed of David, what would be the point of the statement that He would be the fruit of David's womb? What else can this promise mean: 'One from your own body will sit on your throne'? As for the genealogy in Matthew, the opponents raise sophisticated objections. Matthew does not name Mary's parents but Joseph's — yet because he was speaking of something well known throughout the community, he considered it sufficient to show that Joseph came from David's line, since it was common knowledge that Mary came from the same stock. But Luke presses them more directly by teaching that the salvation Christ brings is common to all humanity, because Christ the author of salvation descended from Adam, the common ancestor of all. I grant that from the genealogy one can only conclude Christ was the son of David insofar as He was

born of the Virgin. But the new Marcionites, in trying to cover their error, argue too brazenly that women contribute no seed, which would overturn the basic principles of nature. Since this is not a theological question, and the arguments they bring are so weak they can easily be refuted, I will not pursue the philosophical and natural-science aspects but will only dispose of what they allege from Scripture. They claim that Aaron and Joiada took wives from the tribe of Judah, and that the distinction between tribes would have been confused if women carried generative seed. But it is well enough known that in civil matters, family lines are traced through the male seed — yet the priority of the male over the female does not disprove that the woman's seed participates in generation. And this answer covers all the genealogies. Scripture often in tracing a genealogy names only the men — does that mean women are nothing? Every child knows that women are included under the names of men. It is also said in this sense that women bear children to their husbands, because the family name remains with the males. Just as the preeminence of the male means children's rank follows the father's status, so in the matter of slavery the condition follows the mother, according to civil law — from which we may conclude that children are conceived from the mother's seed as well. It has long been accepted among all nations that mothers are called genitors — that is, generators. God's law agrees with this, for otherwise it would wrongfully forbid a man's marriage to his sister's daughter on the grounds of kinship, if no such kinship actually existed through the woman. And it would be permissible for a man to marry his half-sister if she had a different father. While I grant that a passive generative role is attributed to women, the same generative language is applied to them as to

men. And Christ Himself is said to be made not by the woman but of the woman. Some of them shamelessly ask whether we will say that Christ was conceived from the menstrual seed of the Virgin. I will ask them in turn whether He was not formed from His mother's blood — which they will be forced to admit. Therefore it is rightly concluded from Matthew's words that since Christ was begotten of Mary, He was conceived from her seed, just as a similar act of generation is meant when it is said that Boaz was born of Rahab. Matthew here does not describe the Virgin as a mere channel through which Christ passed — he sets this remarkable form of generation apart from the ordinary kind, for it was through her that Christ was begotten from the seed of David. In the very same way that Isaac was begotten of Abraham, Solomon of David, and Joseph of Jacob, Christ is said to have been begotten of His mother. The evangelist frames his account this way, and in proving that Christ came from David, he is content with this single demonstration: that He was begotten of Mary. From which it follows that he took it as an established fact that Mary was a relative of Joseph.

The objections they raise against us are full of childish quibbling. They think it a shame and dishonor to Christ that He should have descended from human beings — because then He could not be exempt from the universal law that binds all the offspring of Adam under sin without exception. But Paul's comparison easily resolves this doubt: just as sin came through one man and death through sin, so grace has abounded through the righteousness of one man (Romans 5:12). This agrees with his other comparison: the first Adam was of the earth, earthly and natural; the second Adam was from heaven, heavenly (1 Corinthians 15:47). Elsewhere the same apostle teaches that Christ was sent in the likeness of sin-

ful flesh to satisfy the law — and he carefully sets Christ apart from the common condition of humanity, showing that He was truly a man yet without fault or corruption (Romans 8:3). But they reason childishly when they say: if Christ is free from all stain, and was conceived by the secret working of the Holy Spirit from Mary's seed, then it is the man's seed that is unclean, not the woman's. We do not hold that Christ was free from all stain simply because He was conceived of His mother without a human father — but because He was sanctified by the Holy Spirit, so that His generation was pure and uncorrupted, as it would have been before Adam's fall. It remains firmly established that whenever Scripture speaks of Christ's purity, it refers to His true human nature — for it would be unnecessary to say that God is clean. The sanctification He speaks of in John 17 also could not apply to the divine nature. Nor does Adam's fall necessarily infect Christ, even though Christ descended from him — for human generation is not unclean in itself, but only became so as an accident of the Fall. It is no wonder, therefore, that Christ, through whom the state of innocence was to be restored, was exempt from the common corruption. As for the objection they press on us as an absurdity — that if the Word of God put on flesh, He was then confined in the narrow prison of an earthly body — this is mere stubbornness. Although the infinite essence of the Word was joined together into one person with human nature, we do not teach that He was enclosed or confined. For the Son of God descended from heaven in a marvelous way, yet never left heaven. It was His will to be miraculously born in the Virgin's womb, to live on earth, and to hang on the cross — and yet He always filled the world, just as He had from the beginning.

THE .XIIII. CHAPTER. ¶ HOWE THE [•]WO NATURES OF THE MEDIATOUR DO MAKE ONE PERSONE.



When Scripture says the Word was made flesh, this does not mean the Word was turned into flesh or confused with flesh. Rather, He chose the Virgin's womb as a temple to dwell in — the one who was the Son of God also became the Son of Man, not by mixing the two substances together, but by the union of one person. We affirm that the Godhead was joined and united to the humanity, so that each nature retains its full properties, yet from both one Christ is formed. If any earthly comparison can shed light on so great a mystery, the nature of man is the most fitting. We see that a human being consists of two substances — soul and body — yet neither is mixed with the other in such a way that either loses its own distinct nature. The soul is not the body, and the body is not the soul. Therefore some things may be said specifically of the soul that could never apply to the body, and some things may be said of the body that could never apply to the soul. And some things may be said of the whole person that would not fit either the soul or the body taken separately. Sometimes the properties of the soul are attributed to the body, and the properties

of the body to the soul — yet the person who consists of both is one man, not many. Such ways of speaking show both that there is one person in man composed of two natures knit together, and that there are two distinct natures that make up the same person. Scripture speaks of Christ in the same way. Sometimes it attributes to Him things that belong specifically to His human nature, sometimes things that belong specifically to His divine nature, and sometimes things that encompass both natures and do not belong to either one in isolation. This joining of two natures in Christ is expressed with such care that sometimes the properties of one are shared with the other — a figure that the ancient writers called the communication of properties.

These points would carry little weight if many passages of Scripture — passages that anyone can easily find — did not prove that none of this was invented by human minds. What Christ said of Himself — 'Before Abraham was, I am' — clearly goes beyond anything that could be said of His human nature (John 8:58). I am aware of the clever twisting that erroneous teachers use to distort this passage. They say He existed before all ages because He was already foreknown as the Redeemer, both in the Father's purpose and in the minds of the faithful. But Christ openly distinguishes the day of His appearing from His eternal existence, and deliberately asserts for Himself an antiquity that exceeds Abraham's. He is undoubtedly claiming what belongs to the Godhead alone. When Paul says He is the firstborn of all creation, that He existed before all things and all things hold together in Him (Colossians 1:15), and when Christ reports that He shared glory with the Father before the world was made and works together with the Father (John 5:17; John 17:5) — none of these things can apply to human nature.

These and similar statements belong specifically to the Godhead. But when He is called the servant of the Father; when it is said He grew in age, wisdom, and favor with God and men; that He does not seek His own glory; that He does not know the last day; that He does not speak on His own authority; that He does not do His own will; and when He is said to have been seen and touched (Isaiah 42:1; Luke 1:52; John 8:50; Matthew 13; John 14:10; John 6:38; Luke 24:39) — all of this belongs solely to His human nature. As God, He cannot grow in anything, He works all things for His own purposes, nothing is hidden from Him, He acts according to His own free will, and He can neither be seen nor touched by human hands. Yet He does not assign these things separately to His human nature alone — He takes them as belonging to Himself as the Mediator. The communication of properties is what Paul refers to when he says God purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), and what is meant when the Lord of glory is said to have been crucified (1 Corinthians 2:8). Similarly, John says that the Word of life was touched with hands (1 John 1:1). God in His divine nature has no blood, does not suffer, and cannot be touched. But because the one who was both truly God and truly man shed His blood for us when Christ was crucified, the things done in His human nature are — in an improper but legitimate sense — attributed to His Godhead. A similar example is when John says God laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16) — there the property of the human nature is communicated to the divine. Again, while Christ was still living on earth, He said that no one had ascended into heaven except the Son of Man who was in heaven (John 3:13). According to His human nature and the flesh

He had taken on, He was not in heaven at that moment — but because He was both God and man, He attributed to one nature what belonged to the other, by virtue of the union of both.

Most clearly of all, the passages that encompass both natures together express the true substance of Christ — and there are many such passages in the Gospel. What we find there belongs neither specifically to His Godhead nor to His humanity alone, but to both together: that He has received from the Father authority to forgive sins, to raise up whomever He will, to grant righteousness, holiness, and salvation, to be made judge over the living and the dead, and to be honored just as the Father is honored. He is also called the light of the world, the good shepherd, the only door, and the true vine. The Son of God possessed these prerogatives when He appeared in the flesh. Although He had enjoyed them with the Father before the world was made, He did not exercise them in the same manner or in the same respect — and they could not have been given to one who was merely a man. We should understand Paul's statement in the same way: that after judgment is complete, Christ will deliver the kingdom to God the Father. His kingdom as the Son of God had no beginning and will have no end. But in that He lay hidden under the lowliness of flesh, humbled Himself by taking on the form of a servant, and set aside the display of majesty, He showed Himself obedient to His Father. Having accomplished this complete obedience, He is at last crowned with honor and glory and exalted to the highest sovereignty, so that every knee will bow before Him. He will then yield up to the Father both that name and crown of glory, and everything He received from the Father, so that God may be all in all. For what purpose was power and authority given to Him, if not so that the Father

would govern us by His hand? In this same sense it is said that He sits at the Father's right hand. But this is only for a time, until we are able to enjoy the direct sight of the Godhead. Here the error of the early fathers cannot be excused: by failing to pay attention to the person of the Mediator, they obscured the plain meaning of nearly all the teaching in the Gospel of John and entangled themselves in many difficulties. Let this therefore be the key to right understanding: things that belong to the office of the Mediator are spoken neither simply of the divine nature nor simply of the human nature. Christ will therefore reign until He comes to judge the world, in that He unites us to His Father according to the limited measure of our weakness. But when we are made partakers of heavenly glory and see God as He is, Christ, having fulfilled the office of Mediator, will cease to act as the Father's ambassador and will rest in the glory He had before the world was made. The title of Lord belongs specifically to Christ only in the sense that it describes His intermediate position between God and us. Paul captures this purpose: one God, from whom are all things, and one Lord, through whom are all things — the one to whom the Father has entrusted dominion for a time, until His divine majesty is seen face to face. Far from losing anything by yielding up the dominion to His Father, He will then be all the more glorious. For then God will also cease to be the head of Christ, because Christ's Godhead will shine on its own — whereas now it is covered by a kind of veil.

This observation will be of great help in resolving many difficulties, if readers apply it carefully. It is remarkable how troubled many people — including some who are not entirely ignorant — become over the statements they see Christ make, which seem to fit neither His Godhead nor His humanity. They fail to see that

such statements fit His person — in whom He is shown as both God and man — and fit the office of the Mediator. When a reverent and careful interpreter examines these great mysteries as they deserve, it is easy to see how everything fits together. But there is nothing that reckless and frantic minds will not disturb. They seize on what is said of His human nature to deny His Godhead; they seize on what is said of His Godhead to deny His humanity; and they seize on what is said jointly of both natures — belonging separately to neither — to deny both. But what is that except to say Christ is not man because He is God, is not God because He is man, and is neither God nor man because He is both? We therefore affirm that Christ — being both God and man, consisting of two natures united though not confused — is our Lord and the true Son of God, even according to His human nature, though not by reason of His human nature. We must keep far from us the error of Nestorius, who, attempting to separate rather than distinguish the two natures, ended up imagining two Christs. Scripture cries out loudly against this, for the name Son of God is given to the one born of the Virgin, and the Virgin herself is called the mother of our Lord. We must also guard against the madness of Eutyches, lest in trying to demonstrate the unity of Christ's person we destroy either nature. We have already cited many testimonies, and there are many others throughout Scripture, that distinguish the Godhead from the humanity — enough to silence even the most contentious. A little later I will add more testimonies to refute that invented error more fully, but for now one passage is enough. Christ would not have called His body a temple unless the Godhead distinctly dwelt within it. Therefore, just as Nestorius was rightly condemned at the Council of Ephesus, Eutyches was

afterward rightly condemned at the Councils of Constantinople and Chalcedon — for it is no more lawful to confuse the two natures in Christ than it is to tear them apart.

But in our own age, a no less dangerous heretic has arisen: Michael Servetus, who substituted for the Son of God a fabricated being made of the essence of God, of spirit, flesh, and three uncreated elements. First, he denies that Christ is the Son of God in any other way than that He was begotten by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin's womb. The aim of his subtlety is this: once the distinction between the two natures is overthrown, Christ might be thought of as a confused mixture of God and man -- yet neither truly God nor truly man. His whole argument drives toward this point: that before Christ was openly revealed in the flesh, there were only certain foreshadowing figures in God. The truth and reality of these figures did not actually exist until the Word, ordained for that honor, truly began to be the Son of God. We do indeed confess that the Mediator who was born of the Virgin is properly the Son of God. Christ as man could not be the mirror of God's immeasurable favor unless He were given the dignity of being -- and being called -- the only begotten Son of God. But meanwhile, the church's settled definition stands firm: He is counted the Son of God because the Word, begotten of the Father before all ages, took on human nature through a personal union. This personal union is what the early fathers called the "hypostatic union" -- the union that makes one person out of two natures. This term was coined to overthrow the foolish error of Nestorius, who imagined that the Son of God dwelt in human flesh yet was not Himself man. Servetus slanders us by claiming that we make two Sons of God when we say that the eternal Word was already the Son of God before He was clothed

with flesh. It is as if we said anything other than that He was manifested in the flesh. It does not follow that if He was God before He was man, He began to be a new God. And it is no more absurd to say that the Son of God appeared in the flesh -- having always been the Son from His eternal begetting -- as the angel's words to Mary quietly show: "That holy thing that shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." It is as if he said that the name of Son, which was obscure during the time of the law, would now become famous and known everywhere. Paul's statement agrees with this: that now through Christ we are the children of God, freely and with boldness crying "Abba, Father." But were not the holy fathers in the old covenant also counted among God's children? Indeed, and relying on that relationship, they called upon God by the name of Father. But since the only begotten Son of God has been brought forth into the world, the heavenly fatherhood has become more plainly known. Therefore, Paul assigns this as a special privilege to the kingdom of Christ. Yet this must be firmly held: God was never Father, either to angels or to people, except in relation to the only begotten Son. People especially, whom their own wickedness makes hateful to God, are His children by free adoption, because Christ is the Son of God by nature. There is no reason for Servetus to object that this depends on becoming a son, which God had determined within Himself. Our purpose here is not to discuss the figures through which atonement was shown through the blood of animals. Rather, since people could not truly be children of God unless their adoption was grounded in Christ the head, it is unreasonable to take away from the head what is shared with all the members. I go further: since Scripture calls the angels sons of God -- whose great dignity did not depend on a future redemption -- it

must be that the Son is in rank before them. It is He who makes the Father their Father. I will state it again briefly and add the same point about humanity. Since from the very beginning, both angels and humans were created with the condition that God would be their common Father -- and if Paul's statement is true that Christ was always the head and the firstborn of all creation, holding the first rank in everything -- I think I am right to conclude that He was also the Son of God before the creation of the world.

But if His Sonship began only when He appeared in the flesh, it would follow that He was Son only in respect of His human nature. Servetus and other such deluded people would have it that Christ who appeared in the flesh is the Son of God only because He could not be called by that name apart from the flesh. Now let them answer me: is He the Son according to both natures, and with respect to both? This is what they claim, but Paul teaches something very different. We do grant that Christ in human flesh is called the Son -- but not in the way the faithful are, through adoption and grace alone. He is the true, natural, and only Son, and by this distinction He is set apart from everyone else. God graciously gives the title of sons to us who are born again into new life, but He gives the title of the true and only begotten Son to Christ alone. How can He be the only Son among so many brothers, unless He possesses by nature what we have received as a gift? We extend this honor to the whole person of the Mediator: that He is truly and properly the Son of God, who was also born of the Virgin and offered Himself as a sacrifice to His Father on the cross -- yet with respect to His deity, as Paul teaches when he says Christ was set apart to preach the Gospel of God, which He had promised beforehand concerning His

Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared the Son of God in power. But why, when Paul distinctly names Him the Son of David according to the flesh, would he separately say that He was declared the Son of God -- unless he meant to show that this depended on something other than the flesh itself? In the same way that Paul says elsewhere that He suffered through the weakness of the flesh and rose again through the power of the Spirit, so here he distinguishes between the two natures. They must certainly admit that just as He received from His mother what makes Him the Son of David, so He received from His Father what makes Him the Son of God -- and this is something distinct and separate from human nature. Scripture gives Him two names, calling Him sometimes the Son of God and sometimes the Son of Man. There can be no debate about the second title. According to common Hebrew usage, He is called the Son of Man because He is of Adam's offspring. Conversely, I affirm that He is called the Son of God with respect to His deity and eternal essence. It is no less fitting to refer the title "Son of God" to the divine nature than it is to refer the title "Son of Man" to the human nature. Again, in the same passage I cited, Paul means that He who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh was declared the Son of God in power in no other way than Paul teaches elsewhere: that Christ, who descended from the Jews according to the flesh, is God blessed forever. Now, if in both passages the distinction between the two natures is being marked, what right do they have to say that He who according to the flesh is the Son of Man is not also the Son of God with respect to the divine nature?

They do indeed twist the passage, in defense of their error, where it says that God did not spare His own Son, and where the angel commanded that the one born of the Virgin should be called the Son of the Most High. But so that they do not boast about such a weak objection, let them weigh with us how strongly they reason. If it is valid to conclude that He began to be the Son of God at His conception because He who was conceived is called the Son of God, then it would also follow that He began to be the Word only at His appearance in the flesh, since John says he brings them news of the Word of life, which his hands have touched. Likewise, the passage in the prophet: "You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are a small one among the thousands of Judah; out of you shall come forth a ruler to govern My people Israel, and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). How will they be forced to explain this if they insist on following such reasoning? I have made clear that we do not agree with Nestorius, who imagined a double Christ. By our teaching, Christ has made us sons of God together with Himself by right of brotherly union, because He is the only begotten Son of God in the flesh He took from us. Augustine wisely reminds us that this is a bright mirror in which to see God's marvelous and unique favor: Christ attained an honor as man that He could not have deserved. Therefore, Christ was adorned with this distinction even in His human nature from His mother's womb: to be the Son of God. Yet we must not imagine such a blending in the unity of His person as would destroy what properly belongs to the deity. It is no more absurd that the eternal Word of God and Christ, because of the two natures united in one person, should be called the Son of God in different ways, than that He should be called sometimes the Son of God and sometimes

the Son of Man. Nor does Servetus' other objection trouble us: that before Christ appeared in the flesh, He is nowhere called the Son of God except in a figurative way. Although the descriptions of Him were somewhat unclear at that time, it has already been clearly proven that He was the eternal God only because He was the Word begotten of the eternal Father; that this name belongs to the person of the Mediator He has taken on only because He is God openly revealed in the flesh; and that God the Father would not have been called Father from the beginning unless there had been a mutual relationship to the Son, through whom all fatherhood is reckoned in heaven and on earth. From all this, it is easy to conclude that even during the time of the law and the prophets, He was the Son of God, before this name was commonly known in the church. But if they quarrel only about the word itself, Solomon -- in discussing the infinite greatness of God -- affirms that His Son, as well as Himself, is beyond comprehension. "Tell His name if you can," he says, "or the name of His Son" (Proverbs 30:4). I am aware that contentious people will not accept this testimony as sufficient proof, and I do not heavily rely on it. But it does show that those who deny Christ is the Son of God apart from His becoming man are arguing dishonestly. Besides this, all the most ancient church fathers have openly and unanimously testified to the same truth. So the shamelessness of those who dare to cite Irenaeus and Tertullian against us is worthy of both scorn and disgust, since both of these fathers confess that the Son of God was invisible before He later appeared in visible form.

Although Servetus has piled up horrible and monstrous ideas that the others might not accept, if you press them hard, you will find that everyone who refuses to acknowledge Christ as the Son of

God apart from His human flesh only grants Him that title because He was conceived in the Virgin's womb by the Holy Spirit. This is like the ancient Manichean error of claiming that the human soul comes by derivation from God, because they read that God breathed the breath of life into Adam. They cling so tightly to the name "Son" that they leave no distinction between the natures. Instead, they babble in a confused way that Christ as man is the Son of God because He was begotten of God according to His human nature. This destroys the eternal begetting of Wisdom that Solomon speaks of. It also either dismisses the deity of the Mediator or substitutes a phantom in place of His true humanity. It would indeed be profitable to refute Servetus' cruder deceptions in detail -- the ones with which he has deceived himself and some others -- so that godly readers, warned by this example, might keep themselves within the bounds of sober and humble thinking. But I believe this would be unnecessary, since I have already done so in a separate book. The sum of his ideas amounts to this: the Son of God was an idea in God's mind from the beginning, and even then He was foreordained to be the man who would be the essential image of God. Servetus recognizes no other Word of God than one that exists only in outward appearance. He explains the begetting this way: there was a will begotten in God from the beginning to beget a Son, and this will eventually extended to actual creation. Meanwhile, he confuses the Spirit with the Word, claiming that God distributed the invisible Word and the Spirit into flesh and soul. In his system, the forming of Christ takes the place of begetting. He says that the one who was only a shadowy Son in idea was at length begotten through the Word, which he treats as a kind of seed. If that were true, it would follow that pigs and dogs

are equally children of God, since they too were created from the original seed of the Word of God. Although he assembles Christ from three uncreated elements in order to make Him begotten from the essence of God, he still claims that Christ is the firstborn among creatures in such a way that stones possess the same essential divinity in proportion to their rank. And to avoid seeming to strip Christ of His deity, he claims that Christ's flesh is of the same substance as God, and that the Word was made man by turning the flesh into God. So while he cannot conceive of Christ being the Son of God unless His flesh came from God's essence and was turned into deity, he destroys the eternal person of the Word and takes from us the Son of David who was promised as Redeemer. He often repeats that the Son was begotten of God through knowledge and predestination, and that He was ultimately made man from the matter that originally shone with God in three elements -- which afterward appeared in the first light of the world, in the cloud, and in the pillar of fire. It would be too tedious to recount how shamefully he contradicts himself at times. From this brief summary, readers of sound mind can see that the teachings of this corrupt man completely destroy the hope of salvation. If the flesh were the Godhead itself, it would cease to be His temple. And no one can be our Redeemer unless He was truly made man, begotten from the seed of Abraham and David according to the flesh. Servetus wrongly presses the words of John -- "the Word was made flesh" -- because while those words resist the error of Nestorius, they do not at all support the wicked idea of Eutyches. The evangelist's only purpose was to defend the unity of the person in the two natures.

CHAPTER 15: THAT WE MAY KNOW
TO WHAT END CHRIST WAS SENT OF
HIS FATHER, AND WHAT HE
BROUGHT US — THREE THINGS ARE
PRINCIPALLY TO BE CONSIDERED IN
HIM: HIS PROPHETICAL OFFICE,
HIS KINGDOM, AND HIS
PRIESTHOOD



Augustine rightly says that although heretics boast of the name of Christ, they do not share the same foundation as the faithful — that foundation belongs exclusively to the church. For if the things that truly belong to Christ are carefully examined, He will be found among the heretics in name only, not in reality. The same is true today of the papists. Although the name of the Son of God, Redeemer of the world, sounds in their mouths, they are content with an empty use of that name while stripping Him of His power and dignity. Paul's words may rightly be applied to them: they do not hold to the head. Therefore, so that faith may find solid grounds of salvation in Christ and rest in Him, this principle must be established: the office committed to Him by the

Father consists of three parts. He is given as Prophet, King, and Priest. Yet it would bring little benefit to know these titles without knowing their purpose and significance. These names are mentioned among the papists as well, but without depth or profit, because there is no understanding of what each title actually contains. We have said previously that although God never left His people without profitable teaching sufficient for salvation — sending prophets in an unbroken succession — the faithful always held this conviction: that the full light of understanding was to be expected only at the coming of the Messiah. This expectation had spread even to the Samaritans, who had never known the true religion, as the woman's words show: 'When the Messiah comes, He will teach us all things.' The Jews had not rashly invented this idea in their own minds — they believed it because they had been taught by reliable oracles. Among these, the word of Isaiah stands out: 'Behold, I have made Him a witness to peoples, I have given Him to be a guide and teacher to peoples' — just as in another place Isaiah had called Him the Angel, or interpreter, of the great counsel. The apostle, commending the perfection of Gospel doctrine, likewise says that in former times God spoke to the fathers by the prophets in many ways and under many figures — but in these last days He has spoken to us through His beloved Son. Because it was the common office of the prophets to hold the church in expectation until the Mediator came, we read that when they were scattered, the faithful lamented being deprived of that ordinary benefit: 'We see no signs; there is no prophet among us; there is no one who understands.' But when Christ was near, a time was appointed for Daniel to seal up the vision and the prophecy — not only to confirm the prophecy spoken of there with

certain authority, but also to teach the faithful to wait contentedly for a time without prophets, since the fullness and closing of all revelations was at hand.

It is important to note that Christ's honor is connected to all three of these offices. In the time of the law, prophets, priests, and kings were all anointed with holy oil — and for this reason the promised Mediator was given the distinguished title of Messiah. Though I have said elsewhere that He was called Messiah with particular reference to His kingly office, the anointings relating to the prophetic and priestly offices also have their place and must not be overlooked. Express mention of the first of these two is made in Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; therefore the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the humble, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to captives, and to declare the year of God's favor.' We see that He was anointed with the Spirit to be the herald and witness of the Father's grace. And not in the ordinary way — He is set apart from the other teachers who held a similar office. It must also be noted here that He did not receive this anointing for Himself alone so that He could teach, but for His whole body — so that in the ongoing preaching of the Gospel, the power of the Spirit would accompany it. This remains certain: through the perfection of the doctrine He brought, all prophecy came to its end. Those who are not content with the Gospel and add foreign elements to it diminish His authority. The voice that thundered from heaven — 'This is My beloved Son; listen to Him' — elevated Him by a unique privilege above all others. This anointing then flows from the head to all the members, as Joel foretold: 'Your sons will prophesy, and your daughters will see visions.' When Paul says Christ was given to us as wisdom — and elsewhere

that in Him are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and understanding — this carries a somewhat different meaning: that apart from Him there is nothing worth knowing, and those who grasp by faith who He is have comprehended the whole fullness of heavenly blessing. For this reason Paul writes elsewhere: 'I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' This is most true, because it is not lawful to go beyond the simplicity of the Gospel. The dignity of Christ's prophetic office points to this: that in the sum of the teaching He gave, all points of perfect wisdom are contained.

Now I come to His kingdom — though it would be pointless to speak of it unless readers are first warned that its nature is spiritual. From this spiritual nature we understand its purpose, its value to us, its full force and eternity — the eternity the angel attributes to the person of Christ in Daniel, and which the angel in Luke rightly applies to the salvation of God's people. This kingdom is also twofold: one aspect belongs to the whole body of the church, and the other is particular to each individual member. The first is addressed in the psalm: 'Once I have sworn by My holiness to David — I will not lie — his seed will endure forever, his throne will be like the sun before Me, established like the moon forever, and a faithful witness in the sky.' There is no doubt that God is promising there to be, through His Son, an eternal governor and defender of His church. The true fulfillment of this prophecy can be found nowhere except in Christ — for immediately after Solomon's death, much of the kingdom's splendor fell away and passed dishonorably to a private individual, then gradually declined until it collapsed in utter ruin and shame. The same meaning is carried by Isaiah's exclamation: 'Who can describe His generation?' For Isaiah declares

that Christ will live on after death, joined to His members. Therefore, whenever we hear that Christ is equipped with eternal power, we should remember that the church's unending continuance is sustained by this support — so that it remains safe amid the constant turbulence that buffets it and amid the violent upheavals that threaten destruction on every side. When David mocks his enemies' boldness — those who set out to break the yoke of God and Christ — saying that kings and peoples raged in vain because He who sits in heaven is strong enough to crush their violent attacks, he assures the faithful of the church's continual preservation and encourages them to maintain hope whenever the church is under pressure. And when God speaks through him: 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet' — He warns us that however many and powerful enemies conspire to besiege the church, they cannot overpower the unchangeable decree of God by which He has appointed His Son as eternal King. It follows that the devil with all the world's forces can never at any time destroy the church, which rests on the eternal throne of Christ. As for the particular benefit of each individual, this same eternal continuance should lift us up to hope for immortality. We see that everything earthly and worldly lasts only a short time and is very fragile. Therefore Christ, to raise our hope toward heaven, declares that His kingdom is not of this world. So whenever any of us hears that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, let that truth lift him up and point him toward the hope of a better life. And since Christ now protects him by His hand, let him look for the full fruit of this grace in the world to come.

As we have said, the power and benefit of Christ's kingdom can only be understood when we recognize it as spiritual. This is evident from the following: since we must live our whole life in warfare under the cross, our condition is hard and miserable. What good would it do us to be gathered under the rule of a heavenly king if we could not enjoy the fruit of that rule beyond this earthly life? It must therefore be known that whatever happiness is promised us in Christ does not consist in outward comforts — a pleasant and quiet life, prosperity, freedom from all harm, and abundance of the pleasures the flesh desires. It belongs entirely to the heavenly life. Yet just as a nation's wellbeing is maintained partly by material plenty and peace within, and partly by strong defenses against outward attack, so Christ enriches His own with everything necessary for the eternal salvation of their souls and strengthens them so they can stand unmoved against all the assaults of spiritual enemies. From this we understand that He reigns more for us than for Himself, and this both inwardly and outwardly. Equipped with spiritual gifts — of which we are naturally empty — as far as God knows to be beneficial for us, we can through these firstfruits recognize that we are truly joined to God for perfect blessedness. And then, resting confidently on the power of that same Spirit, we need not doubt that we will always have victory over the devil, the world, and every kind of harm. Christ's answer to the Pharisees points to this: the kingdom of God is within you, and it will not come with outward display. Since He had declared Himself to be the King under whom God's supreme blessing was to be expected, the Pharisees apparently mocked Him and demanded signs. But because they — who are already too fixed on earthly things — should not foolishly rest their hope on worldly

pomp, He told them to look within their own consciences, for the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. This briefly teaches us what Christ's kingdom means for us. Because it is not earthly or fleshly or subject to decay, but spiritual, He lifts us up to eternal life — so that we may patiently endure this life with all its misery, hunger, cold, contempt, insults, and other troubles, content with this one thing: our King will never abandon us but will help us in our needs, until having finished our warfare we are called to triumph. For this is how He reigns: by sharing with us everything He has received from the Father. When He arms and equips us with power, adorns us with beauty and honor, and enriches us with His gifts, He gives us abundant reason to glory and the bold courage to fight the devil, sin, and death without fear. Finally, clothed with His righteousness, we can confidently face all the world's reproaches — and as He freely fills us with His gifts, we in turn may bear fruit to His glory.

His kingly anointing is presented to us not as something done with oil or perfumed ointments, but He is called God's Anointed because the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, and the fear of God rested upon Him. This is the oil of gladness with which the psalm says He was anointed above His companions — for without such fullness in Him, we would all be in need and starving. As already said, He was not enriched privately for Himself alone, but to pour out His abundance on us who are hungry and dry. The Father gave the Spirit to His Son without measure — and the reason is stated plainly: so that we all might receive from His fullness, and grace upon grace. From this fountain flows the generous distribution Paul speaks of, by which grace is distributed in various ways to the faithful according to the measure of

Christ's gift. This confirms what I said: Christ's kingdom consists in the Spirit, not in earthly delights or outward pomp — and therefore we must leave the world behind in order to share in it. A visible sign of this holy anointing appeared at Christ's baptism, when the Holy Spirit rested on Him in the form of a dove. That the Holy Spirit and His gifts are signified by the word anointing should seem neither new nor strange. For we are not made alive in any other way — especially as far as the heavenly life is concerned. There is not a drop of living power in us except what the Holy Spirit pours into us. The Spirit has chosen His dwelling in Christ so that from there the heavenly riches might flow abundantly to us in our great need. Because the faithful stand invincible through the strength of their King, and because His spiritual riches flow out to them so generously, they are rightly called Christians. But the eternity we have spoken of is not diminished by Paul's statement: 'Then He will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father,' and 'the Son Himself will be made subject, so that God may be all in all.' His meaning is simply that in that state of perfect glory, the administration of the kingdom will not be what it is now. The Father has given all authority to the Son so that through the Son's hand He might govern, care for, and sustain us, protect us under His care, and help us. So while we are for a time wandering away from God, Christ is the one who mediates between God and us, gradually drawing us to perfect union with God. His sitting at the Father's right hand means in effect that He is the Father's appointed representative, in whose hands all the power of His dominion is placed — for God's will is to rule and defend His church through His Son as the means. Paul explains it in Ephesians 1: He was seated at the Father's right hand to be the head of the church,

which is His body. The same meaning appears where Paul teaches that a name above every name was given to Him, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father. Even in those words he is describing an order in Christ's kingdom that fits the needs of our present weakness. Paul rightly concludes that God will then be by Himself the sole head of the church, because Christ's work of defending the church will be complete. For this same reason Scripture commonly calls Him Lord — because the Father placed Him over us for the purpose of exercising His own lordly power through Him. Though there are many lords in the world, yet for us there is one God the Father, from whom are all things and we in Him, and one Lord Christ, through whom are all things and we through Him, as Paul says. From this it is rightly concluded that He is the same God who, through Isaiah's mouth, declared Himself to be the King and Lawgiver of the church. Though He everywhere calls all the power He holds a gift and benefit of the Father, His meaning is simply that He reigns by the power of God — for He took on the person of the Mediator specifically to descend from the Father's embrace and incomprehensible glory and draw near to us. All the more reason, then, that we should be fully prepared to obey, and that we should direct our obedience to His command with great gladness. For just as He combines the offices of King and Shepherd toward those who willingly submit in obedience, so on the other side we hear that He wields an iron scepter to shatter and crush the stubborn like clay pots. We also hear that He will judge nations, cover the earth with the dead, and bring down everything that stands

against Him. Some evidence of this is visible even today, but the full demonstration will come at the last judgment — which may rightly be called the final act of His kingdom.

Concerning His priesthood, this much must be firmly held: its purpose and function is that He should be a Mediator — pure from all stain — who by His holiness reconciles us to God. But because a righteous curse stands in the way, and God in His role as judge is set against us, some form of atonement is necessary. As priest, He must secure God's favor and appease His wrath. Therefore, to fulfill this office, Christ had to come with a sacrifice. Under the law, the priest was not permitted to enter the sanctuary without blood — teaching the faithful that even though a priest stood as mediator to intercede for them, God could not be made favorable to them until their sins were purged. The apostle develops this at length in Hebrews, from the seventh chapter through nearly the end of the tenth. But the whole argument comes to this: the honor of priesthood belongs to Christ alone, who by the sacrifice of His death wiped away our guilt and paid the full penalty for our sins. How weighty this is we see from God's solemn oath, spoken without possibility of reversal: 'You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.' He was certainly establishing the central point — the one He knew to be the hinge on which our salvation turns. As has been said, there is no way open for us or for our prayers to come to God unless, our filth having been purged, the priest sanctifies us and obtains grace for us — the grace from which the uncleanness of our sins had barred us. We see, then, that we must begin with Christ's death for the power and benefit of His priesthood to reach us. From this it follows that He is an eternal intercessor, through whose mediation we find favor with God.

From this arises not only confidence in prayer, but also the peace of a godly conscience — resting securely on God's fatherly love and fully persuaded that whatever is offered to Him through the Mediator is acceptable. Under the law, God commanded animal sacrifices — but in Christ there was a new and different order: one person would be both the offering and the priest. No other satisfaction for sin could be found adequate, and no one else was worthy of the honor of offering God His only begotten Son. Christ holds the role of priest not only through the eternal work of reconciliation — making the Father favorable and merciful toward us — but also by bringing us into the fellowship of that same honor. Though we are defiled in ourselves, we are made priests in Him — offering ourselves and all we have to God, freely entering the heavenly sanctuary, so that all our prayers and praise may be acceptable and pleasing to God. This is the full reach of Christ's words: 'For their sake I sanctify Myself' — for having poured His holiness on us, and having offered us together with Himself to the Father, we who would otherwise be offensive to God are accepted before Him as pure and clean and holy. To this end also belongs the anointing of the sanctuary mentioned in Daniel. The contrast between that anointing and the shadowy anointing then in use should be noted — as if the angel were saying that when the shadows were removed, a true and clear priesthood would exist in the person of Christ. All the more detestable, then, is the invention of those who, not content with the sacrifice of Christ, have presumed to appoint themselves to offer Him repeatedly — which is exactly what happens among the papists, where the Mass is treated as a sacrificing of Christ.

CHAPTER 16: HOW CHRIST HAS FULFILLED THE OFFICE OF REDEEMER, TO PURCHASE SALVATION FOR US — WHEREIN IS TREATED OF HIS DEATH, AND RESURRECTION, AND HIS ASCENDING INTO HEAVEN



Everything we have said so far about Christ points toward this end: that since we are condemned, dead, and lost in ourselves, we must seek righteousness, deliverance, life, and salvation in Him — as Peter's memorable words teach us, that there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved. The name Jesus was not given Him carelessly or by accident or by human choice. It was brought from heaven by the angel as the announcer of God's decree, and the reason was stated: He was sent to save His people from their sins. In these words we should note what we mentioned elsewhere — the office of Redeemer was assigned to Him so that He would be our Savior. But our redemption would be incomplete unless He continually carried us forward to the final goal of salvation. Therefore, the mo-

ment we stray even slightly from Him, our salvation — which rests entirely in Him — begins to slip away. Those who do not rest in Him willfully rob themselves of all grace. Bernard's warning is worth repeating: the name of Jesus is not only light but also food, and also oil — without which all food for the soul is dry. It is salt, without which everything set before us is tasteless. It is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, and joy in the heart. It is medicine. And whatever is said in any discussion is without flavor unless this name sounds there. But here we must carefully examine how He purchased salvation for us — not merely so that we are persuaded He is its author, but so that, holding to what is sufficient to sustain our faith, we reject whatever might pull us away from it. Since no one can look seriously within himself without feeling that God is angry and set against him, he is driven to seek some means of appeasing God — which requires satisfaction. No ordinary assurance is adequate here, for God's wrath and curse always rest on sinners until they are freed from their guilt. As a righteous judge, He does not allow His law to be broken without punishment but stands ready to avenge it.

But before going further, we must consider how these two things fit together: that God, who showed us mercy first, was our enemy until He was reconciled to us through Christ. For how could He have given us His only begotten Son as a remarkable pledge of His love if He had not already embraced us with His free favor? Since an apparent contradiction arises here, I will first untangle it. Scripture commonly speaks this way: that God was the enemy of humanity until people were restored to favor by Christ's death; that they were under a curse until their iniquity was purged by His sacrifice; that they were separated from God until they were

brought into union through His body. Such language is used to help us grasp how miserable and wretched our condition is apart from Christ. If Scripture did not state in plain words that God's wrath and vengeance and everlasting death rested upon us, we would less fully recognize how wretched we would be without His mercy, and we would be less grateful for the blessing of deliverance. Consider this example: a man hears someone say to him, 'If God, at the time when you were still a sinner, had hated you and cast you away as you deserved, you would have suffered horrible destruction. But because He willingly and of His own kindness kept you in favor and would not let you be cut off from Him, He delivered you from that danger.' Hearing this, a man will be moved and will feel in part how much he owes to God's mercy. But suppose he hears instead what Scripture actually teaches — that he was estranged from God by sin, an heir of wrath, under the sentence of eternal death, excluded from all hope of salvation, a stranger to every blessing of God, a slave of Satan, captive under the yoke of sin, already entangled with and destined for horrible destruction; and that in this situation Christ became his intercessor, that Christ took on and bore the punishment which by God's righteous judgment hung over all sinners, that He purged with His blood the evils that made them hateful to God, that by this atonement full satisfaction and sacrifice was made to God the Father, that by this intercessor God's wrath was appeased, that peace between God and humanity rests on this foundation, and that God's good will toward them is secured by this bond — will he not be all the more moved, as the depth of the misery from which he has been rescued is more vividly shown to him? In short: because our minds cannot eagerly enough lay hold of life through God's mercy,

or receive it with the gratitude we owe, unless they are first struck and cast down by fear of God's wrath and dread of eternal death, Scripture teaches us this way. Without Christ we see God, in a manner of speaking, angrily turned against us, His hand raised to destroy us — and we find His goodwill and fatherly kindness nowhere but in Christ.

Although this is said in language suited to our limited understanding, it is not said falsely. For God, who is the highest righteousness, cannot love the wickedness He sees in all of us. Therefore we all carry within us what is worthy of God's hatred. Because of our corrupted nature, and the evil lives added to it, we truly stand under God's displeasure — guilty in His sight and born for condemnation. Yet because the Lord will not abandon what is His in us, He finds something He can still love in His goodness. For however much we are sinners by our own fault, we remain His creatures. However much we have brought death upon ourselves, He made us for life. So He is moved by pure and free love for us to receive us into favor. But because there is a permanent and irreconcilable conflict between righteousness and iniquity, He cannot fully receive us as long as we remain sinners. Therefore, to remove every obstacle to reconciliation, He takes away through the atonement accomplished in Christ's death whatever evil exists in us — so that we, who were before unclean and impure, may now appear righteous and holy in His sight. So God the Father's love comes first and precedes our reconciliation in Christ. Because He first loved us, He afterward reconciles us to Himself. But because until Christ comes to help us with His death, the wickedness that deserves God's wrath remains in us — wickedness that is cursed and condemned in His sight — we are not fully and firmly joined to

God until Christ joins us. Therefore, if we want to be assured that God is pleased and favorable toward us, we must fix our eyes and minds on Christ alone. It is through Him alone that our sins are not counted against us — for when sins are charged to us, God's wrath follows.

For this reason Paul says that the same love with which God embraced us before the creation of the world was grounded and established in Christ. These things are clear and consistent with Scripture, and they bring into harmony the passages where it is said that God showed His love toward us by giving His only begotten Son to death — and yet that He was our enemy until He was made favorable to us again by Christ's death. But to prove this more strongly from the testimony of the ancient church, I will cite one passage from Augustine, who teaches exactly what we teach. The love of God, he says, is incomprehensible and unchangeable. He did not begin to love us from the time we were reconciled to Him by His Son's blood. Before the creation of the world He loved us — even before we existed at all — so that we might be His children together with His only begotten Son. When we are reconciled by Christ's death, then, it must not be understood as though the Son reconciled us to Him so that He might now begin to love those whom He previously hated. Rather, we are reconciled to the One who already loved us — the One to whom we were enemies because of sin. As for whether what I say is true, let the apostle be the witness. He commends God's love toward us, Augustine says, in this: that when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He therefore already loved us, even when we were His enemies and were doing evil. Therefore after a marvelous and divine manner He loved us even while He hated us. He hated us because we had be-

come what He had not made us to be, and because our wickedness had everywhere marred His work. Yet He knew how to hate in each of us what we ourselves had made, while still loving what He Himself had made. These are Augustine's words.

When the question is asked how Christ removed our sins, resolved the conflict between us and God, and obtained a righteousness that makes God favorable and well-disposed toward us, the general answer is this: He accomplished it through the whole course of His obedience. Paul's testimony proves this: 'As by one man's offense many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience we are made righteous.' Elsewhere Paul extends the ground of the pardon that frees us from the law's curse to Christ's entire life, saying: 'When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.' Even at His baptism Christ fulfilled one part of righteousness by obediently carrying out His Father's command. In short, from the moment He took on the role of a servant, He began to pay the ransom to redeem us. Yet Scripture, in describing the manner of our salvation more precisely, assigns this work in a special and proper sense to Christ's death. He Himself declared that He gave His life as a ransom for many. Paul teaches that He died for our sins. John the Baptist cried out that Christ came to take away the sins of the world, for He was the Lamb of God. Elsewhere Paul says we are justified freely by the redemption that is in Christ, since God set Him forth as the one who makes atonement in His own blood. Again, that we are justified in His blood and reconciled by His death. Again: 'He who knew no sin was made sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' I will not list all the testimonies — the number would be endless, and many

of them must be cited in their proper place later. So in the summary of belief called the Apostles' Creed, the account passes directly from Christ's birth to His death and resurrection — for in these lie the substance of perfect salvation. Yet the rest of His obedience throughout His life is not excluded, as Paul makes clear when he summarizes the whole from beginning to end: 'He humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant, and was obedient to the Father even to death — yes, the death of the cross.' And even in that death, His willing submission comes first — for a sacrifice not freely offered would have contributed nothing toward righteousness. When the Lord testified that He laid down His life for His sheep, He expressly added: 'No one takes it from Me.' In keeping with this, Isaiah says He was silent like a lamb before its shearer. And the Gospel accounts record that He went forward to meet the soldiers, and before Pilate He offered no defense but stood still to submit to the judgment being pronounced on Him. This was not without an inward struggle — for He had taken our weaknesses on Himself, and His obedience to the Father was tested in this very way. And this was no small display of His incomparable love for us: to wrestle with terrible dread and in the midst of those cruel torments to set aside all concern for Himself so that He might provide for us. It must be believed that no sacrifice could have been properly offered to God except this: that Christ, setting aside all His own feelings, submitted and wholly yielded Himself to His Father's will. As proof of this, the apostle fittingly cites the psalm: 'In the scroll of the book it is written of Me — I come to do Your will, O God. I desire it, and Your law is within My heart. Then I said: Behold, I come.' But because troubled consciences find no rest except in sacrifice and the cleansing that washes away sins, we

are rightly directed there — in Christ's death the substance of life is appointed for us. Now since our own guilt meant a curse was due us before God's heavenly judgment seat, we are first told that He was condemned before Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea — so that we would know that the punishment we deserved was justly laid on Him. We could not escape the terrifying judgment of God — Christ, to deliver us from it, allowed Himself to be condemned before a mortal man, and a wicked and pagan man at that. The governor's name is included not merely to lend historical credibility but so that we would learn what Isaiah teaches: the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. To take away our condemnation, it was not sufficient for Him to die in just any manner — for our redemption to be satisfied, a specific kind of death had to be chosen, one in which He both drew our condemnation to Himself and took our guilt upon Himself, delivering us from both. If He had been killed by robbers or cut down in a mob uprising, such a death would have given no appearance of making satisfaction. But when He was brought to trial before a judgment seat, when He was accused and pressed with testimony against Him, and when the judge condemned Him to death by his official sentence — by these details we understand that He bore the role of a guilty person and a criminal. Two things are to be noted here, both foretold by the prophets and both bringing extraordinary comfort and strengthening to faith. When we hear that Christ was sent from the judgment seat to death and was crucified among criminals, we see the fulfillment of the prophecy the evangelist cites: 'He was counted among the wicked.' And why? To stand in the place of a sinner — not a righteous or innocent person — because He suffered death not on account of innocence but

on account of sin. On the other side, when we hear that He was acquitted by the very mouth that condemned Him — for Pilate was compelled more than once to publicly declare His innocence — let us recall what the other prophet says: that He repaid what He had not taken. So we see in Christ the figure of a sinner and criminal, and through the open testimony of His innocence it becomes plain that He was charged with others' offenses, not His own. He suffered therefore under Pontius Pilate and by the official sentence of the governor was reckoned among the wicked — yet in such a way that the same judge at the same time declared Him righteous, affirming that he found no grounds for condemnation in Him. This is our acquittal: the guilt that made us subject to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God. We must hold fast to this contrast above all things, so that we need not tremble and live in anxiety as though the just vengeance of God still hung over us — for the Son of God has taken it upon Himself.

Beyond this, the very manner of His death is not without profound significance. The cross was accursed not only in the opinion of men but by the decree of God's own law. Therefore when Christ was lifted up on the cross, He made Himself subject to that curse. This had to happen so that the curse might be transferred from us to Him, and we might be freed from every curse that our sins had prepared for us — or rather, that already rested upon us. This was also expressed in shadow through the law. The sacrifices and offerings made for sin were called by a word that means sin itself. By this figurative name, the Holy Spirit intended to show that they were like cleansing agents drawing to themselves and bearing the curse due to sin. But what was pictured in shadow through Moses's sacrifices was truly accomplished in Christ, the original reality be-

hind all those figures. Therefore Christ, to complete a perfect atonement, gave His own life as a sin offering — as the prophet calls it — on which our filth and punishment could be laid and so cease to be charged to us. The apostle states the same thing more plainly where he teaches that He who knew no sin was made sin for us by the Father, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. For the Son of God, completely clean from all fault, took upon Himself the shame and reproach of our iniquities, while on the other side He covered us with His purity. He seems to have the same meaning where he speaks of sin being condemned in His flesh — for the Father destroyed the power of sin when its curse was removed and laid on Christ's flesh. This statement therefore declares that Christ was offered to the Father in His death as a sacrificial atonement, so that with the full satisfaction for sin completed by His sacrifice, we might cease to dread God's wrath. Now it is clear what the prophet means when he says that the iniquities of us all were laid on Him — that is, intending to wipe away the filth of our sins, He was covered with them through a kind of exchange of imputation. The cross to which He was nailed was a sign of this, as the apostle testifies: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, Accursed is everyone who hangs on a tree — so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ.' Peter points to the same thing when he teaches that Christ bore our sins on the tree — for through the very sign of the curse we see more clearly that the burden that was pressing us down was laid on Him. Yet it must not be understood as though He was overcome by the curse He bore — rather, by taking it on Himself He crushed, broke, and destroyed its entire power. So faith grasps acquittal in Christ's condemna-

tion, and blessing in His being cursed. This is why Paul speaks honorably of the triumph Christ won on the cross — as though the cross, full of shame, had been turned into a chariot of triumph. He says that the record of debt that stood against us was nailed to the cross, and that the rulers and authorities were disarmed and publicly humiliated. No wonder — for as the other apostle testifies, Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit, and from this came that transformation of all things. But so that these truths may take deep root and be firmly settled in our hearts, let us always think about His sacrifice and cleansing. We could not truly believe that Christ was the ransom, redemption, and satisfaction unless He had been a sacrificial offering. This is why Scripture mentions blood so often when describing the manner of our redemption. Though the blood Christ shed served not only as sacrifice but also as washing — to cleanse away our filth.

The Creed continues: He was dead and buried. Here again we see how He placed Himself entirely in our position to pay the price of our redemption. Death held us under its dominion. Christ, in our place, yielded Himself into the power of death to free us from it. This is what the apostle means when he writes that He tasted death for all people. By dying He brought it about that we would not die — or to put it the same way, by His death He purchased life for us. But He differed from us in this: He gave Himself to death as though to be devoured — not to be swallowed by it, but rather to swallow it up, the death that would otherwise have swallowed us. He surrendered Himself to death to be overcome — not to be crushed by its power, but rather to overturn the death that was approaching us and had already beaten us down and triumphed over us. Finally, through death He destroyed the one who had the

power of death, that is the devil, and freed those who throughout their lives had been held in bondage by the fear of death. This is the first benefit His death brings us. Another is this: by sharing Himself with us, He puts to death our earthly members so that they no longer carry out their own works, and He kills our old self so that it no longer lives and bears fruit. His burial serves the same purpose: that we, as sharers in it, might be buried to sin. When the apostle teaches that we have been united with Christ in a death like His, buried with Him to die to sin, that the world has been crucified to us and we to the world through His cross, and that we have died together with Him — he is not merely urging us to follow Christ's example. He is declaring that there is a power in Christ's death that ought to be seen in all Christians, unless they are willing to make His death empty and fruitless. Therefore in Christ's death and burial a double benefit is offered to us: deliverance from the death under which we had become enslaved, and the putting to death of our flesh.

We must not pass over His descent into hell, which is of no small importance to the effect of redemption. Although the writings of the early fathers suggest that this article was not so commonly used in the churches in earlier times, it must have its place in treating the sum of our doctrine — for it contains a profitable and weighty mystery that must not be dismissed. Some of the ancient writers do include it. We may gather from this that it was added at some later point and came into common use in the churches only gradually. But it is beyond question that it reflects the shared judgment of all the godly, since there is not a single father who does not mention Christ's descent into hell in his writings, though they explain it in various ways. Who first added it and

when is not of much consequence. What matters in the Creed is that we have in it a full and complete summary of our faith, into which nothing may be introduced except what is drawn from the pure Word of God. Now even if someone for reasons of strict precision refuses to include it in the Creed, it will quickly become apparent that it is of such importance to the sum of our redemption that if it is omitted, a great part of the fruit of Christ's death is lost. Some think that this article says nothing new — that it merely repeats in different words what was already said about His burial, since the word for hell is often used in Scripture to mean the grave. I grant that what they say about the word's meaning is true — hell is often used for the grave. But two reasons easily persuade me to disagree with them. For what pointless redundancy it would be if, after something easy to understand has already been stated in plain and clear words, the same thing were then obscurely gestured at rather than declared. When two expressions covering the same ground are placed side by side, the second should be an explanation of the first. But what kind of explanation would it be to say: 'By Christ being buried, we are to understand that He descended into hell'? Moreover, it is not likely that such a needless repetition could have crept into a summary of the chief points of our faith, where everything was expressed in as few words as possible. I have no doubt that anyone who has thought carefully about the matter will readily agree with me.

Some interpret it differently, saying that Christ descended to the souls of the fathers who had died under the law, to bring them news that redemption had been accomplished and to deliver them from the prison where they were held. To support this they wrongly apply testimony from the psalm about Christ breaking

gates of bronze and bars of iron. They also cite Zechariah, that He released prisoners from the waterless pit. But since the psalm is speaking of those who are cast into captivity in distant lands, and Zechariah is comparing the Babylonian captivity that oppressed the people to a dry pit or bottomless depth — and is teaching that the salvation of the whole church is like coming up from the deepest depths — I cannot understand how later interpreters concluded that there was a specific underground place, which they named Limbus. This story, though defended by respected authorities and still earnestly upheld by many today as truth, is nothing but a fable. Enclosing the souls of the dead in a prison is a childish idea. And what need was there for Christ's soul to descend there to set them free? I do willingly grant that Christ shone upon them by the power of His Spirit, so that they might know that the grace they had only tasted in hope had now been delivered to the world. To this purpose Peter's passage may probably be applied, where he says that Christ came and preached to the spirits in prison, as it is commonly translated. The flow of the text itself leads us to this: the faithful who had died before that time shared in the same grace that we share — for Peter uses this to amplify the power of Christ's death, showing that it reached even to the dead. The godly souls experienced the present reality of the visitation they had eagerly awaited, while at the same time it became still more plain to the reprobate that they were excluded from all salvation. When Peter makes no distinction between the two groups in his statement, this does not mean he mixed the godly and ungodly together without distinction — he simply meant to teach that both groups shared a common experience of Christ's death.

Regarding Christ's descent into hell, beyond what the Creed states, we must seek a more reliable interpretation — and we have one from God's Word that is not only sound and devout but also full of extraordinary comfort. Christ's death would have accomplished nothing if He had suffered only a bodily death. He had to feel the full severity of God's vengeance — to appease God's wrath and satisfy His righteous judgment. For this reason He also had to wrestle hand to hand, so to speak, with the armies of hell and the horror of eternal death. We have already cited the prophet: the punishment that brought us peace was laid on Him; He was struck by the Father for our sins and crushed for our infirmities. This means He was placed in the position of sinners — as their guarantor, their substitute, indeed as the guilty party Himself — to bear and suffer all the punishments that should have fallen on them. The one exception is that He could not be held permanently by the agonies of death. It is therefore no wonder that He is said to have descended into hell, since He suffered the very death with which God in His wrath strikes the wicked. The objection raised against this interpretation is foolish — indeed, worthy of mockery — that the order would be reversed, since it would be absurd to place after His burial something that happened before it. For after describing what Christ suffered visibly before human eyes, it follows in perfectly good order to speak of the invisible and incomprehensible judgment He suffered before God — so that we may know that not only was Christ's body given as the price of our redemption, but that a greater and more excellent price was paid: in His soul He endured the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken person.

This is what Peter means when he says Christ rose again having loosed the agonies of death, of which it was impossible that He should be held. He does not simply say death — he specifies that the Son of God was wrapped in the agonies of death, which arise from God's curse and wrath, which are the source of death. For how small a thing it would have been to go cheerfully and without struggle to face death. But it was a true demonstration of His infinite mercy that He did not shrink from the very death He so greatly dreaded. No doubt the apostle means the same in the letter to the Hebrews, where he writes that Christ was heard out of His fear — some translate it reverence or piety, but both the matter itself and the very language show how poorly that fits. Christ, praying with tears and a loud cry, was heard out of His fear — not to be spared from death, but not to be swallowed up by death as a sinner would be, for He was bearing our condition. Truly, no more dreadful depth can be imagined than for a person to feel himself forsaken and cut off from God, to cry out and not be heard — as though God Himself had turned against him. There we see that Christ was brought so low that the force of His anguish compelled Him to cry: 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Some suggest He spoke these words according to others' perception rather than His own feeling — but this is entirely unlikely, since it is clear that the cry came from the very depths of His heart. Yet we do not mean that God was at any time His enemy or angry with Him. For how could He be angry with His beloved Son, in whom His soul delighted? And how could Christ appease the Father's wrath toward others if God were angrily turned against Christ Himself? Our meaning is this: that He suffered the full severity of God's rigor — being struck and tormented by the hand of God, He

experienced all the marks of God's anger and punishment. Therefore Hilary argues that through this descent we have gained this: that death is destroyed. In other places he agrees with our view, as when he says: 'The cross, death, and hell are our life.' And again: 'The Son of God is in hell, but man is carried up to heaven.' But why cite one writer when the apostle himself says the same thing, counting it among the fruits of Christ's victory that those who had been in bondage all their lives through fear of death were set free? It was necessary, then, that He overcome the fear that naturally and continually torments and oppresses all mortal people — and that could only be done by fighting it. Moreover, that His fear was no ordinary fear or one with a trivial cause will become even more apparent shortly. So by fighting hand to hand with the power of the devil, the horror of death, and the pains of hell, He both won the victory over them and triumphed over them — so that in death we need no longer fear the things our Prince has swallowed up.

Here certain wicked men — ignorant, but driven more by malice than by ignorance — cry out that I do a grave wrong to Christ, since it is unreasonable that He should have feared for His soul's salvation. They press their objection harder by saying that I ascribe despair to the Son of God, which is contrary to faith. But first, they are maliciously raising a controversy about Christ's fear and trembling that the evangelists plainly report. A little before the hour of His death, He was troubled in spirit and overwhelmed with grief, and when He met it face to face, He began to tremble more intensely. If they say He was only acting, that excuse is far too weak. As Ambrose rightly teaches, we must boldly acknowledge the grief of Christ — unless we are ashamed of His cross. If His soul had not

been a participant in pain, He would have been a redeemer for bodies only. But He had to wrestle, to raise up those who had been thrown down. His heavenly glory is not in the least diminished by this — rather, His goodness, which can never be praised enough, shines gloriously even here, in that He did not refuse to take our weaknesses upon Himself. From this comes the comfort in our anguish that the apostle sets before us: this Mediator felt our infirmities, and is therefore all the more earnestly moved to help us in our misery. They say that what is evil in itself is unfitting to attribute to Christ — as though they were wiser than the Spirit of God, who puts these two things together: that Christ was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. There is therefore no reason for Christ's weakness to trouble us, since He was not driven to it by force or necessity, but submitted to it out of pure love and mercy toward us. And whatever He willingly suffered for us diminishes nothing of His power. These critics are mistaken in one key respect: they fail to see that Christ's weakness was entirely clean and free from all fault, because He kept Himself within the bounds of obedience. In our corrupt nature there is no restraint — all our passions exceed all measure with troubling violence. It is wrong to measure the form of God by that standard. When man was in his uncorrupted state, all his passions were moderated and kept from excess. So Christ could be genuinely like us in sorrow, dread, and fear, and yet differ from us at this very point. Refuted on this ground, the critics leap to another objection: that though Christ feared death, He did not fear the curse and wrath of God, from which He knew Himself to be safe. But let godly readers consider how honorable this makes Christ — that He was more tender and fearful than most people of even the lowest sort. Criminals and

evildoers march stubbornly to death, many despise it with bold courage, others bear it calmly. But what kind of steadfast courage would it be for the Son of God to be astonished and all but overcome with fear of ordinary death? Even something that would be remarkable in a common person is reported of Him: that such was the intensity of His grief that drops of blood fell from His face. And He did not do this as a performance for others — it happened when He was alone in a secluded place, groaning to His Father. It is beyond all doubt that He needed angels to come down from heaven and comfort Him in an extraordinary way. What shameful weakness it would have been, as I said, to be so tormented by fear of common death as to sweat blood and be unable to be comforted without the sight of angels? Furthermore, does not the prayer repeated three times — 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me' — proceeding from an inconceivable bitterness of heart show that Christ faced a much crueler and harder battle than with ordinary death? From all this it is clear that the critics I am now addressing boldly speak about things they do not understand, for they have never seriously considered what it means — or how great a thing it is — for us to be redeemed from the judgment of God. Our wisdom is to understand well what a dear price the Son of God paid for our salvation. Now if someone asks me whether Christ descended into hell when He prayed to escape that death, I answer that this was its beginning — from which we may understand how grievous and terrible were the torments He endured, knowing He stood arraigned for our cause before God's judgment seat. Although for a moment the divine power of the Spirit concealed itself to make room for the weakness of the flesh, we must know that the temptation He felt through grief and fear was not such as to

destroy faith. And so was fulfilled what Peter says in his sermon: that He could not be held by the agonies of death — because even when He felt as if forsaken by God, He did not at all waver in trust in God's goodness. This is proved by His remarkable cry, when in the extremity of pain He called out: 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' For though He was in measureless grief, He does not stop calling God His God — the very God of whom He cries out that He has been forsaken. This also refutes both the error of Apollinaris and the error of those called the Monothelites. Apollinaris imagined that Christ had an eternal spirit in place of a soul, making Him only half a man — as though He could have cleansed our sins in any other way than by obeying His Father. But where is the will and disposition of obedience except in the soul? His soul was troubled for precisely this purpose: to drive away our fear and bring peace and quiet to our souls. As for the Monothelites, we see plainly how Christ, according to His human nature, willed something different from what He willed according to His divine nature. I will not elaborate on how He overcame the fear He spoke of with a contrary resolve — but it is plainly shown here. 'Father, save Me from this hour' — and then: 'But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.' Even in this conflict there was none of the disorder in Him that we see in ourselves, even at our most intense moments of self-discipline.

His resurrection from the dead follows next — without which everything covered so far would be incomplete. For since the cross, death, and burial of Christ reveal nothing but weakness, faith must reach beyond all of these to be fully strengthened. So although His death accomplished our salvation in full — by it we were reconciled to God, His righteous judgment was satisfied, the curse was re-

moved, and the penalty was fully paid — we are said to be reborn to a living hope not through His death but through His resurrection. As He rose as the conqueror of death, so the victory of our faith rests in the resurrection itself. Paul expresses this more clearly: Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification — as if to say, by His death sin was taken away, and by His resurrection righteousness was renewed and restored. For how could He, by dying, deliver us from death if He Himself had remained overcome by it? How could He have won the victory for us if He had been defeated in the fight? So we divide the substance of our salvation between Christ's death and resurrection: by His death sin was taken away and death was destroyed; by His resurrection righteousness was repaired and life was raised up again. Yet through His resurrection His death exerts its power and effect upon us. Therefore Paul affirms that in His very resurrection He was declared the Son of God — for it was then that He openly displayed His heavenly power, which is both a clear mirror of His divinity and a firm foundation for our faith. Elsewhere he teaches that Christ suffered through the weakness of the flesh and rose again by the power of the Spirit. In the same sense, in a passage treating perfection, he says: 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection' — and immediately adds fellowship with His death. With this Peter's statement fits very well: that God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that our faith and hope might be in God — not that our faith resting on His death would waver, but that God's power that keeps us in faith shows itself most plainly in the resurrection. Therefore let us remember: whenever His death alone is mentioned, what properly belongs to His resurrection is included as well. And when resurrection is men-

tioned separately without mention of His death, it carries with it what pertains specifically to His death. Now since by rising again He obtained the crown of conquest — bringing both resurrection and life — Paul is right to declare that faith is empty and the Gospel is vain if Christ's resurrection is not firmly fixed in our hearts. Therefore, after he had gloried in Christ's death against all threats of condemnation, he adds further: 'Indeed, the very one who died has also risen and now stands as our Mediator in the presence of God.' Furthermore, as we showed earlier that sharing in His cross produces the putting to death of our flesh, so His resurrection brings us a corresponding benefit. For as the apostle says, we were united in the likeness of His death so that, sharing in His resurrection, we might walk in newness of life. Elsewhere, just as Paul draws from the fact of our dying with Christ the argument that we must put to death our earthly members, so from our rising with Christ he concludes that we must seek the things above and not the things of the earth. By these words we are not merely urged to rise up and follow the example of Christ's resurrection in a new life — we are taught that it is by His power that we are regenerated into righteousness. We also receive a third benefit from His resurrection: we are assured, as by an earnest payment, of our own resurrection. His resurrection is the most certain proof of ours — a matter Paul argues at greater length in 1 Corinthians 15. This also should be noted: the text says He rose from the dead — by which is expressed the truth of both His death and His resurrection. It is as if to say that He died the same natural death that all people die, and received immortality in the same flesh He had taken on as mortal.

His ascension into heaven follows fittingly from the resurrection. Although Christ began to display His glory and power more fully when He rose — having laid aside the lowly and ignoble condition of mortal life and the shame of the cross — it was only through His ascension that He truly began His kingdom. The apostle shows this where he teaches that Christ ascended in order to fill all things — a statement that appears contradictory but actually describes a beautiful harmony: He departed from us in such a way that His presence would become more beneficial to us. While He lived on earth, He was confined within the humble shelter of the flesh. John, after recording that remarkable invitation — 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me' — immediately adds that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to the faithful because Jesus had not yet been glorified. The Lord Himself confirmed this to His disciples: 'It is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Holy Spirit will not come.' He gave them comfort for His bodily absence by promising that He would not leave them as orphans but would come to them again — invisibly, yet in a way far more to be desired. For they would then learn through greater experience that the authority He holds and the power He exercises are sufficient for the faithful — not only to live blessedly but to die happily. And indeed we see how much more abundantly He poured out His Spirit after that point, how much more royally He advanced His kingdom, and how much greater power He displayed both in helping His own and in overthrowing His enemies. Being taken up into heaven, He removed the bodily presence from our sight — not to cease being present with the faithful still wandering on earth, but to govern both heaven and earth with more immediate power. Indeed, the very promise He had made — that He would be with us

to the end of the age — He fulfilled through this ascension. As His body was lifted above all heavens, so His power and active working were poured out and spread beyond all the limits of heaven and earth. I prefer to express this in Augustine's words rather than my own. Christ, he says, was to go by death to the right hand of the Father, from where He is to come to judge the living and the dead — both in bodily presence, according to sound doctrine and the rule of faith. For in spiritual presence He was to be with them after His ascension. And elsewhere, more fully and plainly: According to an unspeakable and invisible grace, that is fulfilled which He had spoken: 'Behold, I am with you all the days, even to the end of the world.' But according to the flesh the Word took on, according to being born of the Virgin, being seized by the Jews, nailed to the cross, taken down from the cross, wrapped in linen cloths, laid in the tomb, and openly shown in His resurrection — this was fulfilled: 'You will not always have Me.' Why? Because He was with His disciples in bodily presence for forty days, and while they were together, seeing Him but not following Him, He ascended into heaven and is not here — for He sits there at the right hand of the Father. And yet He is here — for He has not departed in the presence of His majesty. So according to the presence of His majesty, we always have Christ; according to the presence of His flesh, it was truly said to His disciples: 'You will not always have Me.' For the church had Him in the flesh for a few days — but now she holds Him by faith and does not see Him with eyes.

It follows immediately: He sat down at the right hand of the Father. This is expressed by a figure of speech drawn from princes who have attendants beside them, to whom they entrust their authority to rule and govern in their place. So Christ — in whom the

Father will be exalted and reign by His hand — is said to have been received to sit at the Father's right hand. This means He was invested with dominion over heaven and earth, took formal possession of the authority committed to Him, and not only entered upon it but continues in it until He comes down to judgment. The apostle explains it this way: 'The Father seated Him at His right hand, above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come. He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things for the church.' Now you see the purpose of that sitting: that all creatures, both heavenly and earthly, might look with wonder at His majesty, be governed by His hand, behold His face, and be subject to His power. When the apostles so frequently repeat this, they mean nothing other than to teach that all things are placed under His will. Those who think only blessedness is meant by it are mistaken. It does not matter that in Acts, Stephen testifies that he saw Christ standing — for we are not speaking here of the posture of His body, but of the majesty of His dominion. To sit means nothing other than to be the supreme Judge in the heavenly court.

From this, faith gathers many benefits. First, it learns that the Lord through His ascension has opened the entrance to the heavenly kingdom, which had previously been shut by Adam. When He entered it in our flesh and in our name, what the apostle says follows: that we already sit in heaven with Him in a certain manner. For we do not look toward heaven with bare hope alone — we already possess it in our head. Second, faith perceives that He sits with the Father for our great benefit. He has entered into a sanctuary not made with hands and appears continually before the Father as our advocate and intercessor. He turns the Father's eyes

toward His own righteousness so that they are turned away from our sins. He so reconciles the Father's mind toward us that through His intercession He prepares a way and access for us to His throne, filling it with grace and mercy — which would otherwise be full of terror to wretched sinners. Third, faith grasps His power — in which our strength, might, wealth, and triumph over hell consist. For ascending on high He led captivity captive, plundered His enemies, and enriched His people — continually filling them with an abundance of spiritual riches. He sits on high so that from there, pouring out His power to us, He may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by His Spirit, and adorn His church with the varied gifts of His grace. He preserves it safely by His protection, restrains with the strength of His hand the raging enemies of His cross and our salvation, and holds all power in heaven and earth — until He has overthrown all His enemies, who are also our enemies, and brought His church to its complete fullness. This is the true nature of His kingdom: this is the power the Father has given Him, until He brings the final act to completion when He comes to judge the living and the dead.

Christ does show His people clear signs of His power present among them. But because under the lowliness of the flesh His kingdom lies hidden in the world, faith is rightly directed to think upon the visible presence He will openly display on the last day. For He will descend in visible form from heaven, just as He was seen ascending — and He will appear to all people with unspeakable majesty, with the blazing splendor of immortality, with the infinite power of the Godhead, and with an escort of angels. We are therefore told to look for Him to come as our Redeemer on that day, when He will separate the sheep from the goats, the chosen

from the forsaken — and none, whether living or dead, will escape His judgment. For from the farthest corners of the earth the sound of the trumpet will be heard, calling all to His judgment seat — both those who will be found alive on that day and those whom death will have already taken from among the living. Some interpret the words 'living and dead' in this place differently, and we see that some of the ancient writers were uncertain about how to understand this part of the Creed. But as the straightforward meaning is plain and easy to grasp, it also fits better with the Creed, which was clearly written with ordinary people in mind. And this does not conflict with what the apostle affirms — that it is appointed for all people to die once. For although those who remain in mortal life at the last judgment will not die in the natural and ordinary way, the transformation they will undergo will be like death, and it is not improperly called death. It is certain that not all will sleep, but all will be changed — meaning that in a single moment their mortal life will perish, be swallowed up, and be utterly transformed into a new nature. No one can deny that this passing of the flesh is a death — and yet it remains true that the living and the dead will be summoned to judgment, because the dead in Christ will rise first, and then those who remain and believe will suddenly be caught up with them in the air to meet the Lord. It is likely that this article was drawn from the sermon of Peter that Luke records, and from Paul's solemn declaration to Timothy.

From this comes extraordinary comfort: the one who is judge is the very one who has already appointed us as partners with Him in judgment. He will not mount the judgment seat to condemn us. For how could the most merciful King destroy His own people?

How could the head scatter His own members? How could the advocate condemn His own clients? If the apostle dares to declare that while Christ intercedes for us no one can come forward to condemn us, it is all the more true that Christ Himself — being our intercessor — will not condemn those He has received into His care and protection. It is no small assurance that we will stand before no other judge than our own Redeemer, from whom our salvation is to be expected — and that the very one who now promises eternal blessedness through the Gospel will then fulfill that promise from the judgment seat. For this reason the Father has honored the Son by giving Him all judgment — thereby providing for the consciences of His people, who might otherwise tremble with fear before the judgment. Up to this point I have followed the order of the Apostles' Creed, because it briefly contains in a few words the chief articles of our redemption and serves as a kind of summary by which we can clearly and separately see all that is worthy of attention in Christ. I call it the Apostles' Creed without being overly concerned about its authorship. By long-standing agreement among the ancient writers it has been attributed to the apostles — either because they believed it was composed through their joint effort, or because they judged that this summary, faithfully drawn from the apostolic teaching, deserved to carry their name. I have no doubt that wherever it originated, it was used from the earliest days of the church, from the very time of the apostles, as a public confession received by common consent. It is likely that it was not privately composed by any one person, since it is clear from the earliest times it has always held sacred authority and weight among the faithful. What matters most, however, is beyond all dispute: the whole story of our faith is briefly and clearly set out in it

in orderly sequence, and everything it contains is confirmed by sound testimonies of Scripture. Given this, there is no reason to speculate curiously about its author or to argue with anyone about who wrote it — unless someone is not satisfied by the assurance of the Holy Spirit but must also know from whose mouth it was spoken or by whose hand it was written.

Since we see that the entire sum of our salvation and all its parts are found in Christ, we must take care not to draw away from Him even the smallest part. If we seek salvation, the very name of Jesus teaches us it is in Him. If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they are to be found in His anointing. If we seek strength, it is in His dominion. If we seek purity, it is in His conception. If we seek tender compassion, it is shown in His birth — by which He was made like us in all things so that He might learn to suffer with us. If we seek redemption, it is in His suffering. If we seek acquittal, it is in His condemnation. If we seek release from the curse, it is in His cross. If we seek satisfaction, it is in His sacrifice. If we seek cleansing, it is in His blood. If we seek reconciliation, it is in His descent into the depths. If we seek the putting to death of the flesh, it is in His burial. If we seek new life, it is in His resurrection. If we seek immortality, it is likewise there. If we seek the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom, it is in His ascension into heaven. If we seek protection, security, and an abundance of every good thing, it is in His kingdom. If we seek confident readiness to face judgment, it is in the power given to Him to judge. In short, since the fullness of all good things is in Him, let us draw from that source and nowhere else, until we are filled. Those who are not content with Him alone but scatter themselves to various other hopes — even if they give Christ the chief place — have gone astray

in this, that they turn any part of their attention elsewhere. Yet such distrust cannot creep in once the abundance of His good gifts has been truly known.

THE .XVII. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT IT IS
TRUELY AND PROPERLY SAYDE, THAT
CHRIST HATH DESERUED GODS FAU-
OUR AND SALUATION FOR VS.



This question also requires resolution as a further matter. There are some clever men who, though they confess that we obtain salvation through Christ, cannot tolerate the word merit, thinking it obscures the grace of God. They therefore want to make Christ only an instrument or servant, not the author, guide, and Prince of life, as Peter calls Him. I grant that if a person were to set Christ simply and by Himself against the judgment of God, there would be no room for merit — for no worthiness can be found in man that could deserve God's favor. But, as Augustine most truly writes, the clearest example of predestination and grace is our Savior Himself, the man Christ Jesus, who obtained this position in human nature — without any prior deserving through works or faith. Let someone answer me: by what merit did that man deserve to be assumed by the Word coeternal with the Father into one person and so become the only begotten Son of God? Therefore let the very fountain of grace appear in our head, from which it flows out according to the measure of each one into all His

members. By that grace every person from the beginning of their faith is made a Christian, just as by that same grace that man from His beginning was made Christ. Elsewhere Augustine writes: there is no clearer example of predestination than the Mediator Himself. For He who, without any prior deserving of the will, made of the seed of David a man who would never be unrighteous — that same one makes the unrighteous members of that head into righteous people, and so on. So when we speak of Christ's merit, we are not saying that merit originates in Him — we trace it back to God's decree, which is its primary cause. For God of His own pure goodwill appointed Him as Mediator to obtain salvation for us. Therefore the merit of Christ is not rightly set in opposition to the mercy of God. It is a general principle that things ordered one under another do not conflict. Therefore it can stand together perfectly well that our justification is free through the sheer mercy of God, and that the merit of Christ also enters in — since Christ's merit is contained within the mercy of God. It is our works that are rightly and directly opposed by both the free favor of God and the obedience of Christ, each in its own place. For Christ could not have merited anything apart from God's good pleasure — and only because He was appointed for this very purpose: to appease God's wrath with His sacrifice and to remove our offenses with His obedience. In short: since Christ's merit rests entirely on the grace of God, who appointed this means of salvation for us, Christ's merit and God's grace are equally and rightly set against all human works.

This distinction is drawn from many passages of Scripture. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish.' We see how the love of God holds the first place as the supreme cause and origin, and then

faith in Christ follows as the second, nearer cause. If someone objects that Christ is merely the formal cause, he diminishes His power more than the words can bear. For if we obtain righteousness through faith resting on Him, then the substance of our salvation is to be found in Him — which many passages plainly confirm. 'Not that we first loved Him, but He first loved us, and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.' These words clearly show that God, so that nothing would hinder His love toward us, appointed us a means of reconciliation in Christ. The word atoning sacrifice carries great weight — for in a certain unspeakable manner, God, even at the time He loved us, was also angry with us until He was reconciled in Christ. All these statements serve the same purpose: 'He is the propitiation for our sins.' Again: 'It pleased God through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, making peace through the blood of His cross.' Again: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's sins against them.' Again: 'He accepted us in His beloved Son.' Again: 'That He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross.' The reason for this mystery is found in Ephesians 1, where Paul, after teaching that we were chosen in Christ, adds that we have found favor in Him. How did God begin to embrace with His favor those whom He had loved before the foundation of the world, except by declaring that love when He was reconciled through Christ's blood? Since God is the fountain of all righteousness, a person who is a sinner must necessarily have God as his enemy and judge. Therefore the beginning of His love is righteousness — such as Paul describes: 'He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' For Paul means that we have obtained free righteousness through Christ's

sacrifice, so that we who are by nature children of wrath and have been estranged from God by sin might be pleasing to Him. This distinction is also implied every time the grace of Christ is joined with the love of God. From this it follows that He gives us from His own what He has purchased — for otherwise the praise given Him separately from the Father, that this grace is His and comes from Him, would not be fitting.

But many passages of Scripture truly and perfectly show that Christ has purchased God's favor and salvation for us through His obedience. I take this as established: if Christ has satisfied for our sins, if He has suffered the punishment owed to us, if by His obedience He has appeased God, and if as a righteous man He has suffered for the unrighteous, then salvation has been purchased for us by His righteousness -- which amounts to saying He has earned it. As Paul witnesses, we are reconciled and have received reconciliation through His death. But reconciliation has no place unless there was first an offense. The meaning, then, is this: God, to whom we were hateful because of sin, is appeased by the death of His Son, so that He might be favorable to us. The contrast that follows shortly after deserves careful attention: "As by one man's transgression many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of one man many are made righteous" (Romans 5:11; Romans 5:19). The meaning is this: just as by Adam's sin we were alienated from God and destined for destruction, so by Christ's obedience we are received into favor as righteous. The future tense of the verb does not exclude present righteousness, as the context shows. Paul had said just before that the free gift from many sins led to justification.

When we say that grace is purchased for us by the merit of Christ, we mean that we are cleansed by His blood and that His death was a satisfaction for our sins. "His blood cleanses us from sin" (1 John 1:5; Luke 22:20). "This blood is shed for the forgiveness of sin." If the effect of His shed blood is that sins are no longer counted against us, it follows that by this price God's judgment is satisfied. John the Baptist's statement serves this point: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He sets Christ against all the sacrifices of the law to teach that only in Him was fulfilled what those figures represented. We know what Moses repeatedly says: that wrongdoing will be cleansed, sin put away, and forgiven. In short, the old figures teach us very well about the power and effect of Christ's death. The apostle sets this out very well in the epistle to the Hebrews, taking as his principle that forgiveness is not accomplished without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). From this he concludes that Christ appeared once and for all through His sacrifice to abolish sin. Again: that He was offered up to take away the sins of many. He had said before that not by the blood of goats or calves, but by His own blood, He entered into the holy place once, obtaining eternal redemption. Now when he reasons like this -- if the blood of an animal sanctifies for outward cleanliness, how much more do Christ's blood cleanse consciences from dead works -- it is clear that Christ's grace is greatly diminished unless we grant His sacrifice the power of cleansing, appeasing, and satisfying. A little later he adds: "This is the Mediator of the new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance, by means of His death for the redemption of sins that remained under the law." But it is especially important to weigh the connection

Paul describes: that He became a curse for us, etc. (Galatians 3:13). It would be pointless -- indeed absurd -- for Christ to be charged with the curse unless His purpose was to pay what others owed and so purchase righteousness for them. Isaiah's testimony is also clear: the punishment that brought us peace was laid on Christ, and by His wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). If Christ had not satisfied for our sins, it could not have been said that He appeased God by taking upon Himself the punishment to which we were subject. What follows in the same passage agrees with this: "For the sin of My people I have struck Him." Let us also cite Peter's interpretation, which removes all doubt: "He bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:23). He says that the burden of condemnation from which we were delivered was laid upon Christ.

The apostles plainly declare that He paid the ransom price to redeem us from the guilt of death. "Being justified by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by faith in His blood." Paul commends the grace of God in that He provided the price of redemption in Christ's death. Then he tells us to take refuge in His blood, so that having obtained righteousness, we may stand boldly before God's judgment. Peter's statement serves the same purpose: that we are redeemed not with gold and silver, but with the precious blood of the spotless Lamb. The comparison would not hold together unless satisfaction for sins had been made through that price. This is why Paul says that we were bought at a great cost. His other statement would also not stand: "There is one Mediator who gave Himself as a ransom" -- unless the penalty we deserved had been placed on Him. Therefore, the same apostle defines redemption through the blood of Christ as the forgiveness of sins. It is as if he said that we

are justified, or acquitted, before God because that blood serves as satisfaction for us. This also agrees with the other passage: the written record that stood against us was cancelled at the cross. This refers to the payment or compensation that acquits us from guilt. Paul's words are also very significant: "If we are justified by the works of the law, then Christ died for nothing." From this we gather that we must get from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it -- or to say the same thing differently: we obtain through the grace of Christ what God promised to our works in the law when He said, "The one who does these things shall live by them." He confirms this no less plainly in his sermon at Antioch, declaring that by believing in Christ we are justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. If keeping the law is righteousness, who can deny that Christ earned favor for us when He took that burden upon Himself and reconciled us to God as if we ourselves had kept the law? His statement to the Galatians serves the same purpose: "God sent His Son, subject to the law, so that He might redeem those who were under the law." What was the point of His submission, if not to purchase righteousness for us by taking upon Himself the obligation we were unable to fulfill? This is where the imputation of righteousness without works, of which Paul speaks, comes from. The righteousness credited to us is the righteousness found in Christ alone. And truly, Christ's flesh is called our food for no other reason than that we find in Him the substance of life. That power comes from nothing else but the fact that the Son of God was crucified as the price of our righteousness. As Paul says: He gave Himself up as a fragrant sacrifice. And in another place: "He died for our sins and was raised for our justification." From this we conclude that not

only is salvation given to us through Christ, but for His sake the Father is now favorable to us. There is no doubt that what God said figuratively through Isaiah is perfectly fulfilled in Christ: "I will do it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake." The apostle is a reliable witness of this when he says: "Your sins are forgiven for His name's sake." Although the name of Christ is not stated, John uses the pronoun "He" to refer to Christ, following his usual style. In the same sense, the Lord declares: "As I live because of My Father, so you will also live because of Me." Paul's statement agrees: "It has been granted to you for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him."

But to ask whether Christ earned anything for Himself, as Lombard and other scholars do, is foolish curiosity. And their claim that He did is a reckless conclusion. Why would the Son of God have needed to come down to acquire something new for Himself? The Lord, by declaring His own purpose, puts the matter beyond doubt. Scripture does not say that the Father provided for the Son's benefit through His merits. Instead, it says that He delivered Him to death and did not spare Him because He loved the world. The prophet's manner of speaking is worth noting: "A child is born to us." Again: "Rejoice, daughter of Zion! Behold, your king comes to you." Also, Paul's demonstration of love would be very weak if Christ suffered death for His enemies only for His own benefit. We gather from this that Christ had no regard for Himself. He explicitly confirms this when He says: "I sanctify Myself for them." The one who gives away the fruit of His holiness to others testifies that He earns nothing for Himself. And this is truly worth noting: Christ, in order to give Himself completely to save us, in a certain sense forgot Himself. But they wrongly apply Paul's testi-

mony to this question: "Therefore God has exalted Him and given Him a name above every name," etc. By what merits could a man obtain the right to be judge of the world, head of the angels, and to enjoy the supreme rule of God -- so that the majesty resting in Him is beyond what all the powers of humans and angels combined could reach? But the solution is easy and plain: Paul is not discussing the cause of Christ's exaltation but simply showing what followed from it, as an example for us. The same is meant by the saying found elsewhere: that Christ had to suffer, and in this way enter into the glory of His Father.

CHAPTER 1: THAT THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE SPOKEN OF CHRIST DO PROFIT US BY THE SECRET WORKING OF THE HOLY GHOST



Now we must see how the good things the Father has given to His only begotten Son — not for His own private use, but to enrich those who were without them and in need — actually come to us. First, this must be understood: as long as Christ remains outside of us and we are separated from Him, whatever He suffered or did for the salvation of humanity is of no profit and does no good for us. Therefore, so that He may share with us what He has received from the Father, it is necessary that He become ours and dwell in us. For this reason He is called our head and the firstborn among many brothers — and conversely, it is said that we are grafted into Him and have put Him on. For as I have said before, everything He possesses belongs nothing to us until we are joined with Him into one. But although this is obtained through faith, we see that not all people equally embrace this sharing in Christ that is offered through the Gospel. Reason therefore directs us to look further — to inquire into the secret effective working of the Spirit, by which it is brought about that we enjoy Christ and all

His good things. I have treated elsewhere of the eternal divinity and essence of the Spirit. For now, let us be content with this one point: that Christ came in water and blood so that the Spirit might testify of Him — so that the salvation He purchased would not slip away from us. For just as there are three witnesses in heaven — the Father, the Word, and the Spirit — so also there are three on earth: water, blood, and the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is not without reason repeated twice — we feel it engraved in our hearts as a seal. By this it seals to us the washing and sacrifice of Christ. In the same sense Peter says that the faithful are chosen through the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ — telling us that so that the shedding of that holy blood would not be wasted, our souls are cleansed by it through the Spirit's secret inner work. Accordingly, Paul, speaking of cleansing and justification, says we are made partakers of both in the name of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. The sum of it is this: the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectively joins us to Himself. Everything we taught in the previous book about His anointing serves as proof of this.

But since this is a matter especially worth knowing, it must be made more clearly evident. We must keep in mind that Christ came equipped with the Holy Spirit in a particular and unique way — so that He might separate us from the world and gather us together into the hope of an eternal inheritance. For this reason the Spirit is called the Spirit of sanctification — because He does not merely enliven and sustain us with the general power that appears in all of humanity and every living creature, but is in us the root and seed of heavenly life. Therefore the prophets commend the kingdom of Christ above all by this mark of distinction: that a

more abundant outpouring of the Spirit would flourish in that day. Outstanding among all is Joel's passage: 'In those days I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh' (Joel 2:28). Though the prophet seems to limit the Spirit's gifts to the office of prophecy, he means figuratively that God by the illumination of His Spirit will make students of those who were previously untaught and empty of all heavenly understanding. Now since God the Father gives us His Holy Spirit for His Son's sake — and yet has left the whole fullness of the Spirit with Christ so that He might be the agent and distributor of His generosity — the Spirit is sometimes called the Spirit of the Father and sometimes the Spirit of the Son. Paul says: 'You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.' And from this he builds our hope of complete renewal — that He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in us. It is no contradiction that the praise for God's gifts is attributed to the Father, who is their author, and yet also attributed to Christ, with whom the gifts of the Spirit are entrusted so that He may give them to those who are His. He therefore calls all who are thirsty to come to Him and drink. Paul teaches that the Spirit is distributed to each one according to the measure of Christ's gift. It should be known that He is called the Spirit of Christ not only because the eternal Word of God shares the same Spirit with the Father, but also according to His role as Mediator — for without that power He would have come to us in vain. In this sense He is called the second Adam, given from heaven to be a life-giving Spirit — by which Paul compares the unique life that the Son of God breathes into those who are His, setting them apart with Him, with the natural life that is

common even to the reprobate. Likewise, when Paul wishes the faithful the grace of Christ and the love of God, he adds to it the fellowship of the Spirit — without which no one can taste either the Father's favor or the generosity of Christ. As he also says elsewhere: 'The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.'

Here it will be helpful to note the titles Scripture assigns to the Holy Spirit when discussing the beginning and full restoration of our salvation. First, He is called the Spirit of adoption — because He is a witness to us of God's free goodwill, by which God the Father has embraced us in His beloved only begotten Son so that He might be a Father to us. The Spirit encourages us to pray boldly and supplies us with the words to cry without fear: 'Abba, Father.' For the same reason He is called the earnest pledge and seal of our inheritance — because He so breathes heavenly life into us as we wander in this world, deadened, that we may be assured our souls are safely kept in God's care. For this reason He is also called life, because of righteousness. Since by His secret inner work He makes us fruitful to bring forth the buds of righteousness, He is often called water — as in Isaiah: 'All you who are thirsty, come to the waters.' And again: 'I will pour out My Spirit on the thirsty, and streams on the dry ground' — which agrees with Christ's words just cited: 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me.' Though sometimes He is called water because of His power to purge and cleanse — as in Ezekiel, where the Lord promises clean water with which He will wash His people from their filth. Since He restores and nourishes into living freshness those on whom He has poured the flow of His grace, He is therefore also called oil and anointing. Again, because He continually burns up and consumes the vices of

our desires, setting our hearts ablaze with love for God and zeal for godliness, He is fittingly called fire. Finally, He is described as a fountain from which all heavenly riches flow to us — or as the hand of God by which God exercises His power — because through the breath of His power He so breathes divine life into us that we are no longer moved by ourselves but governed by His impulse and movement. So whatever good things are in us are fruits of His grace. Without Him, our own nature produces only darkness of mind and corruption of heart. This point is made plainly enough: until our minds are directed to the Holy Spirit, Christ lies in a manner idle — because we view Him coldly as one outside of us, indeed far away from us. We know that He benefits only those of whom He is the head and firstborn, those who have put Him on. Only this union makes it so that, as far as we are concerned, He has come with the name Savior not in vain. As proof of this serves that sacred union by which we are made flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones — indeed, one with Him. But it is by the Spirit alone that He joins Himself to us. By the grace and power of that same Spirit we are made His members, so that He holds us under Him and we in turn possess Him.

Since faith is the Spirit's principal work, most of what we find said about His power and operation is referred to faith — for He brings us into the light of the Gospel through faith alone. As John the Baptist teaches, the privilege of being children of God — born not of flesh and blood but of God — is given to those who believe in Christ. Setting God against flesh and blood, he affirms that it is a supernatural gift to receive Christ by faith, for people would otherwise remain captive to their own unbelief. Similar is Christ's answer: 'Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father

who is in heaven.' I touch on these things briefly here since I have already treated them at length. Similar also is Paul's statement that the Ephesians were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit — showing that the Spirit is the inner teacher by whose working the promise of salvation penetrates our minds, which otherwise would remain merely words in the air or to the ear. Likewise, when Paul says the Thessalonians were chosen by God through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth — by joining these two things together he briefly points out that faith itself comes from the Holy Spirit alone. John states this more plainly: 'We know that He abides in us by the Spirit He has given us.' And again: 'By this we know that we dwell in Him and He in us — because He has given us of His Spirit.' Therefore Christ promised His disciples the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, so that they might be able to receive heavenly wisdom. He assigned to the same Spirit this specific task: to remind them of all He had taught them by mouth. For the light would show itself to the blind in vain unless the same Spirit of understanding opened the eyes of their minds. So one may rightly call the Holy Spirit the key by which the treasures of the heavenly kingdom are opened to us, and call His illuminating work the eyesight of our minds. This is why Paul so highly commends the ministry of the Spirit — because teachers would shout without effect unless Christ Himself, as the inner teacher, drew to Himself by His Spirit those given to Him by the Father. Therefore, as we have said, perfect salvation is found in the person of Christ. So that we might become partakers of it, He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and fire, illuminating us to faith in His Gospel, thus re-

generating us so that we become new creatures — and purging us from every unclean defilement, He consecrates us as holy temples to God.

CHAPTER 2: OF FAITH, WHEREIN BOTH IS SET THE DEFINITION OF IT, AND THE PROPERTIES THAT IT HAS ARE DECLARED



All of this will be easy to understand once a clear definition of faith is provided so that readers may know its nature and power. But first it is fitting to recall what has already been said: that since God prescribes by His law what we must do, if we fail in any point of it, the terrible judgment of eternal death He has pronounced remains upon us. Second, since fulfilling the law is not only difficult but entirely beyond our strength and ability — if we look only at ourselves and consider what our deeds truly deserve — no hope remains, and we are cast away from God under eternal destruction. Third, it has been shown that there is only one means of rescue from so wretched a disaster: Christ the Redeemer appears, through whose hand it pleased the heavenly Father, in His infinite goodness and mercy, to help us — so that we might embrace this mercy with genuine faith and rest upon it with steadfast hope. Now we must carefully consider what kind of faith this must be — by which all whom God has adopted as His children take possession of the heavenly kingdom — since it is certain that not every

opinion or persuasion is sufficient to accomplish so great a thing. We must search out the true nature of faith all the more diligently, because the error of many people in this area is so harmful today. A large part of the world, on hearing the word faith, conceives of nothing higher than a general agreement with the Gospel history. Indeed when the schools debate faith, by simply naming God as the object of faith, they do nothing but — as we said elsewhere — draw miserable souls away from the right path by empty speculation, rather than directing them to the true goal. For since God dwells in unapproachable light, Christ must necessarily serve as the mediator between us and that light. For this reason Christ calls Himself the light of the world, and in another place the way, the truth, and the life — for no one comes to the Father, who is the fountain of life, except through Him. He alone knows the Father and reveals Him to the faithful to whom He is pleased to disclose Him. Accordingly, Paul says he determines to know nothing worthy of the name but Christ. In Acts 20 he says he preached faith in Christ. Elsewhere he records Christ speaking: 'I will send you to the Gentiles, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' And Paul testifies that the glory of God is visible to us in Christ's person — or, which amounts to the same thing, that the light of the knowledge of God's glory shines in His face. It is true that faith looks to God alone — but this must be added: it acknowledges the one God sent, even Jesus Christ. For God Himself would have remained hidden and distant from us had not the brightness of Christ cast His beams upon us. For this purpose the Father left all that He had with His only begotten Son — to express the true image of His glory by sharing His blessings with Him. Just as we must be drawn

by the Spirit to seek Christ, so again we must be reminded that the invisible Father is to be sought nowhere but in this image. Augustine speaks excellently on this, when, dealing with the goal of faith, he says we must know where we are going and by what way. He then concludes that the safest path through all errors is the one who is both God and man. For God is the one we go to, and man is the one by whom we go — and both are found nowhere but in Christ. When Paul speaks of faith in God, he does not mean to overturn what he so often says about faith resting entirely on Christ. And Peter most fittingly unites both, saying that through Christ we believe in God.

This error — like countless others — must be laid at the door of the scholastic theologians, who have drawn a veil before Christ, concealing Him. Unless we are directed straight to Him, we will always wander through many uncertain paths. Beyond obscuring and effectively destroying the whole power of faith with their confusing definitions, they have invented the device of implicit faith — a term with which they adorn their very gross ignorance and greatly deceive simple people. To state it plainly as it really is: this device does not merely bury but utterly destroys genuine faith. Is this believing — to understand nothing, while submissively deferring your judgment to the church? Faith does not rest on ignorance but on knowledge — and not only knowledge of God, but of God's will. We do not obtain salvation by being willing to accept whatever the church appoints, or by handing over the entire task of inquiry and knowing to the church. We obtain it by acknowledging that God is a merciful Father to us through the reconciliation made by Christ, and that Christ has been given to us as our righteousness, sanctification, and life. By this knowledge — not by de-

ferring our judgment — we enter the kingdom of heaven. When the apostle says that with the heart we believe unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, he shows that it is not enough for a person to implicitly believe what he neither understands nor seeks to learn. He requires an explicit acknowledgment of God's goodness — and in that acknowledgment our righteousness consists.

I do not deny — given the ignorance that surrounds us — that many things are now and will continue to be wrapped in mystery until, having laid down the burden of the flesh, we draw nearer to God's presence. In those very things that remain hidden, nothing is more fitting than to suspend our judgment and hold our minds to the settled purpose of maintaining unity with the church. But it is a great absurdity to take that ignorance tempered with humility and call it faith. For faith rests on knowledge of God and of Christ, not on deference to the church. We see what a maze these teachers have constructed with their doctrine of implicit faith — anything at all, whatever it may be, is eagerly swallowed by the ignorant as an oracle, so long as it is presented under the church's name, including sometimes the most monstrous errors. This reckless credulity, which is a sure road to ruin, is excused by them on the grounds that it assents to nothing definitively, but only on the condition that the church's faith is what it claims to be. In this way they pretend that truth is held within error, light within blindness, and true knowledge within ignorance. Rather than spend time refuting them at length, I simply invite readers to compare their teaching with ours — the very plainness of the truth will supply its own refutation. For the question is not whether faith still contains many remnants of ignorance. Their definitive claim is that those

who stand in ignorance — even flattering themselves in it — believe rightly, provided they defer to the authority and judgment of the church on things they do not understand. This is as though Scripture did not everywhere teach that knowledge accompanies faith.

We do grant that as long as we are away from our true home in this world, our faith is not fully developed — not only because many things are still hidden from us, but also because we are surrounded by so many mists of error that we do not grasp everything. The highest wisdom even of the most mature believer is to keep learning and moving forward with a teachable spirit. Therefore Paul urges the faithful that if they differ on any point, they should wait for further revelation. And experience teaches that until we are freed from the flesh, we know less than we would wish. Daily reading brings us face to face with many obscure passages that remind us of our ignorance. With this restraint God keeps us in humility — assigning a measure of faith to each person so that even the best teacher remains ready to learn. Notable examples of this incomplete faith can be seen in Christ's disciples before they were fully enlightened. We see how they barely grasped the most basic instruction, how they stumbled over the smallest points, and how even while hanging on every word of their teacher they made little progress — even when they ran to the tomb at the women's report, their master's resurrection was like a dream to them. Yet since Christ had already testified to their faith, we cannot say they had none at all. If they had not been persuaded that Christ would rise again, all concern for Him would have faded in them. It was not mere superstition that drove the women to embalm the body of a man they thought beyond hope — they believed

the words of one they knew to be truthful. Yet the dullness that still held their minds wrapped their faith in such darkness that they were nearly bewildered by it. Therefore it is said that they then at last believed when the truth of Christ's words was confirmed through the event itself — not that they began to believe only then, but that the seed of hidden faith that had been dormant in their hearts received life and sprang up. There was therefore a true faith in them, but an incomplete faith — because they reverently embraced Christ as their only teacher, were instructed by Him, determined that He was the author of their salvation, and believed He had come from heaven by the Father's grace to gather His disciples to heaven. We need no more familiar proof of this than the fact that in all people, in all things, unbelief is ever mingled with faith.

We may also speak of an implicit or incomplete faith that is really nothing more than a preparation for faith. The evangelists record that many believed who were simply seized with wonder at miracles and went no further than concluding Christ was the promised Messiah — without having tasted even the most basic teaching of the Gospel. Such willingness, by which they submitted themselves to Christ, bears the name of faith where in fact it was only the beginning of faith. So the royal official who believed Christ's promise about his son's healing — when he returned home, as the evangelist testifies, believed again — because he received as an oracle what he heard from Christ's mouth and submitted himself to Christ's authority to receive His teaching. It should be noted, however, that in the first instance the word believing points to a particular act of faith, while in the second it places him among the disciples who professed to be followers of Christ. A sim-

ilar example is given by John in the Samaritans: they believed the woman's report and ran eagerly to Christ — but after hearing Him they said: 'We no longer believe because of what you told us, for we have heard Him ourselves, and we know that He is the Savior of the world.' From this it appears that those not yet instructed in the basics of the faith, if they are disposed toward obedience, are called faithful — though not properly so. God in His kindness graciously honors that godly inclination with so great a name. But this willingness to learn and desire to go further is far different from the dull ignorance of those who content themselves with the implicit faith the papists have invented. For if Paul sharply condemns those who are always learning yet never come to the knowledge of the truth, how much harsher a rebuke do those deserve who deliberately set out to know nothing?

True knowledge of Christ, then, is to receive Him as the Father offers Him — clothed with His Gospel. For since He is appointed as the goal of our faith, we cannot reach Him by the right way except with the Gospel as our guide. Through the Gospel the treasures of grace are opened to us, and without it Christ would do us little good. So Paul makes faith and doctrine inseparable companions, saying: 'You did not learn Christ that way — for you have been taught the truth as it is in Christ' (Ephesians 4:20). Yet I do not so restrict faith to the Gospel that I deny Moses and the prophets taught enough to build faith. But because the Gospel presents a fuller unfolding of faith, Paul rightly calls it the doctrine of faith. For the same reason he says elsewhere that with the coming of faith the law is set aside — using the word faith to mean the new and remarkable manner of teaching in which Christ, now appearing as our teacher, has more plainly set forth the Father's

mercy and more certainly declared our salvation. But it will be more orderly and convenient to proceed step by step from the general to the specific. We must first be reminded that faith has a general relation to the Word, and that faith can no more be separated from the Word than the sun's rays from the sun itself. Therefore God cries out in Isaiah: 'Hear Me, and your soul will live.' That the Word is the fountain of faith, John shows in these words: 'These things are written that you may believe.' And the prophet, urging the people toward faith, says: 'Today, if you hear His voice.' To hear is commonly taken as meaning to believe. Moreover, God is not without reason when in Isaiah He sets this mark distinguishing the children of the church from outsiders: that He will instruct them all, so that they are taught by Him. For if this were a benefit for everyone, why would He address it to only a few? This is confirmed by the fact that the evangelists commonly use the words faithful and disciples as different terms for the same thing — especially Luke, very often in Acts. He even extends the name disciple to a woman in Acts 9. Therefore if faith turns even slightly from this mark it aims at, it loses its own nature and becomes a kind of unstable credulity and wandering of the mind. The Word is the foundation on which faith rests and is held up — if it departs from the Word, it collapses. Take away the Word, and faith has nothing left to stand on. We are not debating here whether the ministry of human beings is necessary to sow God's Word so that faith may arise — that is a question for elsewhere. What we are saying is that the Word itself, however it reaches us, is like a mirror in which faith beholds God. Whether God uses the service of human beings or works by His own power alone, He always reveals Himself through His Word to those He wills to draw to Himself. This is

why Paul defines faith as obedience given to the Gospel (Romans 1:5) and praises the obedience of faith in the Philippians (Philippians 2:17). For the purpose of faith is not merely to know that God exists, but above all to understand what will He bears toward us. What matters most is not what He is in Himself, but what He will be to us. We have therefore arrived at this point: faith is knowledge of God's will, received through His Word. The foundation of this is a settled persuasion of the truth of God. As long as your mind wavers about this, the Word will carry only doubtful and weak authority — indeed, practically none at all. But it is also not enough to believe that God is truthful and cannot deceive or lie. You must further hold as beyond all doubt that everything that comes from Him is sacred and inviolable truth.

But since not every word of God raises the human heart to faith, we must search further to see what faith in the Word specifically rests upon. God said to Adam: 'You shall surely die.' God said to Cain: 'Your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground.' Yet these are the kinds of words that by themselves can only shake faith — much less establish it. We do not deny that it is faith's task to agree with the truth of God, however often, in whatever form, and in whatever manner He speaks. But our question now is simply this: what does faith find in God's Word to lean on and rest in? When conscience sees nothing but indignation and vengeance, how can it do anything but tremble and quake with fear? And how can it do anything but flee from God, of whom it is afraid? But faith ought to seek God, not flee from Him. It is therefore clear that we do not yet have a complete definition of faith — for knowing God's will, in whatever form it takes, does not count as faith. But what if in place of 'will' — whose message is often sorrowful

and whose declaration is dreadful — we put 'kindness' or 'mercy'? Then we come much closer to the nature of faith. For we are drawn to seek God when we have learned that salvation is stored up for us with Him. This is confirmed when He declares that He cares for us and loves us. Therefore a promise of grace is needed — by which He testifies that He is our merciful Father — for apart from this we cannot approach Him, and only upon this can the human heart safely rest. For this reason the psalms so commonly pair these two things — mercy and truth — for it would profit us nothing to know God is true unless He mercifully drew us to Himself. And we would be unable to embrace His mercy unless He offered it with His own mouth. 'I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth.' 'Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.' In another place: 'Your lovingkindness reaches to the heavens and Your faithfulness to the clouds.' Again: 'All the ways of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant.' Again: 'His lovingkindness prevails over us, and the truth of the Lord is everlasting.' Again: 'I will praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth.' I will omit what the prophets say to the same effect — that God is merciful and faithful in His promises. For we would be rash to conclude that God is merciful toward us unless He Himself testified of it and came to us first with His calling — otherwise His will would remain uncertain and unknown. But we have already seen that Christ is the only pledge of God's love, and that without Him the signs of hatred and wrath appear on every side. Now since knowledge of God's goodness will not do much good unless He makes us rest in it, any understanding that is mixed with doubt — that does not settle clearly within itself but ar-

gues back and forth — must be set aside. The human mind, being blind and darkened, is far from reaching and grasping God's will. The human heart, wavering in constant doubt, is far from resting assured in that persuasion. Therefore our minds must be enlightened and our hearts strengthened by other means, so that God's Word may be fully trusted. We will now have a complete definition of faith if we say this: faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's goodwill toward us, which is grounded in the truth of the free promise in Christ, revealed to our minds, and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Before I go further, I must clear away certain difficulties that might otherwise trip up readers. First, I must refute the distinction that circulates in the schools between formed and unformed faith. The scholastics imagine that people who have no fear of God and no sense of godliness can believe everything necessary for salvation. As though the Holy Spirit, in enlightening our hearts to faith, were not at the same time a witness to us of our adoption. Yet they presumptuously, despite all of Scripture crying out against it, give the name of faith to such a persuasion devoid of the fear of God. We need not argue at length with their definition. We need only set out the nature of faith as the Word of God declares it — and then it will be plain how unskillfully and foolishly they make noise about something they do not understand. I have already touched on part of this; the rest I will add later as occasion allows. For now I say that no greater absurdity can be imagined than their invention. They want faith to be an assent by which even the most contemptuous person can receive what Scripture declares. But they should first have asked whether every person produces faith from his own power, or whether the Holy Spirit through faith becomes a witness

of adoption. They therefore play the fool in debating whether faith with the quality of love added to it is the same faith or a new and different faith — making it clear that in all their chatter they never considered the unique gift of the Holy Spirit. For the very act of believing already contains within it the reconciliation by which a person approaches God. If they had weighed Paul's words — 'with the heart one believes unto righteousness' — they would stop inventing that cold quality they call unformed faith. This one argument alone should be enough to settle the debate: assent itself — as I have already touched on and will repeat more fully — is a matter of the heart more than the mind, of affection more than understanding. For this reason faith is called the obedience of faith, which is the kind of obedience the Lord places above all others — rightly so, since nothing is more precious to Him than His truth, which believers, as John the Baptist testifies, subscribe to and seal as true. The matter is not in doubt. We say plainly: it is foolish to claim that faith is formed by adding godly affection to assent, when assent itself — at least the kind of assent Scripture speaks of — already consists in godly affection. There is yet another plainer argument. Since faith embraces Christ as He is offered to us by the Father — and Christ is offered not only for righteousness, forgiveness of sins, and peace, but also for sanctification and as a fountain of living water — no one can truly know Him without also receiving the sanctification of the Spirit. Or to put it plainly: faith consists in the knowledge of Christ. Christ cannot be known without the sanctification of His Spirit. Therefore faith can in no way be separated from godly affection.

When our opponents cite Paul's words — 'If I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing' — to strip faith of love and leave it deformed, they fail to consider what Paul means by faith in that passage. In the chapter before it he had spoken of the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit, including different kinds of tongues, miraculous powers, and prophecy. He had urged the Corinthians to pursue the best gifts — those bringing the greatest benefit to the whole body of the church. He then said he would show them an even more excellent way. That all such gifts, however excellent in themselves, count for nothing unless they serve love — for they were given to build up the church, and if they are not used for that purpose, they lose their value. To prove this he goes through them one by one, listing the same gifts mentioned before but using different terms. He uses the words powers and faith to mean the same thing: the power to perform miracles. Since this — whether you call it power or faith — is a particular gift of God that even an ungodly person may possess and misuse, just as he may misuse the gift of tongues, prophecy, and other gifts of grace, it is no wonder that it can be separated from love. The whole error of these men rests on this: the word faith has several meanings, and they dispute as though it means the same thing in every passage without accounting for the difference. The passage from James they cite in support of the same error will be addressed elsewhere. Though for teaching purposes — when we want to show what kind of knowledge of God ungodly people have — we may grant that there are different kinds of faith, we acknowledge and speak of only one faith belonging to the godly, as Scripture teaches. Many people believe there is a God. They consider the Gospel accounts and other parts of Scripture to be true — in the same way

we commonly accept reports of things that happened long ago or events we witnessed ourselves. Some go further: they regard God's Word as a completely reliable oracle, they do not altogether despise His commandments, and they are somewhat moved by His threats and promises. Such people are indeed said to have faith — but this is an improper use of the word, because they do not openly fight against God's Word or reject and despise it, but rather maintain a certain outward appearance of obedience.

But this shadow or image of faith is worthless and does not deserve the name. How far it differs from genuine faith will be treated more fully later, but there is no reason not to touch on it briefly now. It is said that Simon Magus believed — yet shortly after he revealed his own unbelief. When the text says he believed, we do not take this to mean, as some do, that he merely pretended to believe while having nothing in his heart. Rather, we think that being overcome by the majesty of the Gospel, he had a certain kind of faith — such as it was — and acknowledged Christ as the author of life and salvation, willingly professing himself to be one of His followers. In the same way, the Gospel of Luke speaks of those who believe for a time — in whom the seed of the word is choked before bearing fruit, or before it takes root, withering away and perishing. We have no doubt that such people, delighted by a taste of the word, receive it eagerly and begin to feel its divine power — so much so that they deceive not only others but even themselves with a counterfeit faith. They persuade themselves that the reverence they show toward God's Word is genuine godliness, because they think that ungodliness means nothing less than open and deliberate contempt of His Word. But whatever form this assent takes, it does not pierce to the heart and remain established there.

And even when it appears to have taken root, those roots are not living ones. The human heart has so many secret corners of vanity, so many hiding places of deceit, and is covered with such cunning hypocrisy that it often deceives itself. Those who glory in such shadows of faith should understand that in this they are no better than the devil. Indeed that first kind of person — who hears and understands those things carelessly, knowledge of which makes the devils tremble — is far worse than the devil. And the others are in this respect equal to the devil: the feeling they have only drives them to terror and despair.

I know that some find it hard that we assign any kind of faith to the reprobate, since Paul affirms faith is the fruit of election. But this doubt is easily resolved. Though no one receives the light of faith or truly feels the effectual working of the Gospel except those foreordained to salvation, experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes moved by the same feeling as the elect — so that in their own judgment they seem no different from the elect. It is therefore not absurd that the apostle attributes to them a taste of the heavenly gifts, and that Christ attributes to them a faith that lasts for a time. This is not because they soundly perceive the spiritual power of grace and the assured light of faith — but because the Lord, in order to make them all the more condemned and inexcusable, gives them access to His goodness to the degree it can be tasted without the Spirit of adoption. If someone objects that this leaves the faithful with no way to verify their own adoption with certainty, my answer is this: though there is great similarity between God's elect and those who have only a temporary faith, there lives in the elect alone the confidence Paul speaks of — that they cry with full voice, 'Abba, Father.' Just as God regenerates only the

elect with imperishable seed so that the seed of life planted in their hearts never dies, so He seals the grace of adoption in them in such a way that it is stable and certain. But this does not prevent the Spirit's lesser working from having its effect in the reprobate as well. Meanwhile the faithful are taught to examine themselves carefully and humbly, lest in place of the assurance of faith, a careless fleshly confidence should creep in. Moreover, the reprobate never conceive more than a confused sense of grace — they grasp at the shadow rather than the substance — because the Holy Spirit seals the forgiveness of sins in the elect alone, so that they apply it to themselves through personal faith. Yet it is truly said that the reprobate believe God is merciful to them — for they receive the gift of reconciliation, though confusedly and not clearly enough. Not that they share in the same faith or regeneration as the children of God, but because they seem, under a cloak of hypocrisy, to have the same beginning of faith.

I do not deny that God illuminates their minds to the point that they acknowledge His grace — but He makes that feeling so different from the special testimony He gives to the elect that they never reach the genuine effect and enjoyment of it. For He does not show Himself merciful to them in the sense of truly delivering them from death and receiving them into His protection — He only discloses to them a present and passing mercy. But to the elect alone He grants the living root of faith, so that they persevere to the end. So the objection is answered: if God truly shows His grace, it remains permanently established — but there is nothing to prevent God from enlightening some with a present feeling of His grace that afterward fades away.

Although faith is knowledge of God's goodness toward us and a firm persuasion of its truth, it is no wonder that the feeling of God's love experienced in temporal things fades away — for while it bears some resemblance to faith, it differs greatly from it. I grant that God's will is unchangeable and His truth always steadfastly agrees with itself. But I deny that the reprobate progress far enough to attain to that secret revelation which Scripture declares belongs to the elect alone. I therefore deny that they either grasp God's will as unchangeable or firmly embrace its truth — for they remain in a feeling that fades, like a tree not planted deeply enough to take living root. Over time it dries up, though for a few years it may produce blossoms, leaves, and even fruit. Just as the image of God in the first man's mind and soul could have been obliterated by the fall, so it is no wonder that God shines certain beams of His grace on the reprobate, which He afterward allows to be extinguished. There is nothing to prevent Him from lightly sprinkling some with the knowledge of His Gospel while thoroughly soaking others. What must be held as truth is this: however small and weak faith may be in the elect, because it is to them a sure pledge of the Spirit of God and a seal of their adoption, its mark can never be erased from their hearts. As for the reprobate, they are covered with a light that later comes to nothing. Yet the Spirit is not being deceptive — He simply does not give life to the seed He plants in their hearts in such a way as to make it remain incorruptible as He does in the elect. I go further still: since it is plain both from Scripture and daily experience that the reprobate are sometimes touched with a feeling of God's grace, a certain desire for mutual love is stirred in their hearts. So Saul for a time had a godly affection toward God, knowing himself to be fatherly dealt

with and taking pleasure in a certain sweetness of His goodness. But since the conviction of God's fatherly love is not firmly rooted in the reprobate, they do not truly love Him as His children — they are moved by something more like the feeling of a hired servant. The Spirit of love was given to Christ alone for the purpose of pouring it into His members. Paul's words extend no further than the elect: 'The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us' — the very love that produces the confidence of calling on God which I mentioned earlier. On the other hand, we see God deal with His own children in ways that appear to be wrath — though He never ceases to love them. It is not that He actually hates them, but that His will is to make them feel the weight of His wrath — to humble their pride, shake off their drowsiness, and move them to repentance. Therefore at the same time they perceive God as both angry with them for their sins and merciful toward them — for they genuinely pray to appease His wrath and yet flee to Him with quiet and assured trust. From this it appears that those who presume to claim faith but lack it do not simply put on a pretend show. Rather, being carried away by a sudden and violent burst of zeal, they deceive themselves through false opinion — and there is no doubt that such sluggishness grips them that they never examine their hearts as they should. Such were likely those to whom, as John testifies, Christ did not commit Himself even when they believed in Him — because He knew all people and knew what was in a person. If many did not fall away from what I call the common faith — common because it has great similarity and resemblance to living and lasting faith — Christ would not have said to His disciples: 'If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know

the truth, and the truth will set you free.' For He was addressing those who had embraced His teaching and urging them to grow in faith so they would not quench by their own laziness the light given to them. Therefore Paul affirms that faith belongs specifically to the elect — declaring that many fall away because they have not taken living root. As Christ also says in Matthew: 'Every tree that My Father has not planted will be uprooted.' In others there is a cruder kind of deception — those who are not ashamed to mock both God and people. James speaks against that kind of person who wickedly abuses faith with deceitful pretense. Paul would not require the children of God to hold sincere faith unless many were presumptuously claiming what they do not have, deceiving others or sometimes themselves with empty and colored pretense. Therefore he compares a good conscience to a chest in which faith is kept — because many, having abandoned a good conscience, have suffered shipwreck of their faith.

We must also keep in mind that the word faith carries more than one meaning. Often faith refers to the sound doctrine of religion — as in the passage just cited, and as in the same letter where Paul writes that deacons must hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. Again, where he speaks of certain people falling away from the faith. And on the other hand, where he says Timothy was brought up on the words of faith. Where he writes that profane and empty talk, falsely called knowledge, causes many to depart from the faith — people he elsewhere calls reprobate regarding the faith. And again where he charges Titus: 'Warn them to be sound in the faith' — by soundness meaning nothing other than purity of doctrine, which is easily corrupted and distorted by human fickleness. Since Christ — whom faith possesses — contains

hidden within Himself all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, faith is fittingly extended to signify the whole body of heavenly teaching, from which it cannot be separated. On the other hand, faith is sometimes narrowed to a particular object — as when Matthew says Christ saw the faith of those who lowered the paralyzed man through the roof, or when Christ Himself marveled that He had not found such great faith in Israel as the centurion showed. The centurion was no doubt deeply concerned for his daughter's healing, his mind fully occupied by it. But because he was content with Christ's word and assurance alone and did not require His bodily presence, his faith was so highly commended in light of this particular circumstance. We showed a little earlier that Paul uses faith to mean the gift of working miracles — a gift that even those who are not regenerated by the Spirit of God and do not truly worship Him may possess. Elsewhere Paul uses faith to mean the teaching by which we are instructed in faith. Where he writes that faith will be done away with, he clearly means the ministry of the church, which is useful for our weakness during this present time. In these uses of the word there is a proportional relationship. But when faith is improperly transferred to signify a false profession or a lying title of faith, that is as striking a figurative use as when the fear of God is used to describe a corrupt and perverted manner of worship — as in the sacred history, where the foreign nations transplanted into Samaria and the surrounding areas are said to have feared both the false gods and the God of Israel, which is as much as to mix heaven and earth together. Our question now is: what is the faith that distinguishes the children of God from un-

believers — by which we call God our Father, by which we pass from death to life, by which Christ, our eternal salvation, dwells in us? Its nature and power I believe I have set out briefly and clearly.

Now let us go through all the parts of the definition again from the beginning — examined carefully, I think nothing doubtful will remain. When we call faith a knowledge in our definition, we do not mean the kind of comprehension people have of things that fall within human understanding. For faith so far surpasses that kind of comprehension that the human mind must stretch and go beyond itself to reach it. And even when it has reached it, it does not grasp what it feels — yet being persuaded of what it cannot fully comprehend, it understands more by the very certainty of persuasion than if it were fully grasping something ordinary by its own natural capacity. Paul expresses this well when he speaks of comprehending the length, breadth, depth, and height, and of knowing the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge. His point was to show that what our minds grasp by faith is infinite in every direction, and that this kind of knowledge far surpasses all human understanding. Yet because the Lord has disclosed to His saints the secret of His will, hidden through ages and generations, faith is also rightly called acknowledgment in Scripture. John calls it a certain knowledge, testifying that the faithful know with certainty that they are the children of God. And indeed they know it with assurance — not by natural demonstration, but by being confirmed through persuasion of God's truth. Paul's words confirm this as well: while we dwell in the body we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. He is showing that the things we

grasp by faith are still absent from us and hidden from our eyes. From this we conclude that the knowledge of faith rests in certainty rather than in comprehension.

We further call faith a firm and certain knowledge, to express a more solid and steadfast persuasion. For just as faith is not content with a wavering and unstable opinion, it is also not content with a dark and confused understanding. It requires full and settled assurance — the kind that people have of things confirmed by experience and proof. For unbelief clings so tenaciously and is so deeply rooted in our hearts, and we are so bent toward it, that what everyone confesses with his lips to be true — that God is faithful — no one is inwardly persuaded of without great struggle. When things come to the test, the wavering of all people exposes the fault that was previously hidden. It is not without reason that Scripture, with its remarkable praises, upholds the authority of God's Word and strives to remedy this very disease — so that God's promises may be fully believed. 'The words of the Lord are pure words,' says David, 'like silver refined in a furnace, purified seven times.' And again: 'The Word of the Lord is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.' Solomon confirms the same in almost the same words: 'Every word of God is pure.' Since Psalm 119 treats almost exclusively of this theme, it would be unnecessary to pile up more passages. Every time God commends His Word to us in this way, He is at the same time rebuking our unbelief — for that commendation has no other purpose than to pull up all perverse doubting by the roots. There are also many who conceive of God's mercy in such a way that they draw little comfort from it. They are tormented by a miserable anxiety — doubting whether He will be merciful to them — because they enclose within too narrow limits

the very mercifulness of which they think themselves most assured. Their thinking goes like this: God's mercy is great and generously poured out on many, offering itself freely to all — but whether it will extend to them, or whether they will actually reach it, they are not sure. When a person's thinking stops halfway like this, it is only half a thought. It does not settle the spirit in assured quiet — it disturbs it with restless uncertainty. But there is a completely different kind of full assurance that Scripture always assigns to faith — one that sets God's goodness plainly before us and puts all doubt away. This cannot be unless we truly feel and experience its sweetness in ourselves. Therefore the apostle derives assured confidence from faith, and from confidence, boldness. He says that through Christ we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. By these words he is showing that it is no genuine faith unless we appear before God with quiet and open minds. This boldness comes from nothing else but assured confidence in God's goodwill and our salvation. This is so true that the word faith is often used to mean confidence itself.

But on this rests the chief foundation of our faith: that we do not think the promises of mercy the Lord offers are true only for others but not for us — rather, by embracing them inwardly, we make them our own. From this comes what Paul elsewhere calls peace — or at least, peace flows from it. This is an assurance that brings the conscience quiet and cheerfulness before God. Without it the conscience is bound to be troubled and torn to pieces by distressing anxiety — unless it forgets about God and itself for a while and dozes off. And I truly say for a while — for that miserable forgetfulness does not last long. The repeated return of the memory of God's judgment cuts sharply through it. In short: no one is truly

faithful unless, being persuaded with solid assurance that God is his merciful and loving Father, he claims for himself all things in trust of God's goodness. And no one is faithful unless, trusting in God's promises of goodwill toward him, he holds an unshaken expectation of salvation — as the apostle shows: 'We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm to the end.' By this he means that no one hopes well in the Lord except the one who confidently glories in being an heir of the heavenly kingdom. There is no faithful person — I say — except the one who, leaning on the assurance of his own salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death, as Paul teaches in that remarkable concluding statement: 'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' In the same way, the apostle holds that the eyes of our minds are truly enlightened only when we see what is the hope of the eternal inheritance to which we are called. And throughout his letters his habitual teaching is this: we do not truly comprehend God's goodness unless we draw from it the fruit of great assurance.

Someone will say: the faithful find something very different within themselves. When they recall God's grace toward them, they are not only troubled by anxiety, which often happens, but are at times shaken by the most severe terrors. The force of temptations is so great it beats down their minds — and this seems not to fit well with the assurance of faith described above. This objection must be answered if our teaching is to hold. When we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we do not mean a certainty

untouched by any doubt or an assurance never assailed by anxiety. Rather, we say that the faithful are in a constant struggle with their own unbelief. Far from settling their consciences in a peaceful quiet that no trouble can interrupt, we do say this: in whatever way they are afflicted, they never fall away and depart from the assured confidence they have conceived in God's mercy. Scripture presents no example of faith plainer or more notable than David, especially when one looks at the whole course of his life. Yet how far he was from always having a quiet mind, he himself declares through countless complaints — a few of which are sufficient to choose here. When he rebukes his own soul for its troubling movements, what else is it but that he is angry at his own unbelief? 'Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God.' That very discouragement was a plain sign of destruction — as though he thought himself forsaken by God. Elsewhere we read an even fuller confession: 'I said in my alarm: I am cut off from before Your eyes.' In another place he argues with himself in anxious and miserable perplexity, even quarreling with God's very nature, saying: 'Has God forgotten to be gracious? Will He be angry forever?' And what follows is harder still: 'Then I said, My grief is this: the years of the right hand of the Most High.' For in something like despair he condemns himself to destruction, and not only admits he is tossed with doubt, but as one defeated in battle, gives up everything — as if God has forsaken him and turned the same hand that used to help him now to destroy him. It is no wonder then that he urges his soul to return to rest, since he had learned from experience that he was tossed among troubling waves. And yet — what is marvelous — through all these assaults, faith upholds the hearts of the godly, like a date palm tree that

bends but pushes upward against however great a weight. Even when David seemed utterly overwhelmed, while rebuking himself he did not stop rising up toward God. Truly the person who, struggling with his own weakness, resorts to faith in trouble is already in some measure a conqueror. This is seen in such sayings as: 'Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord.' He rebukes himself for fearfulness, and by repeating it twice he admits that he is sometimes subject to many troubling impulses. And in the meantime he is not merely displeased with himself for these failures — he earnestly seeks to improve. If we were to carefully compare him with Ahaz, a great difference would appear. Isaiah was sent to relieve the anxious grief of that wicked and hypocritical king, saying to him: 'Take care and be calm, do not fear.' But what did Ahaz do? As was said earlier, his heart trembled like the trees of the forest shaken by wind. Though he heard the promise, he did not stop shaking with fear. This is the fitting reward and punishment of unbelief: to be so gripped by fear that in temptation one turns away from God, not opening the door through faith. By contrast, the faithful who are bent under the heavy burden of temptations and nearly crushed, constantly rise up again — not without difficulty and struggle. Knowing their own weakness, they pray with the prophet: 'Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth.' These words teach us that they sometimes fall silent, as though their faith were completely overthrown — yet they do not faint or turn away. They continue fighting, and they urge their own sluggishness through prayer, lest by indulging themselves they sink into insensibility.

To understand this, we must return to the division between flesh and spirit mentioned elsewhere — which here appears most clearly. The godly heart therefore feels a division within itself: partly delighted with sweetness in acknowledging God's goodness, partly grieved with bitterness in feeling its own misery; partly resting on the promise of the Gospel, partly trembling at the testimony of its own wickedness; partly rejoicing at the prospect of life, partly afraid of death. This variation comes from the imperfection of faith — for we are never in this present life so far healed from all disease of unbelief as to be completely filled and possessed with faith. From this come those inner battles, when the unbelief remaining in the remnants of the flesh rises up to assail the faith inwardly held. But if assurance is mixed with doubt even in a faithful mind, do we not then arrive at the conclusion that faith does not consist in a certain and clear knowledge of God's will, but in a dark and confused one? No, not at all. Though we are drawn in different directions by conflicting thoughts, we are not therefore immediately cut off from faith. Though we are tossed about by doubt, we are not therefore drowned in its depths. Though we are shaken, we are not therefore cast out of our place. For this is always how the battle ends: faith at last overcomes those hard struggles through wrestling, though when surrounded by them it seems in danger.

Let this be the summary. As soon as even the smallest drop of faith is poured into our hearts, we begin at once to behold God's face as gentle, pleasant, and loving toward us — though we see it from far off, and at a great distance from us, yet we see it with such certainty that we know we are not deceived. From that point forward, the more we advance — as we ought to be continuously advancing — the closer and more certain our beholding of Him be-

comes, and through ongoing experience He grows more familiar to us. So we see that the mind enlightened with knowledge of God is at first wrapped in much ignorance, which gradually is cleared away. Yet that same mind is not so hindered by not knowing some things, or by seeing dimly what it does see, that it cannot enjoy a clear knowledge of God's will toward it — which is the first and chief point of faith. For just as a man shut up in prison, with the sun's rays shining in sideways through a narrow window, does not have the full and open sight of the sun — yet he sees with his eyes its undoubted brightness and benefits from its light — so we, bound by the fetters of an earthly body and shadowed on every side by much darkness, are yet sufficiently enlightened to firm assurance by the light of God, whose beams — though but a little of it — reach us to reveal His mercy.

The apostle teaches both of these points well in various places. When he says that we know in part and prophesy in part, and that we see through a glass dimly, he shows how small a portion of true heavenly wisdom is given to us in this present life. For though those words do not directly say that our faith is imperfect as long as we groan under the burden of the flesh — but rather that it falls to us through our own weakness to need constant growth in learning — he nevertheless quietly points to the fact that what is infinite cannot be grasped by our small capacity. And Paul reports this of the whole church — but for each of us individually, our own dullness is what keeps us from coming as near as we ought. But how sure and undeceitful a taste of Himself even a small drop of faith produces in us, the same apostle shows elsewhere — affirming that through the Gospel we behold the glory of God with unveiled face so powerfully that we are transformed into that same image. In

such entanglements of ignorance, much doubt and fearful trembling are inevitably mixed in — especially since the human heart, by a certain natural inclination, leans toward unbelief. Beyond this, temptations — infinite in number and varied in kind — often assault us with sudden and overwhelming force. And most of all, our own conscience, weighed down by the heavy burden of sins pressing upon it, sometimes moans and grieves within itself, sometimes accuses itself, sometimes mutters quietly, and sometimes is openly tormented. Whether adversity presents the appearance of God's wrath, or the conscience finds within itself evidence and material for His wrath — from there unbelief draws weapons and instruments to battle faith. These attacks always aim at one thing: to make us think God is our adversary and hatefully set against us, so that we would neither hope for help from His hand nor go near Him, but fear Him as a deadly enemy.

To bear these assaults, faith arms and fortifies itself with God's Word. When the temptation comes that God is our enemy because He is severe against us, faith answers from the other side that even when He punishes He is also merciful — for His chastening comes from love rather than wrath. When faith is struck with the thought that God is an avenger of iniquities, it holds up against that blow His pardon ready for all offenses — available whenever a sinner turns to the Lord's mercy. So a godly mind, however wonderfully it is tossed and troubled, at last rises above all dangers and never allows confidence in God's mercy to be torn away from it. Whatever conflicts weary and distress it, they ultimately turn to the strengthening of this very confidence. Proof of this is that the holy ones, even when they feel most severely pressed under the weight of God's vengeance, still bring their complaints to that same God.

Even when it seems they will not be heard at all, they call on Him nevertheless. For what purpose would it be to cry out to the one from whom they expected no comfort? They would never bring themselves to call on Him unless they believed some help from His hand was prepared for them. So the disciples — whom Christ rebukes for their little faith — cried out that they were perishing, and yet they called on Him for help. And when He rebukes their little faith, He does not remove them from the number of His own or place them among unbelievers — He stirs them to shake off that fault. Therefore we affirm again what we said above: the root of faith is never pulled out of a godly heart. It clings so firmly at the bottom that, however shaken and bent this way or that, its light is never so extinguished or choked that it does not at least lie hidden beneath some embers. By this token it is clearly shown that the Word — which is imperishable seed — brings forth fruit after its own kind, the spring of which never completely withers and perishes. For even when the holy ones face what seems to be the final extremity of despair — feeling, in light of present circumstances, God's hand bent toward their destruction — Job still affirms that his hope reaches so far that though God should kill him, he will not stop trusting in Him. This therefore is the truth: unbelief does not reign within the hearts of the godly but only assails them from without. It does not fatally wound them with its weapons but only troubles them or wounds them in a way that remains healable. For faith, as Paul teaches, serves us as a shield. Held up against weapons, it either drives them back entirely or so breaks their force that they cannot pierce through to endanger life. So when faith is shaken, it is like a strong soldier compelled by a violent blow to step back and give a little ground. And when faith itself is

wounded, it is like a shield partially broken by a stroke — but not pierced through. For the godly mind will always rise to the point of saying with David: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.' It is indeed terrifying to walk in death's shadow, and the faithful — however strong they are — cannot but be afraid. Yet because the thought prevails that God is present with them and watches over their safety, that fear is overcome by assurance. As Augustine says: however great the engines the devil raises against us, as long as he does not take possession of the heart where faith dwells, he is shut out at the door. So, judging by the outcome: the faithful not only escape safe from every battle — quickly regaining their courage and ready to return to the field — but also what John says in his first letter is fulfilled: 'This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith.' For he affirms that faith will not only win in one battle or a few, or against some single assault, but will prevail over the entire world — though it be assailed a thousand times.

There is another kind of fear and trembling — one that does not diminish the assurance of faith at all, but actually establishes it more firmly. This is when the faithful, seeing that the examples of God's vengeance against the wicked are presented as lessons for their own instruction, carefully take heed not to provoke God's wrath by the same offenses. Or when, reflecting on their own misery, they learn to depend entirely on the Lord — seeing that without Him they are more unstable and fleeting than any breath of wind. When the apostle holds up the punishments with which the Lord had struck the people of Israel in former times, warning the Corinthians not to entangle themselves in similar evils (1 Corinthians 10:11), he is not diminishing their confidence but only

shaking off the dullness of the flesh by which faith tends to be weighed down rather than strengthened. And when he uses the example of the Jews' fall to warn the one who stands to take heed lest he fall (Romans 11:20), he is not telling us to waver as though we were not fully assured of our steadfastness. He is removing arrogant presumption and reckless confidence in our own strength — warning the Gentiles, who had been received in place of the Jews, not to boast too outrageously against them. Though he speaks there not only to the faithful, but in the same words includes hypocrites who gloried only in outward show. For he is not addressing each person individually, but making a comparison between Jews and Gentiles. Having shown that the Jews' rejection was just punishment for their unbelief and ingratitude, he warned the Gentiles not to lose, through pride and self-promotion, the grace of adoption recently extended to them. But just as in that general rejection of the Jews there remained some who had not fallen from the covenant of adoption, so among the Gentiles some might arise who, without genuine faith, were puffed up only with foolish confidence in the flesh, and so abused God's kindness to their own destruction. But even if you take this as addressed to the elect and faithful, no problem follows from it. For it is one thing to hold down the reckless presumption that sometimes creeps even into the holy from the remnants of the flesh — keeping it from growing wildly arrogant through empty confidence. It is quite another thing to strike the conscience with such fear that it cannot rest with full assurance in God's mercy.

When the apostle teaches that we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), he requires nothing other than this: that we habituate ourselves to look up to the

majesty of God with much self-humbling and reverence. For nothing so effectively drives us to cast all our confidence and assurance upon the Lord as does distrust of ourselves and the anxious awareness that comes from the conscience knowing its own wretchedness. The prophet's saying should be taken in this sense: 'Through the abundance of Your lovingkindness I will enter Your house; I will bow down toward Your holy temple in reverence of You' (Psalm 5:7). Here he fittingly joins the boldness of faith that leans on God's mercy with a reverent fear — which we must feel whenever, coming into the sight of God's majesty, we perceive by its glorious brightness how great our own filth is. Solomon says truly: 'Blessed is the person who fears always' (Proverbs 28:14) — for through hardness of heart people rush headlong into evil. But such fear he means as makes us more attentive — not such as troubles us and causes us to collapse entirely. It is the kind of fear in which the mind, confused in itself, finds its footing again in God — despairing of itself, it comes back to life by trusting in Him. There is therefore nothing to prevent the faithful from being both in fear and in the most assured comfort at the same time — depending on whether in a given moment they turn their eyes to behold their own frailty, or direct their minds to the truth of God. But how, someone will ask, can fear and faith dwell together in one mind? In the same way that numbness and attentiveness coexist in opposite directions. For the wicked strive to produce in themselves a deadness of feeling so that no fear of God will trouble them — yet God's judgment presses on them so that they cannot achieve what they desire. So there is nothing to prevent God from exercising those who are His in humility, so that while fighting bravely they keep themselves under the restraint of modesty. The flow of the

apostle's text makes this clear — he assigns the cause of fear and trembling to the good pleasure of God, by which He gives to those who are His both the will to do good and the strength to carry it through. In this same sense we should understand the prophet's saying: 'The children of Israel will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness' (Hosea 3:5). For not only does godliness produce reverence for God — the very sweetness and pleasant taste of His grace fills the person who is discouraged in himself with fear and wonder, making him cling to God and humbly bow in submission to His power.

By this we do not make room for the most harmful philosophy that many half-papists today are secretly fashioning. Because they cannot defend the crude doubtfulness taught in the schools, they flee to another device: a confidence mixed with distrust. They concede that whenever we look to Christ we find full grounds for hope. But because we are always unworthy of the good things offered in Christ, they would have us waver and stagger as we look at our own unworthiness. In short, they place conscience between hope and fear, alternating between the two by turns. They so contrast faith and hope that when one rises the other falls. So when Satan sees that the open engines he once used to destroy the assurance of faith no longer work, he tries to overthrow it through hidden undermining. But what kind of confidence is it that yields to despair at every turn? They say: if you consider Christ, there is assured salvation. But if you turn back to yourself, there is assured damnation. Therefore distrust and good hope must alternate in your mind — as though we should picture Christ standing at a distance from us, rather than dwelling within us. We look for salvation from His hand not because He appears at a distance, but because He has

grafted us into His body and so makes us partakers not only of all His blessings but of Himself. So I turn their argument against them: if you consider yourself, there is certain damnation. But because Christ with all His blessings has been given to you through a sharing of union — so that all His things become yours and you become a member of Him, indeed one with Him — His righteousness covers your sins, His salvation removes your condemnation. He stands between you and God by His worthiness, so that your unworthiness never comes before God's sight. The truth, briefly stated, is this: we must neither separate Christ from us nor ourselves from Him, but hold fast with both hands to the fellowship by which He has joined Himself to us. So the apostle teaches: 'The body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit of Christ who dwells in you is life because of righteousness' (Romans 8:10). According to these teachers' scheme, Paul should have said: Christ indeed has life in Himself, but you — being sinners — remain under death and condemnation. But he says something entirely different. He teaches that the condemnation we deserve by our own nature is swallowed up by the salvation of Christ — and for the very reason I have stated: because Christ is not outside us but dwells within us, cleaving to us not only with an indivisible bond of fellowship, but through a certain marvelous communion growing daily more and more into one body with us, until He is altogether one with us. Yet I do not deny — as I said a little earlier — that certain interruptions of faith sometimes occur, as faith's weakness is knocked about here and there by sudden violent impulses. In the thick fog of temptations, its light is choked — but whatever happens, it never stops striving to seek God.

Bernard argues in much the same way when he treats this question directly in his fifth homily on the Dedication of the Temple. Often, he says, by God's grace as I meditate on the soul, I seem to find two opposite things in it. If I look at the soul as it is in itself and by itself, I can say nothing truer of it than that it has been utterly reduced to nothing. Why should I list all the soul's miseries one by one — how it is burdened with sins, covered in darkness, entangled in deceitful enticements, itching with desires, subject to passions, filled with illusions, always inclined toward evil, bent to every kind of vice, and finally full of shame and confusion? If even its righteousnesses, when examined in the light of truth, are found to be like a stained cloth, what then shall its unrighteousnesses be counted? If the light that is in us is darkness, how great is the actual darkness itself? What then? Without doubt, man is made like vanity. Man is reduced to nothing. Man is nothing. But how is he utterly nothing, whom God magnifies? How is he nothing, toward whom God's heart turns? Brothers, let us take courage again. Though we are nothing in our own hearts, perhaps something of us lies hidden in the heart of God. O Father of mercies, O Father of the miserable — how do You set Your heart toward us? For where your treasure is, there Your heart is. But how are we Your treasure if we are nothing? All nations before You are as nothing; they are counted as nothing. Before You, I say, not within You. So it is in the judgment of Your truth, but not in the affection of Your pity. You call things that are not as though they were. Therefore both — they are not, because You call things that are not, and they are, because You call them. Though they are nothing in themselves, yet before You they exist, according to Paul's saying — not by works of righteousness, but by Him who

calls. Then Bernard says that this joining of both considerations is marvelous. Truly the two things, when joined together, do not destroy each other. In his conclusion he makes this still more plain: Now if with both these considerations we carefully look at what we are — in one respect how we are nothing, and in the other how greatly we are magnified — I think our glorying seems to be tempered, but perhaps it is actually more increased. For it is perfectly established that we glory not in ourselves but in the Lord. If we think: He has determined to save us, and we shall soon be delivered — in this we can take courage. But let us climb to a higher vantage point and seek the city of God, seek the temple, seek the house, seek the bride. I have not forgotten, but I say it with fear and reverence: we exist — but in the heart of God. We exist — but by His gracious regard, not by our own worthiness.

Now, the fear of the Lord — to which all the holy ones bear witness throughout Scripture, called in some places the beginning of wisdom and in other places wisdom itself — though it is one fear, arises from a twofold understanding. For God in Himself commands the reverence due to both a father and a lord. Therefore the one who truly wishes to worship Him will strive to show himself both an obedient son and a faithful servant. The obedience given to Him as Father, the Lord through His prophet calls honor. The service given to Him as Lord, He calls fear. 'A son honors his father and a servant his master. If I am a Father, where is My honor? If I am a Master, where is My fear?' Yet however He distinguishes between them, you see how He also joins them together. Therefore let the fear of the Lord be for us a reverence mingled with both that honor and that fear. Nor is it surprising that one mind should hold both these affections. For anyone who considers what a Father

God is to us has reason enough — even if there were no hell at all — to dread His displeasure more terribly than any death. But also — given how readily our flesh races toward the license of sin — to restrain it by every means, we must also take hold of this thought: the Lord under whose authority we live hates all iniquity, and those who stir up His wrath by living wickedly will not escape His vengeance.

What John says — that fear is not in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear contains punishment — does not contradict what we have said. The wicked do not fear God in the sense of dreading to displease Him. If they could sin without punishment, they would gladly do so. They fear Him because they know He is armed with power to take revenge — and they shake at the mention of His wrath. They fear His wrath because they know it hangs over them and may fall on their heads at any moment. The faithful, as said above, both fear His displeasure more than punishment, and are not troubled by fear of punishment as though it hung over their necks — rather, they are made more careful not to provoke it. So the apostle, speaking to the faithful, says: 'Do not be deceived: for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.' He does not threaten that God's wrath will come upon them, but reminds them to keep in mind that God's wrath is prepared for such wicked deeds as he has listed, so that they themselves will not be willing to experience it. Though it seldom happens that the reprobate are awakened by threats alone. Already made thick and insensibly dull by their own hardness, they harden themselves to obstinacy whenever God thunders from heaven — but once struck by His hand, they are forced against their will to fear. This fear is commonly called servile fear, and contrasted by

comparison with the free and willing fear that belongs to children. Others subtly insert a middle kind — because that same servile and compelled fear sometimes so subdues men's minds that they gradually come to a willing fear of God.

Now we understand that in the goodwill of God — toward which faith looks — the possession of salvation and eternal life is found. For if we can lack no good thing while God is favorable to us, it is abundantly enough for our assurance of salvation when He Himself assures us of His love. 'Let Him show His face,' says the prophet, 'and we shall be saved.' Therefore the Scriptures identify the sum of our salvation as this: that God, having removed all enmity, has received us into favor. By this they show that when God is reconciled to us, no danger remains but that all things will go well. Therefore faith, having laid hold of God's love, has promises of both the present life and the life to come, and full assurance of all good things — but such assurance as can be drawn from God's Word. For faith does not promise itself either length of life, honor, or wealth in this world, since God has not appointed those things for us in any fixed way. It is content with this assurance: that God will never fail us, however many things may fail us that pertain to the maintenance of this present life. But the chief assurance of faith rests in the expectation of the life to come, which is placed beyond all doubt by God's Word. Whatever miseries and calamities befall those whom God loves cannot undo this: that His goodwill is their perfect happiness. Therefore when we expressed the sum of blessedness, we named God's favor — from that spring flow all kinds of good things to us. We may note this throughout Scripture: whenever mention is made not only of eternal salvation but of any good thing in us, we are always directed back to the love of God.

For this reason David says that God's goodness, when felt in a godly heart, is sweeter and more to be desired than life itself. Finally, if all things came to us as we wished but we were uncertain of God's love or hatred toward us, our happiness would be cursed and therefore miserable. But if God's favorable face shines upon us, even our very miseries are blessed, because they are turned into helps for our salvation. So Paul, after piling up a long list of adversities, glories that none of them separated him from the love of God. And in his prayers he always begins with God's favor, from which all blessing flows. Likewise David sets the only favor of God against all the terrors that trouble us: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.' And we always find that our minds waver, unless — content with God's favor — they seek their peace in it and have fixed within them what the psalm declares: 'Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord, the nation He has chosen for His own inheritance.'

We make the foundation of faith to be the free promise of God, because faith properly rests on it. For though faith believes God to be truthful in all things — whether He commands or forbids, whether He promises or threatens — and obediently receives His commandments, takes heed of His prohibitions, and pays attention to His threats, yet it properly begins with the promise, continues in it, and rests on it. For faith seeks life in God, which is not found in commandments or declarations of penalties but in the promise of mercy — and not just any promise, but one that is freely given. The conditional promise, which directs us to our own works, offers life only if we find it to be standing in ourselves. Therefore, if we do not want our faith to tremble and waver, we must anchor it

in the promise of salvation that the Lord freely and generously offers us — in consideration of our misery rather than of any worthiness in us. Therefore the apostle calls the Gospel 'the word of faith' (Romans 10:8) — a title that sets it apart from both the commandments and the promises of the law, because nothing can establish faith except the gracious message by which God reconciles the world to Himself. The same apostle therefore repeatedly links faith and the Gospel — teaching that the ministry of the Gospel was committed to him for the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 15:18); that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes; and that in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. No wonder. Since the Gospel is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18), there is no other testimony sure enough of God's goodwill toward us — and knowledge of that goodwill is what faith requires. So when we say that faith must rest on the free promise, we are not denying that the faithful embrace and receive every part of God's Word. We are simply identifying the promise of mercy as faith's proper goal — just as the faithful ought to acknowledge God as the judge and punisher of wickedness, and yet their eyes are directed specifically toward His mercy. For He is presented to them as one who is loving and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, gentle toward all, pouring out His mercy on all His works (Psalm 86:5; 103:8).

Nor do I take seriously the objections of Pighius and such critics, who complain that in defining faith this way we are grasping only one part of it. I grant — as I already said — that the general object of faith, as they call it, is the truth of God, whether He threatens or offers hope of favor. The apostle therefore attributes to faith that Noah feared the coming destruction of the world while

it was not yet seen (Hebrews 11:7). If fear of an impending punishment was the work of faith, then threats must not be excluded from the definition of faith. This is true. But the critics unfairly accuse us of denying that faith has respect to all parts of God's Word. Our meaning is only to establish two things: first, that faith never stands firmly until it comes to the free promise; and second, that we are reconciled to God through it in no other way than because it joins us to Christ. Both points are worth noting. We are speaking of a faith that distinguishes the children of God from the reprobate, the faithful from the unbelieving. If a person believes that God rightly commands everything He commands and truthfully threatens — does that make him faithful? Not at all. Therefore there can be no firm foundation for faith unless it rests on God's mercy. Now, to what end are we discussing faith? Is it not to learn the way of salvation? And how does faith bring salvation except by grafting us into the body of Christ? There is therefore nothing wrong with pressing in our definition the principal effect of faith, and attaching to the general term the mark that distinguishes the faithful from the unbelieving. Finally, the critics cannot find fault with this teaching without also directing their blame at Paul, who specifically calls the Gospel the word of faith (Romans 10:8).

From this we also confirm what we said before: faith needs the Word no less than fruit needs the living root of the tree — for none can trust in the Lord, as David testifies, except those who know His name. But this knowledge is not according to each person's own imagination. It comes only as far as God Himself testifies of His own goodness. The same prophet confirms this elsewhere: 'Your salvation is according to Your word.' And again: 'I have trusted in Your word; save me.' Note here the relation of faith to the Word,

and then how salvation follows from it. In the meantime we do not set aside the power of God — for faith must sustain itself by beholding it, or else it can never give God His proper honor. Paul seems to report something brief and commonplace about Abraham — that he believed God who had promised him blessed offspring was able to carry it out. And elsewhere, speaking of himself: 'I know whom I have believed, and I am confident that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.' But if a person reflects on how many doubts about God's power creep into the human mind, he will clearly see that those who hold His power in high regard, as it deserves, have made no small progress in faith. We all profess that God can do whatever He wills — but when even the smallest temptation knocks us down with fear and stuns us with horror, it becomes plain that we are diminishing our estimation of God's power by placing the things Satan threatens above God's promises. This is why Isaiah, in seeking to impress on the hearts of the people the certainty of salvation, treats so magnificently the infinite power of God. It often seems as though he has just begun to speak of pardon and reconciliation when he turns to another subject and moves at length through seemingly detached descriptions of how marvelously the Lord governs the frame of heaven and earth and the whole order of nature. Yet there is nothing there that does not fit the matter he is speaking of. For unless the power of God by which He can do all things is brought before our eyes, our ears will barely take in His word or esteem it as much as it deserves. Beyond this, what is declared here is His effective power — for godliness, as we have shown elsewhere, always applies God's power to practical effect. It sets before itself especially those works of God by which He has testified Himself to be a

Father. Hence the frequent mention in Scripture of the redemption of Israel — so that the Israelites might learn that the God who was once the author of salvation will be its eternal preserver. David also teaches by his own example that the specific benefits God has shown to each person serve afterward to confirm faith. Indeed when God seems to have forsaken us, we must stretch our thinking further, so that His ancient mercies may comfort us — as is said in the psalm: 'I will remember the days of old; I will meditate on all Your work.' And again: 'I will remember the works of the Lord, and Your wonders from of old.' But because without the Word everything we conceive of God's power and His works quickly fades away, we rightly affirm that there is no faith unless God illuminates it with the testimony of His grace. A question might be raised here about Sarah and Rebecca, both of whom, moved apparently by faith-driven zeal, stepped beyond the bounds of God's Word. Sarah, earnestly desiring the promised offspring, gave her maid-servant to her husband. She sinned in many ways, no question — but here I touch only this fault: carried away by her zeal, she did not keep herself within the limits of God's Word. Yet it is certain that the desire came from faith. Rebecca, having been told by God's oracle of her son Jacob's election, secured the blessing through evil and crafty means. She deceived her husband, who was the witness and minister of God's grace. She compelled her son to lie. Through various deceptions she corrupted God's truth and, in making a mockery of His promise, did what she could to destroy it. Yet this act — however evil and blameworthy — was not without faith. She had to overcome many obstacles in order to pursue so earnestly what was full of great difficulties and dangers with no prospect of earthly gain. Nor can we say that the holy patriarch

Isaac was entirely without faith — for though warned by the same divine oracle that the honor would transfer to the younger son, he could not stop showing greater favor to his firstborn, Esau. These examples teach us that errors are often mixed with faith — yet in such a way that faith, if it is genuine, always gains the upper hand. Just as Rebecca's individual error did not cancel the effect of the blessing, so neither did it cancel the faith that generally ruled in her mind and was the beginning and cause of her action. Nonetheless, Rebecca revealed how readily the human mind falls the moment it gives itself even a little freedom. Although human failure and weakness darkens faith, it does not extinguish it. But it reminds us how carefully we must hang on every word from God's mouth — and it confirms what we have taught: that faith fades away unless it is upheld by the Word. The minds of Sarah, Isaac, and Rebecca would each have gone astray in their wandering had they not been held in obedience to the Word by God's secret restraint.

Again, we have good reason for including all the promises in Christ, since the apostle includes all of the Gospel in the knowledge of Him. In another place, he teaches that all the promises of God are Yes and Amen in Christ. The reason for this is easy to show. Whenever God promises anything, He shows His goodwill. So every promise of His is a testimony of His love. It makes no difference that the wicked, when God's generosity is heaped on them in great and continual blessings, only wrap themselves in deeper judgment. Since they neither acknowledge nor consider that these things come from God's hand -- or if they do acknowledge it, they do not reflect on His goodness within themselves -- they cannot be taught about His mercy any better than animals, which according

to their condition also receive the fruit of God's generosity yet do not perceive it. Nor does it make a difference that many people reject the promises intended for them and by doing so bring greater vengeance on themselves. Although the promises produce their effect only when they are met with faith, their power and true character are never destroyed by our unbelief or ingratitude. Therefore, when the Lord through His promises stirs people not only to receive but also to reflect on the fruits of His goodness, He is at the same time declaring His love to them. We must come back to this point: every promise is a testimony of God's love toward us. But it is beyond question that no one is loved by God apart from Christ. He is the beloved Son in whom the Father's love rests and then pours itself out to us, as Paul teaches: we have obtained favor in the beloved one. Therefore, this love must be channeled and come to us through Christ. For this reason, the apostle calls Christ our peace in one place, and in another presents Him as the bond through which God, in fatherly kindness, binds Himself to us. It follows, then, that we must look to Christ whenever any promise is offered to us. And Paul teaches no absurdity when he says that all God's promises, whatever they may be, are confirmed and fulfilled in Christ. Some examples seem to argue against this. It is unlikely that Naaman the Syrian, when he asked the prophet how to worship God correctly, was instructed about the Mediator. Yet his godliness is praised. Cornelius, a Gentile and a Roman, could hardly have understood what was not clearly known even to all the Jews. Yet his alms and prayers were acceptable to God. Naaman's sacrifice was also approved by the prophet's answer. Neither man could have obtained these things without faith. The same might be said of the Ethiopian eunuch, to whom Philip was sent. Why would he

have undertaken the travel and expense of such a long journey to worship, unless he had some faith? Yet we see that when Philip questioned him, he revealed his ignorance about the Mediator. I do acknowledge that their faith was somewhat unclear, not only regarding Christ's person but also regarding His power and the office entrusted to Him by the Father. But at the same time, it is certain that they were grounded in principles that gave them at least some taste of Christ, however small. This should not seem strange. The eunuch would not have traveled in haste from a distant country to Jerusalem to worship an unknown God. Nor did Cornelius, once he had embraced the Jewish religion, spend so much time without becoming acquainted with the basic truths of the faith. As for Naaman, it would have been absurd for Elisha to teach him about small matters while saying nothing about the most essential point. So although their knowledge of Christ was dim, it is not plausible that they had no knowledge at all. They practiced the sacrifices of the law, which had to be distinguished from the false sacrifices of the Gentiles by their very purpose -- that is, Christ.

But this plain, outward declaration of God's word should have been more than enough to produce faith, if our own blindness and stubbornness did not stand in the way. Our minds are so inclined to emptiness that they can never cling firmly to God's truth. They are so dull that they are always blind to the light of truth. Therefore, nothing is effectively accomplished by the word without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. From this it also follows that faith is far beyond human understanding. It is not enough that the mind be enlightened by the Spirit of God; the heart must also be strengthened and established by His power. This is where the medieval scholars go completely wrong. In considering faith, they

only focus on bare intellectual agreement, ignoring the confidence and assurance of the heart. Faith is therefore a unique gift of God in both ways: the mind is purified to taste God's truth, and the heart is established in it. The Holy Spirit is not only the one who begins faith but also the one who increases it by degrees, until through faith He brings us to the heavenly kingdom. "Guard that good thing committed to your care," says Paul, "through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us." But we can easily resolve how Paul says the Holy Spirit is given through the hearing of faith. If there were only one gift of the Holy Spirit, it would be absurd for Paul to call the Holy Spirit an effect of faith, since the Spirit is the author and cause of faith. But since he is reporting on the gifts with which God adorns His church and brings it to perfection through increasing faith, it is no surprise that he attributes to faith those things which prepare us to receive the Spirit's gifts. It seems like a very strange conclusion when it is said that no one can believe in Christ unless it is given to them. But this is partly because people do not consider how secret and lofty heavenly wisdom is, or how dull we are in understanding the mysteries of God. It is also partly because they do not look at the sure and steadfast constancy of heart -- that is, the chief part of faith.

But if, as Paul preaches, no one knows the will of a person except the spirit within them, how could we be sure of God's will? And if God's truth is uncertain among us even in things we see with our own eyes, how could it be assured and steadfast where the Lord promises things that neither the eye sees nor the mind comprehends? Human understanding is so thoroughly defeated here that the first step in God's school is to abandon our own intellect. Our intellect acts like a veil that prevents us from grasping the

mysteries of God, which are revealed only to the humble. Neither does flesh and blood reveal these things, nor does the natural person perceive the things of the Spirit. Instead, God's teaching is foolishness to them, because it must be spiritually discerned. Therefore, the help of the Holy Spirit is essential here -- indeed, only His power prevails. "No one has known the mind of God, or has been His counselor. But the Holy Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." Through Him, we come to know the mind of Christ. Christ says: "No one can come to Me unless My Father who sent Me draws him." "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God." Just as we cannot come to Christ unless drawn by the Spirit of God, so when we are drawn, we are lifted in mind and understanding above our own capacity. The soul, enlightened by the Spirit, receives a new sharpness of understanding that enables it to behold heavenly mysteries. Before, it was dazzled by their brightness. In this way, the human mind, receiving light from the Holy Spirit, truly begins to taste the things that belong to the kingdom of God. Before this, it had no ability to perceive or appreciate them. When Christ masterfully explained to two of His disciples the mysteries of His kingdom, He achieved nothing until He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. Even when the apostles had been taught by His own divine mouth, the Spirit of truth still had to be sent to pour into their minds the very teaching they had heard with their ears. The word of God is like the sun that shines on all who hear it preached, but it does no good among the blind. We are all naturally blind in this re-

spect. Therefore, the word cannot penetrate our minds except through the inward teacher, the Holy Spirit, who by His illumination opens the way for it.

In another place, when we discussed the corruption of human nature, we showed at length how unfit people are to believe. So I will not weary readers by repeating the same points. Let this be sufficient: what Paul calls the "spirit of faith" is faith itself, which the Spirit gives us. It is not something we possess naturally. Therefore, he prays that God would fulfill in the Thessalonians all His good purpose and the work of faith with power. By calling faith the work of God and labeling it with the title of God's good pleasure, and by adding through a figure of speech that it is God's own doing, he denies that it comes from human initiative. Not content with this, he further adds that it is a display of God's power. He writes to the Corinthians that faith does not rest on human wisdom but is grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is speaking of outward miracles, but since the reprobate remain blind even when they see miracles, he also includes that inward seal he mentions in another place. God, to more gloriously display His generosity in such a noble gift, does not grant faith universally to everyone. Instead, by a special privilege, He gives it to whomever He wills. We have already cited testimonies as proof of this. Augustine, a faithful interpreter of these testimonies, exclaims that the Savior would teach us, and that believing itself is a gift, not something earned. Christ says: "No one comes to Me unless My Father draws him, and to whom it is given by My Father." "It is marvelous that two people hear the same message -- one rejects it, the other rises to faith." "Let the one who rejects it blame himself; let the one who rises not arrogantly claim credit." In another place

Augustine asks: "Why is it given to one and not to another?" "I am not ashamed to say it: this is the depth of the cross." "From some depth of God's judgments that we cannot search comes everything we are able to do." "What I can do, I see. Why I can do it, I cannot see -- except that I see this far: it is from God." "But why this person and not that one?" "That is too great for me." "It is a bottomless depth, it is the depth of the cross." "I may cry out in wonder, but I cannot explain it through argument." The final summary is this: when Christ enlightens us to faith by the power of His Spirit, He also grafts us into His body, so that we may share in all His good gifts.

Now what remains is that what the mind has received must be further conveyed into the heart. The word of God is not truly received by faith if it merely floats on the surface of the brain. It must take root in the depths of the heart, becoming an unconquerable defense against all the attacks of temptation. If it is true that the mind's genuine understanding comes through the Spirit's illumination, then the Spirit's power is even more evident in strengthening the heart. The heart's distrust is far greater than the mind's blindness, and furnishing the heart with assurance is harder than instructing the mind with understanding. Therefore, the Spirit acts as a seal, stamping on our hearts the same promises whose certainty He first impressed on our minds. He serves as a guarantee to confirm and establish them. "After you believed," says the apostle, "you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:13). Do you not see how he teaches that the hearts of believers are marked as with a seal by the Spirit? And how for this very reason he calls the Spirit the "Spirit of promise," because He confirms the Gospel to us?

Likewise, he tells the Corinthians: "God who anointed us has also sealed us and given us the Spirit as a guarantee in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). And in another place, when he speaks of confidence and hope, he makes the pledge of the Spirit its foundation.

I have not forgotten what I said before -- something that experience continually confirms -- that faith is tossed by various doubts. The minds of the godly are seldom at peace, or at least do not always enjoy a calm state. But whatever trials shake them, they either rise up out of the very depths of temptation or hold firmly to their ground. This assurance alone nourishes and defends faith: when we hold fast to what is said in the Psalm: "The Lord is our refuge, our help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear when the earth trembles and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (Psalm 46:3). This most sweet peace is also described in another place: "I lay down and slept, and rose again, because the Lord sustained me" (Psalm 3:6). This does not mean David always maintained a steady state of cheerful ease. Rather, according to the measure of his faith, he tasted God's grace, and so he boasts that he fearlessly despised everything that might disturb his peace of mind. Therefore, when Scripture means to encourage us to faith, it tells us to be still. In Isaiah: "In hope and in quietness shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). In the Psalms: "Be still before the Lord and wait for Him" (Psalm 37:7). The apostle's words to the Hebrews agree: "You have need of patience," etc. (Hebrews 10:36).

From this we can see how destructive the Scholastic teaching is: that we can judge God's grace toward us only by moral guesswork, based on how worthy each person considers themselves. If we try to judge God's attitude toward us by our works, I admit we

cannot even arrive at the faintest guess. But since faith should be directed toward a simple and free promise, there is no room for doubt. With what confidence, I ask, will we be equipped if we say that God favors us on the condition that the purity of our lives deserves it? But since I have set aside a proper place for a full discussion of this matter, I will say no more about it now. It is plain enough that nothing is more contrary to faith than either guesswork or anything close to doubt. They very badly twist to their purpose that testimony from Ecclesiastes which they constantly have on their lips: "No one knows whether they deserve hatred or love" (Ecclesiastes 9:1). Setting aside the fact that this passage is poorly translated in the common version, even children can understand what Solomon means. If anyone tries to judge who God loves and who He hates by looking at the present state of things, they labor in vain and trouble themselves for nothing. All things happen alike to the righteous and the wicked, to the one who offers sacrifices and the one who does not (Ecclesiastes 9:2). From this it follows that God does not always show His love to those who prosper, nor always express His hatred toward those He punishes. Solomon makes this point to expose the emptiness of human reasoning, which is so dull in the things most necessary to know. Just before, he had written that no one can tell what distinguishes a human soul from an animal's soul, because both seem to die in the same way. If someone concluded from this that our belief in the immortality of the soul is based on mere guesswork, would they not rightly be considered insane? Then are those people in their right minds who conclude that there is no certainty of God's grace, simply because we cannot discern it by looking at earthly circumstances?

But they claim it is rash presumption to take upon ourselves an undoubted knowledge of God's will. I would grant this if we were trying to make God's incomprehensible secret purposes subject to our limited intellect. But when we simply say with Paul that we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit who is from God -- by whose teaching we may know the things freely given to us by God -- what can they object without slandering the Spirit of God? If it is a horrible act of robbery against God to accuse the revelation that comes from Him of being false, unreliable, or doubtful, what offense do we commit in declaring that it is certain? But they say it is also highly presumptuous to boast in the Spirit of Christ. Who would think that people who want to be considered teachers of the world could be so incredibly dull as to stumble on the very first principles of the faith? I would scarcely believe it if their own published writings did not prove it. Paul declares that only those who are led by His Spirit are the children of God. These people would have God's children led by their own spirit and left without the Spirit of God. Paul teaches that we call God our Father because the Holy Spirit supplies that word to us. He alone can bear witness to our spirit that we are God's children. These people, although they do not forbid us from calling on God, take away the Spirit by whose guidance He should be properly called upon. Paul denies that those who are not moved by the Spirit of Christ are His servants. These people invent a Christianity that does not need the Spirit of Christ. Paul holds out no hope of a blessed resurrection unless we feel the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. These people imagine hope without any such experience. But perhaps they will respond that they do not deny we should be endowed with the Spirit, only that it is a matter of modesty and hu-

mility not to claim we have Him. Then what does Paul mean when he tells the Corinthians to test whether they are in the faith, to examine themselves whether they have Christ? Anyone who does not recognize Christ dwelling in them is a reprobate. "By the Spirit God has given us," John says, "we know that He dwells in us." What else are we doing but calling Christ's promises into question when we claim to be God's servants without His Spirit, which He has openly declared He would pour out on all His own? Beyond that, we wrong the Holy Spirit if we separate faith from Him, since faith is His distinctive work. Since these are the first lessons of true religion, it is a sign of pitiful blindness to accuse Christians of arrogance for boldly claiming the presence of the Holy Spirit -- without which boldness Christianity itself cannot stand. But by their own example, they demonstrate the truth of Christ's words: that His Spirit is unknown to the world and is known only to those with whom He dwells.

Since they will not settle for attacking the certainty of faith from just one angle, they also assault it from another direction. They say that although we may form a judgment about God's grace based on our present state of righteousness, our knowledge of whether we will persevere to the end remains uncertain. A wonderful confidence in salvation this leaves us: if we judge by moral guesswork that for the present moment we are in favor, yet cannot know what will become of us tomorrow! The apostle teaches something far different. "I am convinced," he says, "that neither angels, nor powers, nor principalities, neither death nor life, neither things present nor things to come, shall separate us from the love with which the Lord embraces us in Christ." They try to escape with a flimsy excuse, claiming that the apostle knew this by special

revelation. But they are pinned down too tightly to slip away. Paul is discussing the blessings that come commonly through faith to all believers, not those he personally experiences. Paul also in another place puts us on guard with a mention of our weakness and unsteadiness: "Let him who stands take care that he does not fall." True, but this is not the kind of fear that should overthrow us. Rather, it should teach us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, as Peter explains. Then how unreasonable it is to limit the assurance of faith to a single moment, when faith by its very nature extends beyond this present life into the immortality to come! Since believers attribute it to the grace of God that, enlightened by His Spirit, they enjoy through faith the sight of the heavenly life, such confidence is so far from presumption that if anyone is ashamed to confess it, they reveal extreme ingratitude in unkindly hiding God's goodness more than they demonstrate modesty or humility.

Because it seemed that the nature of faith could not be better or more plainly explained than through the substance of the promise on which it rests as its proper foundation -- so that if the promise is removed, faith immediately collapses or rather vanishes -- we drew our definition from there. Yet it does not differ from the definition, or rather description, that the apostle applies in his discussion. He says that faith is the substance of things hoped for and the certainty of things not seen. By the word hypostasis (substance), he means something like a supporting foundation on which the godly mind leans and rests. It is as if he said that faith is a certain and assured possession of the things God has promised us -- unless you would prefer to take hypostasis as confidence, which I do not object to, although I follow the more commonly accepted

meaning. Again, to show that until the last day when the books will be opened, the things of faith are beyond what our senses can perceive, see, or touch -- and that we possess them only by going beyond our own understanding, rising above everything in the world, and indeed climbing above ourselves -- he adds that this assurance of possession is of things that lie in hope and are therefore unseen. "Clear sight," as Paul writes, "is not hope, nor do we hope for what we see." When he calls it a certainty or proof (or as Augustine often translated it, a conviction of things not present -- for the Greek is *elenchos*), he says essentially this: it is a clear demonstration of things not visible, a seeing of things unseen, a clarity about obscure things, a presence of absent things, an open display of hidden things. The mysteries of God that pertain to our salvation cannot be seen in themselves and in their own nature. We behold them only in His word, and we ought to be so fully persuaded of its truth that we hold everything He says as if it were already accomplished. But how can the mind rise up to taste such goodness from God without being completely kindled to love Him in return? The overflowing sweetness that God has stored up for those who fear Him cannot be truly known without deeply stirring our emotions. And once it stirs the heart, it utterly ravishes and carries the person beyond themselves. Therefore, it is no wonder that this emotion never enters a perverse and crooked heart. Through it we are carried up into the very heavens and admitted to God's most secretly hidden treasures and the sacred inner places of His kingdom, which must not be defiled by the entrance of an impure heart. What the Scholastics teach -- that love comes before faith and hope -- is sheer madness. Faith alone is what first produces love in us. Bernard teaches much more correctly: "I believe that

the testimony of conscience, which Paul calls the glory of the godly, consists in three things." "First, you must believe that you cannot have forgiveness of sins except by God's pardon. Second, that you cannot have any good work at all unless He gives it. Third, that you cannot earn eternal life by any works unless it also is given freely." A little later he adds that these things are not enough. They are only the beginning of faith, because in believing that sins can only be forgiven by God, we must also believe that they are actually forgiven to us -- until we are also persuaded by the testimony of the Holy Spirit that salvation is stored up for us. God forgives sins, He gives the ability to do good, and He gives rewards -- so that we may not remain stuck at the beginning. But these things and others will need to be discussed in their proper place. For now, let it be enough simply to know what faith is.

Wherever this living faith exists, it is impossible that it will not carry with it the hope of eternal salvation as an inseparable companion -- or rather, that it will not give birth to hope from within itself. Without this hope, no matter how eloquently or grandly we talk about faith, we are proven to have no faith at all. If faith (as we said above) is an assured conviction of God's truth -- that He cannot lie to us, deceive us, or fail us -- then those who have grasped this assurance also look for a time when God will fulfill His promises, which they are convinced cannot be anything but true. In short, hope is nothing more than an expectation of the things that faith has believed to be truly promised by God. Faith believes that God is true; hope looks for Him to demonstrate that truth at the right time. Faith believes He is our Father; hope looks for Him to show Himself as such toward us. Faith believes that eternal life is given to us; hope looks for it to be one day revealed. Faith is the

foundation on which hope rests; hope nourishes and sustains faith. Just as no one can expect anything from God's hand without first believing His promises, so the weakness of our faith must be sustained and nurtured through patient hope and expectation, so that it does not grow faint with weariness. For this reason, Paul rightly places our salvation in hope. Hope, while it silently waits for the Lord, restrains faith from rushing ahead too hastily. Hope strengthens faith so it does not waver in God's promises or begin doubting their truth. Hope refreshes faith so it does not grow weary. Hope stretches faith to its farthest limit so it does not collapse midway or at the very start. In short, by continually renewing and restoring, hope enables faith to rise up fresher to keep going. But how many ways the supports of hope are necessary for strengthening faith becomes clearer when we consider how many kinds of temptations assail those who have embraced God's word. First, the Lord often keeps our minds in suspense longer than we would wish by delaying His promises. Here it is hope's job to do what the prophet commands: though the promises are delayed, we must wait for them. Sometimes God not only lets us grow weak, but even seems to be deeply displeased with us. Here hope is needed even more, so that according to another prophet's saying, we may still look for the Lord who has hidden His face from Jacob. Scoffers also arise, as Peter says, asking: "Where is His promise? Where is His coming?" Since the fathers fell asleep, everything has continued as it was from the beginning of creation. Indeed, our own flesh and the world whisper the same thing in our ears. Here faith must be held fast through the patient endurance of hope, fixed on the contemplation of eternity, so that it counts a thousand years as a single day.

Because of this close connection, Scripture sometimes uses the names faith and hope interchangeably. When Peter teaches that we are preserved by the power of God through faith for the revealing of salvation, he gives to faith what more properly belongs to hope -- and not without reason, since we have already taught that hope is nothing but the nourishment and strength of faith. Sometimes they are joined together, as in the same epistle: "that your faith and hope should be in God." And Paul derives expectation from faith in Philippians, because in patiently hoping we hold our desires in suspense until God's right time is revealed. All of this can be better understood from the tenth chapter of Hebrews, which I have already cited. Paul in another place, though using an imprecise expression, means the same thing when he says: "We wait in the Spirit through faith for the hope of righteousness." He says this because we embrace the testimony of the Gospel about God's free love and wait for the time when God will openly reveal what is now hidden under hope. Now it is clear how foolish Peter Lombard was to lay two foundations for hope: the grace of God and the merit of works. Hope can be directed toward no other target than faith, and we have already declared that faith has one single target: the mercy of God, toward which it should look -- if I may say it this way -- with both eyes. But it is worth hearing what kind of lively reasoning he brings. "If you dare to hope for anything without merit," he says, "that should not be called hope but presumption." Who, gentle reader, would not rightly be disgusted with such reasoning -- which says that it is rash and presumptuous to have confidence that God is true to His word? The Lord tells us to look for all things from His goodness, yet they say it is presumption to lean and rest on it. Such a teacher is well matched to the

scholars he found in that foolish school of empty talk. As for us, when we see that God's oracles command us to conceive a hope of salvation, let us gladly presume on His truth. Trusting only in His mercy and casting away all confidence in works, let us be bold to hope well. He will not deceive -- He who said: "Let it be to you according to your faith."

CHAPTER 3: THAT WE ARE REGENERATED BY FAITH, WHEREIN IS TREATED OF REPENTANCE



We have already taught in part how faith lays hold of Christ and how through faith we enjoy His benefits. But this would remain dark unless we also declared the effects we experience from it. It is not without reason said that the sum of the Gospel consists in repentance and forgiveness of sins. Therefore, leaving out these two things, whatever we say about faith will be a thin, incomplete, and practically useless treatment of the subject. Since Christ gives both to us — and we receive both through faith — that is, both newness of life and free reconciliation, reason and the logic of teaching require that I now speak of both. Our movement from faith will be to repentance — for when this matter is well understood, it will become clearer how a person is justified by faith alone and by sheer pardon, and yet how genuine holiness of life is not separated from the free imputation of righteousness. Now it must be beyond question that repentance not only immediately follows faith but springs from it. For since the grace of the Gospel is offered with the preaching that the sinner — delivered from the tyranny of Satan, the yoke of sin, and the miserable

bondage of vices — might pass into the kingdom of God, no one can embrace this Gospel grace without turning from the errors of his former life to the right path and devoting all his effort to the practice of repentance. Those who think repentance goes before faith rather than flowing from it as fruit from a tree have never understood the true nature of repentance, and the argument that moves them to think so is far too weak.

They say: Christ and John in their preaching first called the people to repentance and then announced that the kingdom of heaven was near. The apostles received this as their commission, and Paul followed the same order, as Luke records. But while they cling so rigidly to the order of words, they fail to notice how the meaning holds together. When Christ and John preached, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' did they not draw the grounds of repentance from the very grace and promise of salvation? Their words therefore amount to this: because the kingdom of heaven is near, therefore repent. For Matthew, after showing that this was John's preaching, says that in him was fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy about the voice crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God.' In the prophet, that voice is commanded to begin with comfort and glad tidings. When we say that repentance has its beginning in faith, we do not imagine some span of time in which faith first produces it. We mean to show that a person cannot earnestly apply himself to repentance unless he knows himself to be of God. And no one is truly persuaded that he is of God except the one who has first received God's grace. These things will be discussed more plainly as we proceed. Perhaps they were misled by this: many are first tamed by terrors of conscience or shaped toward obedience

before they have fully digested — indeed, before they have even tasted — the knowledge of grace. This is the initial fear that some count among virtues, seeing that it is near to true and right obedience. But our question is not how God draws us to Himself by various means or prepares us for the pursuit of godliness. I say only this: no genuine uprightness can be found where the Spirit does not reign — the Spirit whom Christ received in order to share with His members. So according to the psalm: 'With You is forgiveness, that You may be feared.' No one will ever truly fear God except the one who trusts that God is merciful to him. No one will willingly prepare himself to keep the law unless he is persuaded that his service pleases God — and that this tenderness in pardoning and bearing with faults is a sign of fatherly favor. This is also shown by Hosea's exhortation: 'Come, let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, and He will heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up.' The hope of pardon is used as a spur to keep people from lying still in their sins. But there is no reasonable basis for the foolish error of those who, in beginning with repentance, assign a set number of days to new converts during which they must practice penance — and only after those days are completed are they admitted to fellowship in the grace of the Gospel. I speak of many Anabaptists, especially those who rejoice greatly to be counted spiritual, and the Jesuits, and other groups of the same kind. Such are the fruits the spirit of giddiness produces — fixing repentance within the span of a few days, when a Christian ought to extend it throughout his entire life.

Certain learned men, even long before these days, meaning to speak simply and truly of repentance according to Scripture, said that it consists of two parts: mortification and vivification.

Mortification they explained as sorrow of soul and fear arising from acknowledgment of sin and from the sense of God's judgment. For when a person is brought into true knowledge of sin, he begins truly to hate and abhor sin; he is deeply displeased with himself, confesses himself to be miserable and lost, and wishes he were a different person. Further, when he is touched with some sense of God's judgment — for the two follow one upon the other — he is stricken and thrown down, he trembles, humbled and cast down, discouraged and in despair. This first part of repentance they commonly called contrition. Vivification they explained as the comfort that grows from faith, when a person who has been brought low by conscience of sin and struck with fear of God, looking then to God's goodness and mercy and the salvation that is in Christ, lifts himself up, breathes again, takes courage, and returns as it were from death to life. These words, if rightly explained, express the nature of repentance well enough. But where they take vivification to mean the cheerfulness the mind receives when brought from trouble and fear into quiet, I cannot agree — for it rather signifies a desire to live holy and godly, which grows from regeneration. It is as though one said that a person dies to himself in order to begin to live to God.

Others, seeing that the word repentance is used in different ways in Scripture, have distinguished two kinds. To make them recognizable by some mark, they called one the repentance of the law — by which the sinner, wounded by the searing iron of sin and worn down by fear of God's wrath, remains stuck in that trouble and cannot find his way out. The other they called the repentance of the Gospel — by which the sinner is indeed grievously troubled within himself, but rises higher and lays hold of Christ as the rem-

edy for his wound, the comfort for his fear, and the haven in his misery. As examples of the repentance of the law they cite Cain, Saul, and Judas — whose repentance, as Scripture describes it, meant that they acknowledged the gravity of their sins and feared the wrath of God, but thinking of God only as avenger and judge, they collapsed under that feeling. Therefore their repentance was nothing other than a kind of entry into hell, into which they descended in this present life and began already to suffer punishment before the face of God's wrathful majesty. The repentance of the Gospel we see in all those who, stung by the spur of sin within themselves, yet comforted and refreshed by confidence in God's mercy, turn to the Lord. Hezekiah was struck with fear when he received the message of death — but he prayed weeping, and looking to God's goodness, he took courage again. The Ninevites were shaken by the dreadful threat of destruction. They clothed themselves in sackcloth and ashes and prayed, hoping that the Lord might turn from the fury of His wrath. David confessed that he had sinned greatly in numbering the people, and said: 'Lord, take away the wickedness of Your servant.' He acknowledged the offense of adultery when Nathan rebuked him and cast himself down before the Lord — yet at the same time looked for pardon. Such was the repentance of those who, at Peter's preaching, were cut to the heart — yet trusting in God's goodness, they said: 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And such was the repentance of Peter himself, who wept bitterly yet did not stop hoping.

Although all these things are true, the word repentance as used in Scripture — so far as I can determine — is to be understood differently. When they include faith within repentance, this conflicts with Paul's statement in Acts that he testified to Jews and Gentiles

concerning repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ — where he counts repentance and faith as two distinct things. What then? Can genuine repentance stand without faith? No. But though they cannot be separated, they must be distinguished. Just as faith is not without hope, and yet faith and hope are distinct things — so repentance and faith, though they are joined in a permanent bond, should be united rather than confused. I am well aware that the name repentance sometimes encompasses the whole turning to God, of which faith is no small part. But in what sense it does so will become clearest when the nature and power of repentance itself are declared. The Hebrew word for repentance is derived from turning or returning; the Greek word from a change of mind or purpose. The thing itself agrees well with both — its sum is that we depart from ourselves and turn to God, and putting off our old mind, take on a new one. Therefore repentance may fittingly be defined as a genuine turning of our life to God, proceeding from a sincere and earnest fear of God, consisting in the mortification of the flesh and the old self, and in the quickening of the Spirit. In this sense all the preachings of the prophets in former times, and of the apostles afterward, are to be understood when they called people to repentance. Their one aim was to persuade people that, having been put to shame by their sins and pierced with fear of God's judgment, they should fall down before the One they had offended, be humbled, and with genuine amendment return to His way. Therefore these phrases — 'to turn or return to the Lord,' 'to repent' — are used among them interchangeably with the same meaning. And for the same reason the sacred history says that men repent toward the Lord when those who had lived carelessly in their own desires without regard for Him begin to follow His word

and are ready at their Captain's command to go wherever He calls. And John and Paul used the expression 'bring forth fruit worthy of repentance' to mean living a life that demonstrates and testifies to such amendment in all one's conduct.

Before going further, it will be profitable to explain the definition we have given more fully. Three main points are to be considered. First, when we call repentance a turning of life to God, we require a transformation — not only in outward works but in the soul itself. When the soul has put off its old nature, it then begins to bring forth works agreeable to its renewal. When the prophet seeks to express this, he commands those he calls to repentance to make themselves a new heart. And Moses, when he sets out how the Israelites might repent and truly turn to the Lord, often teaches that it be done with all their heart and all their soul — a phrase the prophets frequently repeat. By calling it the circumcision of the heart, he brushes away all inward affections of the old self. There is no passage where the true nature of repentance is more clearly shown than in Jeremiah 4: 'If you return to Me, O Israel, return to Me. Plow up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and remove the foreskins of your hearts.' See how God declares that they will gain nothing by adopting external righteousness unless wickedness is first pulled out of the root of their hearts. And to move them deeply, He warns them that they are dealing with God — from whom nothing is gained by playing games, because He hates a double heart. Therefore Isaiah mockingly exposes the futile efforts of hypocrites who busily pursued an external repentance through ceremonies,

while caring nothing about loosening the bundles of wickedness with which they kept poor people bound. There he also makes clear what duties genuine repentance properly includes.

The second point of the definition was this: we taught that repentance proceeds from an earnest fear of God. Before the mind of a sinner can be inclined to repentance, it must be stirred up by thinking on God's judgment. Once this thought is thoroughly settled — that God will one day mount His judgment seat to call every word and deed to account — it will not let the person rest or take a single breath of ease. It continually stirs him up to think about a new way of life, one by which he may safely stand at that judgment. Therefore Scripture, when it exhorts to repentance, often mentions judgment. So Jeremiah: 'Lest My wrath go out like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.' And Paul's sermon to the Athenians: 'The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has set a day when He will judge the world in righteousness.' And many other places. Sometimes Scripture makes God known as judge through punishments already sent — so that sinners will think to themselves that worse things await them if they do not repent in time. An example of this is in Exodus 32. But since turning to God begins with the hatred and abhorrence of sin, the apostle makes godly sorrow the cause of repentance. He calls it godly sorrow when we are not merely afraid of punishment but hate and abhor sin itself — because we understand that it displeases God. And no wonder. Unless we are sharply prodded, the sluggishness of our flesh cannot be corrected. Indeed, prodding alone would not be enough for its dullness and torpor — God must stretch out His rod and pierce more deeply.

This is an obstinacy that must be beaten down as with a hammer. The perverseness of our nature therefore forces God to use the severity He uses in threatening — for He would call us in vain with gentle words while we lie asleep. I will not list the many testimonies that readily present themselves on this point. The fear of God is also the beginning of repentance in another sense. Even if a person's life were fully adorned with every virtue, if it is not directed toward the worship of God, it may be praised by the world — but in heaven it will be mere abomination. The chief part of our righteousness is to give God His proper right and honor, which is wickedly stolen from Him when we do not bend ourselves in submission to His governance.

Third, we must declare what we mean when we say that repentance consists of two parts: the mortification of the flesh and the quickening of the spirit. The prophets express this plainly, though in somewhat simple and direct terms fitting the capacity of the people: 'Cease from evil and do good.' And again: 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless,' and so on. When they call people away from wickedness, they are requiring the death of the whole flesh, which is filled with wickedness and perverseness. It is indeed an uncomfortable and hard thing to put off ourselves and depart from our natural disposition. Nor can the flesh be considered thoroughly dead unless everything we have of ourselves is abolished. Since all the inclinations of the flesh are hostile to God, the first step in obeying His law is the forsaking of our own nature. The prophets then express renewal through its fruits: righteousness, justice, and mercy. For it would not be enough to perform these duties rightly unless

the mind and heart have first taken on the disposition of righteousness, justice, and mercy. This happens when the Spirit of God has so soaked our souls — first washed with His holiness — with new thoughts and new affections that they may rightly be called new. As we are by nature turned away from God, we can never turn toward what is right unless self-denial comes first. This is why we are so often commanded to put off the old self, to forsake the world and the flesh, to bid farewell to our desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. The very word mortification reminds us how hard it is to forget our former nature — for we gather from it that we are not shaped for the fear of God or brought to learn the first principles of godliness except by being violently slain by the word of the Spirit and reduced to nothing. It is as though God were pronouncing that to be counted among His children requires the death of all our common nature.

Both of these things happen to us through our sharing in Christ. For if we truly share in His death, by its power our old self is crucified and the body of sin dies, so that the corruption of our former nature may reign no more. If we share in His resurrection, we are raised up by it to newness of life that agrees with the righteousness of God. In a word, I explain repentance to be regeneration, which has no other goal than this: that the image of God — so foully defaced and nearly obliterated by Adam's offense — be renewed in us. So the apostle teaches when he says: 'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.' And again: 'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.' And

in another place: 'Put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it.' Through this regeneration we are, by the benefit of Christ, restored to the righteousness of God from which we had fallen through Adam. This is how the Lord is pleased to fully restore all those He adopts into the inheritance of life. And this restoring is accomplished not in a single moment, or a single day, or a single year. Through continuous — and sometimes slow — progress, God removes the corruptions of the flesh in His elect, cleanses them from filth, consecrates them as temples to Himself, and renews all their senses to true purity — so that they may practice repentance all their lives and know that this war has no end but death. All the more despicable, then, is the slander of that filthy and apostate reviler Staphylus, who foolishly charges that I confuse the state of this present life with heavenly glory when I explain by Paul that the image of God is holiness and true righteousness. As though in defining something one should not seek its full and perfect content. Yet we do not deny that there is room for growth. I say that however closely a person approaches the likeness of God, to that degree the image of God shines in him. To enable the faithful to reach this, God assigns them the course of repentance — the race they are to run throughout their entire lives.

The children of God are therefore freed from the bondage of sin through regeneration — not so that, having now obtained full possession of liberty, they feel no more trouble from their flesh, but so that there remains in them a continuing ground of struggle, by which they may be exercised. And not only exercised, but also may better learn their own weakness. On this point all sound writers agree: there remains in regenerate persons a tinder of evil from

which desires that allure and stir them to sin continually spring. They also acknowledge that the holy are still so entangled with this disease of desire that they cannot help being at times stirred or drawn toward lust, covetousness, ambition, or other vices. It is not necessary to search extensively through the ancient writers on this, since Augustine alone is sufficient — having faithfully and diligently gathered all their judgments. Let readers draw from him whatever certainty they desire on the opinion of antiquity. There may appear to be this difference between him and us: Augustine, while granting that the faithful, as long as they dwell in a mortal body, are bound by desires so that they cannot avoid desiring, yet dares not call this disease sin. Content to describe it as weakness, he teaches that it becomes sin only when either act or consent is added to the conception or reception of desire — that is, when the will yields to the initial impulse. But we count it as sin that a person is moved by any desire at all that is contrary to the law of God. We affirm that the very corruption that produces such desires in us is sin. We therefore teach that sin is always present in the holy until they are unclothed from the mortal body — because there remains in their flesh a perverseness of desire that fights against uprightness. And yet Augustine himself does not always hesitate to use the word sin, as when he writes: 'This Paul calls sin, from which spring all sins to fleshly desire. This, so far as it concerns the holy, loses its kingdom on earth and perishes in heaven.' By these words he confesses that the faithful are guilty of sin insofar as they are subject to the desires of the flesh.

But the statement that God purges His church from all sin — and the promise of this deliverance through baptism, which He fulfills in the elect — we apply to the guilt of sin rather than to the

very substance of sin. God truly accomplishes this through regenerating those who are His: the reign of sin is abolished in them, for the Holy Spirit provides them with strength by which they prevail and are conquerors in the battle. But sin ceases only to reign in them, not to dwell in them. Therefore we say that the old self is crucified and the law of sin abolished in the children of God — yet remnants remain, not to dominate them but to humble them through the conscience's knowledge of its own weakness. We acknowledge that these remnants are not imputed — treated as though they did not exist. But we affirm that this comes about through God's mercy, which delivers the holy from this guilt that would otherwise rightly make them counted as sinners and guilty before God. This position is not hard to establish, since there are plain testimonies of Scripture on this matter. What could be plainer than Paul's cry in Romans 7? Both we have shown elsewhere, and Augustine proves with strong arguments, that Paul is speaking there in the person of a regenerate person. I am not merely pointing to his use of the words evil and sin, so that those who oppose us cannot object to those terms. Who can deny that fighting against the law of God is evil? Who can deny that resisting justice is sin? Who will not grant that there is fault wherever there is spiritual misery? Yet all of these things Paul attributes to this disease. Moreover, we have a clear demonstration from the law itself, by which the whole question can easily be settled. We are commanded to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. Since all parts of the soul ought to be entirely occupied with love for God, it is certain that those who conceive even the smallest desire in their hearts — or allow any thought to enter their minds that might draw them from love of God to vanity — are fail-

ing to satisfy the commandment. For what are these — the sudden movements of feeling, the conceptions of the mind, the thoughts of the understanding? Are these not the powers of the soul? When they open the way for vain or corrupt thoughts, do they not show that they are lacking in the love of God? Therefore whoever does not confess that all the desires of the flesh are sins, and that this disease of desiring they call a tinder is the wellspring of sin, must by necessity deny that transgression of the law is sin.

If someone thinks it absurd that all desires by which a person is naturally moved in feeling should be universally condemned, since they were placed in human beings by God the author of nature — our answer is this: we do not condemn those desires that God engraved in the human mind at the first creation, which cannot be removed without destroying human nature itself. We condemn only the violent and unbridled impulses that fight against God's order. But now, since the whole of human nature's powers are infected and corrupted by its depravity, so that a continual disorder and excess appears in all its doings, and since desires cannot be separated from such excess — we therefore say that they are corrupt. Or, if you prefer to have the whole sum in fewer words: we teach that all the desires of human beings are evil. We charge them as guilty of sin — not because they are natural, but because they are disordered. And we call them disordered because nothing pure or clean can come out of a corrupt and unclean nature. Augustine does not differ from this teaching as much as he seems to, though out of excessive fear of the slander the Pelagians worked to bring upon him, he sometimes avoids using the word sin. Yet where he

writes that the law of sin still remaining in the holy ones has only its guilt removed, he makes plain that he does not fundamentally disagree with our meaning.

We will cite some other passages that make his view clearer. In the second book against Julian, Augustine writes: 'This law of sin is both released by spiritual regeneration and remains in the mortal flesh — released in that the guilt is taken away in the sacrament through which the faithful are regenerated; and it remains in that it works desires against which the faithful fight.' Again: 'Therefore the law of sin, which was also in the members of so great an apostle, is released in baptism, but not ended.' Again: 'The law of sin — whose remaining guilt is discharged in baptism — Ambrose called wickedness, because it is wickedness for the flesh to lust against the Spirit.' Again: 'Sin is dead with respect to the guilt in which it held us, and even being dead it still rebels until it is healed by the perfection of burial.' And still more plainly in the fifth book: 'Just as blindness of heart is both a sin — in that people do not believe in God — and a punishment of sin — in that a proud heart is justly chastised — and a cause of sin — when something is committed through the error of a blind heart: so the lust of the flesh against which a good spirit lusts is both sin, because in it there is disobedience against the government of the mind; and a punishment of sin, because it is given as payment to the deserts of the disobedient; and a cause of sin in a person — when by defection he consents to it, or when he is born infected by it.' Here Augustine calls it sin without any ambiguity — for once error was overthrown and the truth established, he feared slander less. So also in his 41st Homily on John, where he undoubtedly speaks according to his true conviction, he says: 'If in the flesh you serve the law of sin, do what the

apostle himself says: do not let sin reign in your mortal body to obey its desires.' He does not say, do not let it exist, but do not let it reign. 'As long as you live, sin must be in your members — at least let its reign be taken from it. Do not let what it commands be done.' Those who maintain that desire is not sin usually object with James's statement: 'Desire, after it has conceived, gives birth to sin.' But this is easily answered. Unless we think he is speaking only of evil deeds or actual sins, the evil will itself would not count as sin. And when James calls wicked deeds and offenses the offspring of sin and gives them the name of sin, it does not automatically follow that desiring itself is therefore an evil and damnable thing before God.

Certain Anabaptists in our day invent a sort of frenzied lawlessness in place of spiritual regeneration, claiming that the children of God — restored to the state of innocence — no longer need to be concerned with bridling the desires of the flesh, and that the Spirit is to be followed as their guide, under whose direction they never go wrong. It would be incredible that the human mind could sink to such madness if they did not openly and boldly preach this doctrine. It is monstrous. But it is fitting that those who have so persuaded themselves to turn the truth of God into a lie should suffer the punishment of such blasphemous boldness. Shall all distinction between honesty and dishonesty, right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice, be swept away? Such distinctions, they say, come from the corruption of old Adam, from which Christ has set us free. So now there will be no difference between fornication and chastity, straightforwardness and deceit, truth and lying, justice and extortion. 'Set aside empty fear,' they say, 'the Spirit will command you nothing evil, so freely and fearlessly surrender your-

self to its guidance.' Who can help but be astonished at such monstrous claims? Yet this is common teaching among those who, blinded by the madness of their desires, have shed all common reason. But what Christ, I ask, are they constructing for us? What spirit are they breathing out? For we acknowledge one Christ and His Spirit alone — commended by the prophets, preached by the Gospel given to us — and we hear nothing of the kind from Him. That Spirit is no patron of murder, sexual immorality, drunkenness, pride, quarreling, greed, and gluttony — but the author of love, chastity, sobriety, modesty, peace, self-control, and truth. He is not a giddy spirit that rushes headlong without thought through right and wrong — He is full of wisdom and understanding and discerns rightly between just and unjust. He does not stir up dissolute and unbridled licentiousness, but makes a distinction between lawful and unlawful and teaches the keeping of measure and temperance. But why labor longer to refute this brutish madness? To Christians, the Spirit of the Lord is not a troubled fantasy — either dreamed up by themselves or taken from others who forged it. They reverently seek knowledge of Him from Scripture, where two things are taught about Him. First: He is given to us for sanctification, that He might bring us into obedience to God's will, having been purged from uncleanness and defilements. This obedience cannot stand unless desires are tamed and subdued — the very desires these people would set free without restraint. Second: We are taught that though cleansed by His sanctification, we are still besieged by many vices and much weakness as long as we are enclosed in the burden of the body. Because of this, being far from perfection, we always need to advance further; and being entangled in vices, we need to wrestle with them daily. Therefore it also

follows that we must shake off laziness and carelessness and watch with alert minds, lest we be surrounded unaware by the snares of our flesh. Unless, of course, we think we have advanced further than the apostle himself — who was tormented by a messenger of Satan so that his strength might be made perfect in weakness, and who genuinely experienced in his own flesh that division between the flesh and the spirit.

The apostle, in describing repentance, lists seven elements — whether causes, effects, or parts — and does so with good reason. They are: diligence, defense, indignation, fear, desire, zeal, and punishment. It should not seem strange that I hesitate to say definitively whether they should be counted as causes or effects — both can be argued. They may also be called affections accompanying repentance. But leaving aside those questions, we can understand what Paul means with a simple explanation of each. He says that out of the godly sorrow arises diligence or careful attentiveness. For the person who is genuinely troubled because he has sinned against his God is thereby stirred up to diligence and watchfulness — to free himself cleanly from the devil's snares, to be more alert to his traps, not to fall again from the governance of the Holy Spirit, not to be overcome by carelessness. Next is defense or excusing — which here does not mean the self-justification by which a sinner, to escape God's judgment, denies his offense or minimizes its seriousness. It means rather a seeking of pardon than a defense of one's case. Like children who are not hardened: when they acknowledge and confess their faults, they still plead and do their best to show that they have not thrown away the reverence they owe to their parents. In short, they excuse themselves not to prove their innocence but only to obtain pardon.

Then follows indignation, by which the sinner frets within himself, quarrels with himself, and is angry with himself when he recalls his own perverseness and ingratitude toward God. By the word fear he means the trembling struck into our minds whenever we reflect on both what we have deserved and how terrible the severity of God's wrath is against sinners. We are then inevitably troubled with a profound restlessness, which both teaches us humility and makes us more cautious going forward. And if carefulness springs from fear — as he had said — we see how closely the two are linked. He seems to me to use the word desire to mean diligent attention to duty and a ready cheerfulness to obey — which the acknowledgment of our faults ought above all to stir in us. Zeal is joined immediately to desire, and it signifies the fervor that is kindled in us when we are prodded by thoughts like these: What have I done? Where would I have hurled myself if God's mercy had not helped me? Last is punishment — for the more strictly we deal with ourselves and the more rigorously we examine our sins, the more we may trust that God is favorable and merciful toward us. It is inevitable that a soul struck with horror at God's judgment must execute some punishment upon itself. The godly feel the punishments of shame, confusion, grief, self-loathing, and other affections that flow from an earnest acknowledgment of sins. But let us remember that a limit must be kept so that sorrow does not swallow us up — for nothing more readily threatens fearful consciences than falling into despair. By that same crafty means, Satan drowns those he finds overwhelmed with dread of God ever deeper in the gulf of grief, so that they may never rise again. Truly, fear cannot be too great when it ends in humility and does not depart from hope of pardon. But the sinner must always beware, as the apostle

teaches, that while moving toward self-loathing he does not despair under too great a weight of fear — for in that way we flee from God, who by repentance calls us to Himself. On this point Bernard's counsel is very helpful: 'Sorrow for sins is necessary, but must not be unceasing. I advise you at times to return from the painful and difficult memory of your ways and lift your eyes to the clear ground of cheerful remembrance of God's benefits. Let us mix honey with wormwood, that the wholesome bitterness may bring health when drunk tempered with sweetness. And if you think of yourselves in humility, think also of the Lord in goodness.'

Now we can also see what the fruits of repentance are: duties of godliness toward God and of love toward our neighbors, along with holiness and purity throughout all of life. The more earnestly a person examines his life by the rule of God's law, the surer evidence he shows of genuine repentance. Therefore the Holy Spirit, when urging us to repentance, sometimes directs us to all the commandments of the law and sometimes to the duties of the second table. In other places, after condemning uncleanness at the very fountain of the heart, He descends to outward evidences that display true repentance — a picture of which I will set before readers later in the description of the Christian life. I will not gather testimonies from the prophets in which they partly mock those who try to appease God with ceremonies, exposing them as mere shams, and partly teach that outward uprightness of life is not the principal part of repentance, since God looks on the heart. Whoever is even moderately familiar with Scripture will perceive on his own, without any prompting, that when we are dealing with God we labor in vain unless we begin with the inward affection of the heart. Joel's passage will be no small help for understanding the rest,

where he says: 'Tear your heart and not your garments' (Joel 2:13). Both points are also expressed in James's words: 'Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded' (James 4:8). Here the first part is joined by an addition, but then the very fountain and source is shown: they must wipe away their secret filth so that an altar to God may be set up within the heart itself. Beyond this there are also certain outward practices that we use privately as remedies to humble ourselves or to restrain the flesh, and publicly as declarations of repentance. These flow from the self-punishment of which Paul speaks — for these are the marks of a troubled spirit: to be in self-loathing, mourning, and weeping; to avoid fine clothing and all decoration; and to forsake all pleasures. The person who feels how great an evil the rebellion of the flesh is seeks every remedy to rein it in. And the person who truly thinks how serious a thing it is to have offended the justice of God cannot rest until he has glorified God through his own humility. Such practices the ancient writers frequently describe when speaking of the fruits of repentance. Though they do not place the whole power of repentance in these external exercises, readers will, I think, pardon me for stating my view: it seems to me that they lean too heavily on them. Anyone who weighs the matter carefully will, I trust, agree with me that they have gone too far in two ways. First, by pressing bodily discipline so insistently and praising it with such extravagant commendations, they did indeed secure the people's more eager embrace of it — but they thereby obscured what ought to have carried far greater weight. Second, in assigning penances they were somewhat more severe than the gentleness of the church can bear — as we shall have occasion to show in another place.

But because many people, hearing weeping, fasting, and ashes mentioned frequently — especially in Joel — conclude that the chief part of repentance consists in fasting and weeping, their error must be corrected. What Joel says about turning the whole heart to the Lord and tearing the heart rather than the garments belongs properly to repentance. But weeping and fasting are not joined as constant or necessary effects of it — they are mentioned with respect to a specific situation. Since Joel had prophesied that a terrible destruction was hanging over the Jews, he advised them to head off God's wrath not only by repenting but also by displaying outward signs of their grief. Just as a person standing trial humbly humbles himself with an unkempt beard, uncombed hair, and dark clothing to move the judge to pity — so it was fitting that the Jews, standing accused before God's judgment seat, should appear in pitiful condition and plead with Him not to press His severity. Although ashes and sackcloth may have fit those times more closely, it is certain that weeping and fasting would be very appropriate for us whenever the Lord seems to threaten us with some plague or calamity. For when He causes any danger to appear, He gives warning in a certain sense that He is prepared to punish. Therefore the prophet was right to urge his countrymen to weeping and fasting — the mournful manner of accused persons whose offenses he had just said were under examination. And the pastors of the church would not do wrong today if, seeing some ruin threatening their people, they were to call them to fasting and weeping — so long as they pressed with greater and more inward care what is most important: that they must tear their hearts and not their garments. There is no doubt that fasting is not always joined to repentance but is appointed specifically for times of seri-

ous calamity. Therefore Christ links it with wailing, when He excuses the apostles from the need of it until the time when, deprived of His presence, they would be tormented with grief. I am speaking of solemn, public fasting. For the private life of the godly ought to be characterized by honest restraint and sobriety, so that throughout its entire course there may appear a certain ongoing form of fasting. But since all of this will need to be treated again in the section on church discipline, I touch on it more briefly here. One thing I will add by way of transition: when the name repentance is applied to this outward public expression, it is being used in a sense different from the proper meaning I have set out above. For it is not so much a turning to God as a confession of fault, coupled with a plea that God not charge them with the guilt and penalty. So to do penance in ashes and sackcloth is nothing other than to express distress when God is angry with us for serious offenses. This is a public form of confession by which, condemning ourselves before angels and the world, we anticipate God's judgment. Paul, rebuking those who deal too gently with their own faults, says: 'If we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged by God.' But it is not always necessary to bring others openly into our repentance as counselors and witnesses — for private confession to God is a part of true repentance that cannot be omitted. For nothing is more unreasonable than to expect God to pardon sins in which we flatter ourselves and conceal them from Him through hypocrisy, lest He bring them to light. We must not only confess the sins we commit daily. More serious offenses ought to draw us further, calling back to memory things that seem long since buried. David gives us this lesson by his own example. Stricken with shame over his freshly committed sin, he examines himself all the way back to his time in

his mother's womb and confesses that even then he was corrupted and infected with the filth of the flesh. He does not do this to diminish the seriousness of his fault, as many people hide in a crowd and try to escape punishment by dragging others along with them. David does the opposite: with plain straightforwardness he presses home his fault by saying that, being corrupt from his first infancy, he has never stopped heaping evil upon evil. In another place he likewise examines his past life in such a way that he asks God's mercy for the sins of his youth. Truly, our drowsiness will only be shaken off when we are found groaning under our burden, lamenting our sins, and asking God for relief. It must also be noted that the repentance we are continually commanded to practice differs from the repentance that is, as it were, a rising from death for those who have fallen into shameful sins, have thrown themselves into unbridled licentiousness, or have in a spirit of outright rebellion shaken off the yoke of God. For Scripture, when it exhorts to repentance, often means by it something like a passage or rising again from death to life. And when it says that the people repented, it means they turned from their idolatry and other serious offenses. In the same way Paul threatens mourning to sinners who have not repented of their sensuality, sexual immorality, and impurity. This distinction must be carefully observed — lest, on hearing that only a few are called to repentance in this special sense, we fall into a carelessness that assumes mortification of the flesh no longer applies to us. The corrupt desires that are always tickling us, and the vices that continually spring up in us, will not allow us to be released from that concern. Therefore the special repentance required only of some — those whom the devil has violently dragged away from the fear of God and bound tightly in his damn-

ing snares — does not remove the ordinary repentance that the corruption of our nature compels us to practice throughout the entire course of our lives.

Now if this is true -- as it most certainly is -- that the entire sum of the Gospel is contained in these two main points, repentance and forgiveness of sins, do we not see that the Lord freely justifies His people so that He may also restore them to true righteousness through the sanctification of His Spirit? John, the messenger sent before Christ to prepare His way, preached: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." By calling them to repentance, he urged them to recognize that they were sinners and that everything about them was condemnable before the Lord. He wanted them to desire with all their hearts the death of their sinful nature and a new rebirth in the Spirit. By telling them of the kingdom of God, he called them to faith. By the kingdom of God, which he declared to be at hand, he meant forgiveness of sins, salvation, life, and everything we receive in Christ. Therefore, in the other Gospels it is written that John came preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. What is that but calling those who are oppressed and weary under the burden of sins to turn to the Lord and conceive a good hope of forgiveness and salvation? Christ also began His preaching the same way: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Gospel." First He declares that God's treasures of mercy are opened in Him. Then He requires repentance. Last, He calls for confidence in God's promises. When He wanted to briefly summarize the whole Gospel, He said that He must suffer and rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached in His name. The apostles preached the same message after His resurrection: that He was

raised up by God to give Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. Repentance is preached in Christ's name when people learn from the Gospel's teaching that all their thoughts, passions, and efforts are corrupt and faulty, and that they must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Forgiveness of sins is preached when people are taught that Christ has become their redemption, righteousness, salvation, and life. In His name they are freely counted righteous and innocent before God. Both of these graces are received by faith, as I have explained elsewhere. Yet since the goodness of God by which sins are forgiven is faith's proper object, it will be good to carefully distinguish it from repentance.

Just as hatred of sin -- which is the beginning of repentance -- opens the first door to Christ (who shows Himself only to miserable and afflicted sinners who groan, labor, are burdened, are hungry and thirsty, and waste away in sorrow), so we must pursue repentance throughout our entire lives, applying it and following it to the end if we want to remain in Christ. He came to call sinners, but to repentance. He was sent to bless the unworthy, but on the condition that each one turn from their wickedness. Scripture is full of such statements. When God offers forgiveness of sins, He also typically requires repentance from us, quietly indicating that His mercy should be a cause for us to repent. He says: "Pursue justice and righteousness, for salvation is near." Again: "A Redeemer shall come to Zion and to those in Jacob who turn from their sins." Again: "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked abandon his way and the wickedness of his thoughts, and turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him." Again: "Turn and repent, so that your sins may be wiped away." Yet it must be noted that this condition is not attached as if

our repentance were the basis for deserving pardon. Rather, since the Lord has determined to show mercy to people so they will repent, He is showing them where they must go if they want to receive grace. Therefore, as long as we dwell in the prison of this body, we must continually wrestle with the sins of our corrupt nature -- indeed, with our own natural soul. Plato says in certain places that the life of a philosopher is a meditation on death. But we can more truly say that the life of a Christian is a perpetual study and practice of putting the flesh to death, until it is completely slain and the Spirit of God gains full control in us. I think that person has made much progress who has learned to deeply dislike themselves -- not so that they should remain stuck in that misery and go no further, but so they should hurry and long toward God. Being grafted into the death and life of Christ, they should devote themselves to continual repentance. Truly, those who genuinely hate sin cannot do otherwise, since no one ever hated sin who was not first in love with righteousness. This teaching, being the simplest of all, seemed to me best aligned with the truth of Scripture.

That repentance is a unique gift of God is so well established by the teaching above that I need not repeat a long argument to prove it again. Therefore, the church praises and marvels at the goodness of God in granting the Gentiles repentance for salvation. Paul, commanding Timothy to be patient and gentle toward unbelievers, says: "Perhaps God may grant them repentance so that they may escape from the snares of the devil." God does indeed declare that He desires the conversion of all people, and He directs His exhortations to everyone. But the effective working of repentance depends on the Spirit of regeneration. It would be easier to create us

from nothing than for us to produce a better nature by our own power. Therefore, throughout the whole process of regeneration we are rightly called God's workmanship, created for good works that He prepared in advance for us to walk in. Those whom the Lord wills to rescue from death, He brings to life through the Spirit of regeneration. This is not because repentance is properly the cause of salvation, but because it is inseparable from faith and from God's mercy. As Isaiah testifies, a Redeemer has come to those in Jacob who turn from their sin. This much stands firmly established: wherever the fear of God lives, there the Spirit has worked to bring about salvation. Therefore, in Isaiah, when the faithful complain and grieve that they are forsaken by God, they point to the hardening of their hearts by God as evidence of being rejected. The apostle also, when he wants to exclude apostates from any hope of salvation, gives this reason: it is impossible for them to be renewed to repentance. God, in renewing those whom He does not want to perish, shows a sign of His fatherly favor and in a sense draws them to Himself with the warmth of His cheerful countenance. On the other hand, by hardening the reprobate, He thunders against those whose wickedness is beyond forgiveness. This kind of vengeance the apostle threatens against deliberate apostates -- those who abandon the faith of the Gospel, mock God, scornfully reject His grace, and trample the blood of Christ underfoot. As far as it lies in them, they crucify Him again. He does not - - as some overly strict people claim -- cut off the hope of pardon from every deliberate sin. Rather, he teaches that apostasy is so inexcusable that it is no surprise God punishes such sacrilegious contempt with unrelenting severity. He says it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly

gift, have shared in the Holy Spirit, have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come -- if they fall away -- to be renewed to repentance, since they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and holding Him up to scorn. Again, in another place: "If we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment," etc. These are the very passages from which the Novatians in ancient times drew their extreme conclusions. Their harshness offended some good people so much that they believed this letter was falsely attributed to an apostle. Yet it truly breathes an apostolic spirit throughout. But since we are arguing only with those who accept it as genuine, it is easy to show that these statements do not support the Novatian error. First, the apostle must agree with his Master, who declares that every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven in this age or in the age to come. It is certain that the apostle was satisfied with this exception -- unless we want to make him an enemy of Christ's grace. Therefore, it follows that pardon is denied to no specific type of sin, but only to one: a sin that proceeds from desperate rage, cannot be attributed to weakness, and clearly shows that a person is possessed by the devil.

To discuss this further, we need to ask what this terrible offense is that can never be forgiven. Augustine once defined it as stubbornness even to the point of death, combined with despair of pardon. But this does not fit well with Christ's own words -- that it will not be forgiven in this world. If Augustine's definition were correct, the sin could not be committed during one's lifetime, only at the moment of death. Others say that the person who sins

against the Holy Spirit is one who envies the grace given to a fellow believer. But I do not see where they get this idea. Let us bring a true definition instead, which, once proven by solid evidence, will by itself demolish all the others. I say, then, that those who sin against the Holy Spirit are people who deliberately resist God's truth. They are so dazzled by its brightness that they cannot pretend ignorance, yet they resist it solely in order to fight against it. Christ explains what He had said by immediately adding: "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." And Matthew uses "the spirit of blasphemy" in place of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." But how can a person insult the Son without also insulting the Holy Spirit? Those who stumble unknowingly against God's truth, who ignorantly speak against Christ while still having no intention of suppressing the truth of God revealed to them, or of saying even one word against the One they know to be the Lord's Anointed -- these people sin against the Father and the Son. There are many people today who bitterly hate the doctrine of the Gospel, but who would be ready to worship it with all their heart if they knew it was the Gospel. But those whose conscience is convinced that what they reject and fight against is the word of God, and who still refuse to stop fighting it -- these are said to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. They are wrestling against the enlightenment that is the Holy Spirit's work. Many of the Jews were like this. When they could not resist the Spirit speaking through Stephen, they tried to resist Him anyway. No doubt many of them were driven to it by zeal for the law. But it is clear that there were others who out of deliberate wickedness raged against God Himself -- that is, against the teaching they

knew came from God. The Pharisees against whom the Lord spoke so strongly were of this type. To undermine the power of the Holy Spirit, they accused Him of working by the power of Beelzebub. This, then, is the spirit of blasphemy: when a person deliberately and knowingly leaps forward to insult the name of God. Paul points to this when he says that he obtained mercy because he had acted in ignorance through unbelief. Otherwise, he would have been unworthy of God's favor. If ignorance joined with unbelief was the reason he received pardon, it follows that there is no place for pardon where knowledge is joined with unbelief.

But if you look carefully, you will see that the apostle is not speaking about one particular sin or another. He is speaking about the total abandonment of faith by which the reprobate forsake salvation. It is no wonder that those whom John in his epistle says were never truly among the elect -- since they went out from among us -- find God unwilling to forgive. He directs his words against those who imagined they could return to the Christian faith after having once abandoned it. He calls them back from this false and dangerous assumption by telling them what is absolutely true: there is no way of return open to those who knowingly and willingly cast away their communion with Christ. But they do not cast it away simply by sinning through careless living. Only those who deliberately throw away His entire teaching are guilty of this. The key is in the meaning of "falling" and "sinning." The Novatians interpreted falling to mean that whenever a person knows from God's law that they should not steal or commit adultery, yet does so anyway, they have fallen beyond recovery. But I say the opposite: there is an implied contrast in which everything opposite to what was first said must be included. What is expressed here is not

any particular sin, but the complete turning away from God -- in other words, the total apostasy of the whole person. So when the apostle says that those who have fallen away after being enlightened, tasting the heavenly gift, sharing in the Holy Spirit, and tasting the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, cannot be renewed to repentance, it should be understood of those who, with deliberate wickedness, have smothered the light of the Holy Spirit, spit out the taste of the heavenly gift, cut themselves off from the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, and trampled on the word of God and the powers of the age to come. To make this deliberate intention even more explicit, in another passage he specifically adds the word "willfully." When he says there is no sacrifice left for those who deliberately sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, he does not deny that Christ is a continual sacrifice to purge the sins of the saints (which he clearly proclaims throughout almost the entire epistle, explaining Christ's priesthood). He says there is no other sacrifice once Christ's sacrifice is abandoned. And it is abandoned when the truth of the Gospel is deliberately rejected.

Some think it too harsh and contrary to God's tender mercy that anyone who flees to beg the Lord's forgiveness should be refused. But the answer is easy. The apostle does not say that pardon is denied if they turn to the Lord. He flatly denies that they can rise to repentance, because God has justly struck them with eternal blindness for their ingratitude. It makes no difference that he afterward applies the example of Esau, who tried in vain with howling and weeping to recover his birthright. The prophet's threatening is equally relevant: "When they cry out, I will not hear." In these expressions, what is described is not true conversion or gen-

uine calling upon God, but the desperate anguish of the wicked. Trapped in their extremity, they are forced to face what they had carelessly ignored before: that nothing good awaits them apart from the Lord's help. But they do not truly call upon God so much as they mourn that His help has been taken from them. Therefore, the prophet means nothing by "crying" and the apostle nothing by "weeping" except the horrible torment that desperation inflicts on the wicked. This is important to note carefully, because otherwise God would contradict Himself -- He who declares through the prophet that He will show mercy as soon as the sinner turns. And as I have already said, it is certain that the human mind does not turn to what is better unless God's grace first intervenes. Also, God's promise about answering those who call on Him will never disappoint. But the blind torment that drives the reprobate in different directions -- when they realize they must seek God to find relief for their troubles, yet still flee from His presence -- cannot properly be called conversion or prayer.

But a question arises: since the apostle denies that God is appeased by fake repentance, how did Ahab obtain pardon and turn aside the punishment pronounced against him? The rest of his life shows he was merely stunned by sudden fear. He did put on sackcloth, sprinkle ashes on himself, and lie on the ground. As Scripture says, he humbled himself before God. But this was not enough to tear his garments while his heart stayed thick and swollen with evil. Yet we see that God relented toward him. I answer that hypocrites are sometimes spared for a time, but in such a way that God's wrath still rests on them. This is done not so much for their benefit as for a public example. Although Ahab had his punishment delayed, what did he gain? Only that he would not feel

the punishment during his earthly life. God's curse, though hidden, still had a firm hold on his household, and Ahab himself went on to eternal destruction. The same is true of Esau. Although he was denied the inheritance, an earthly blessing was granted him through his weeping. But since the spiritual inheritance, by God's decree, could rest with only one of the brothers -- Jacob was chosen and Esau rejected -- that rejection excluded him from God's mercy. He received this comfort as a man of the flesh: he would be enriched with the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven. This is what I said earlier: it should be taken as an example for others, so we may more cheerfully apply our minds to repentance. There is no doubt that when we truly and sincerely turn to God, He will be ready to forgive us. His mercy extends even to the unworthy as long as they show any grief at all. At the same time, we are taught what a terrible judgment is prepared for all the stubborn, who now dare to mock God's threats with shameless faces and hardened hearts. In this way, God often reached out His hand to the children of Israel to relieve their sufferings, even though their cries were insincere and their hearts dishonest, as He Himself complains in the Psalms. They would quickly return to their old nature. His gentle dealing was meant either to bring them to genuine conversion or to leave them without excuse. Yet in temporarily delaying punishments, God does not bind Himself to a permanent rule. Sometimes He rises more severely against hypocrites and doubles their pains, to show how much pretense displeases Him. But as I have said, He shows certain examples of His willingness to pardon, so that the godly may be encouraged to change their lives, and the pride of the stubborn -- who kick against the prod -- may be more severely condemned.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. ¶THAT ALL
THAT THE SOPHISTERS BABBLE IN
THEIR SCHOLES OF PENANCE, IS FAR
FROM THE PURENESSE OF THE
GOSPELL. WHERE IS ENTREATED OF
CONFESSION AND SATISFACTION.



N ow I will discuss what the scholastic theologians taught about repentance. I will cover it briefly, since I do not intend to treat everything — otherwise this book, which I am trying to keep concise, would grow into an enormous work. The scholastics have tangled this subject — which is not actually very difficult — in so many volumes that anyone who falls into their thicket will hardly find a way out. First, their definitions show that they never understood what repentance really is. They seize on certain sayings from the early writers that do not express the nature of repentance at all — such as: repentance is to weep for past sins and not to commit sins that need weeping for; or, to grieve over past evils and not commit new ones that must be grieved over. Again: that it is a kind of sorrowful self-punishment for what one is sorry to have done. Again: that it is sorrow of heart and bitterness of soul for the evils a person has committed or consented

to. But even granting that these sayings were well put by the early writers — which a sharp critic could easily dispute — they were not meant as definitions of repentance. They were written simply to urge readers not to fall back into sins they had already escaped. If we try to turn every such word of encouragement into a formal definition, then other statements could be added with equal justification. Take Chrysostom's saying: repentance is a medicine that destroys sin, a gift given from heaven, a remarkable virtue, a grace surpassing the power of the law. And the doctrine they teach afterward is even worse than their definitions. They are so fixated on outward exercises that from all their endless volumes you can gather nothing except that repentance is a discipline and strictness that partly tames the flesh and partly punishes and chastises vices. They are remarkably silent about the inward renewal of the mind that brings genuine correction of life. They do talk a great deal about contrition and attrition, tormenting souls with many doubts and filling them with anxiety. But when they seem to have thoroughly wounded the heart, they soothe the pain with a light sprinkling of ceremonies. And having defined repentance in this way, they divide it into three parts: contrition of heart, confession by mouth, and satisfaction by works. This division is no more logical than their definition — despite the fact that they seem to have spent their whole lives constructing syllogisms. Now, if someone tries to prove by that very definition — which is considered conclusive in logic — that a person can weep for past sins and commit no more, can grieve over past evils and do no new ones, and can punish himself for what he is sorry to have done, without ever making oral confession: how will they defend their division? For if a truly repentant person never confesses, then repentance can exist with-

out confession. If they answer that this division applies to repentance insofar as it is a sacrament, or that it describes the full perfection of repentance which their definitions do not capture — then they should not blame me. They should blame themselves for not giving a clearer and more precise definition. For my part, when anything is being debated, I refer everything back to the definition itself, which is the foundation of the whole discussion. But let that pass as their customary liberty. Now let us examine each of the parts in order. When I pass over their solemn mysteries as worthless trifles, I do so deliberately — not because I could not refute their supposedly deep and subtle arguments, but because I would consider it a wrong against my readers to weary them with such pointless material. It is easy to see from the questions they raise and wrestle with — and in which they hopelessly entangle themselves — that they are talking about things they do not understand. For example: does repentance for one's own sin please God when stubbornness persists in others? Again: do punishments God lays on a person count toward satisfaction? Again: can repentance be repeated for deadly sins? Here they make the wicked and shameful claim that daily penance is performed only for minor sins. They also trouble themselves greatly over a misguided reading of Jerome's saying that repentance is a second plank after shipwreck. This shows that they have never awakened from their dullness enough to feel even a thousandth part of their own faults.

Readers should understand that this is no trivial dispute — it concerns the most important matter of all: the forgiveness of sins. When they require three things for repentance — contrition of heart, oral confession, and satisfaction by works — they are teaching that all three are necessary to obtain forgiveness of sins. But if

there is anything we must understand clearly in our entire religion, it is this: by what means, under what conditions, and with what ease or difficulty is forgiveness of sins obtained? If this knowledge is not clear and certain, the conscience can find no rest, no peace with God, no confidence or assurance. It will continually tremble, waver, be troubled and tormented, filled with dread, hating and fleeing from the sight of God. But if the forgiveness of sins depends on the conditions they attach to it, then nothing is more miserable than our situation. They make contrition the first step in obtaining pardon and require that it be proper contrition — that is, complete and full. Yet they never tell a person how he can know he has fully and completely performed this contrition. I do grant that every person ought to stir himself up diligently and earnestly — grieving bitterly over his sins and sharpening his loathing and hatred of them. For this is the kind of sorrow that is not regretted, because it produces repentance leading to salvation. But when a degree of sorrow is required that proportionally matches the severity of the fault — sorrow that can be weighed against the hope of pardon — sincere consciences are terribly tormented. They see themselves required to produce proper contrition, yet cannot reach a measure that gives them any certainty they have performed what they truly owe. If the answer is that people must do as much as lies within them, we are back where we started — for how can anyone be sure he has used all his strength to grieve over his sins? So when consciences have long wrestled with themselves and fought through long battles and still find no resting place, they strain themselves to produce a sorrow and wring out tears to make their contrition complete.

But if they claim I am misrepresenting them, let them produce a single person who, under such teaching about contrition, was not driven to despair — or who, instead of genuine sorrow, did not adopt a pretended sorrow as his defense before God's judgment. We have also said ourselves that forgiveness of sins never comes without repentance, since only those afflicted and wounded in conscience over their sins can sincerely call upon God's mercy. But we have also said that repentance is not the cause of forgiveness. We have removed those torments of soul that they say must be performed as a duty. We have taught the sinner not to look at his own contrition or his own tears, but to fix both eyes on God's mercy alone. We have only reminded him that Christ called the weary and burdened — when He was sent to bring good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to captives, to release prisoners, and to comfort those who mourn. Both the Pharisees — filled with their own righteousness and unable to acknowledge their poverty — and the scoffers who, careless of God's wrath, seek no remedy for their wrongs, are excluded from this. Such people are not weary or burdened, not brokenhearted, not captive or bound. There is a great difference between teaching a person to earn forgiveness of sins through complete and proper contrition — which the sinner can never achieve — and instructing him to hunger and thirst for God's mercy, so that through the recognition of his own misery, restlessness, weariness, and captivity, he is shown where to seek relief, rest, and freedom. The goal is to teach him, in humbling himself, to give glory to God.

On the subject of confession, there has always been fierce debate between the canon lawyers and the scholastic theologians. Some affirm that confession is commanded by a specific command

of God; others deny it and say it is commanded only by church law. In this dispute the theologians displayed remarkable shamelessness, corrupting and violently twisting every scripture passage they cited for their purpose. When they saw they could not get what they wanted that way, the more clever among them retreated to this argument: that confession was required by God's law in substance, but received its specific form from positive human law. This is like the most foolish lawyers who claim that legal citations come from God's law because it says: 'Adam, where are you?' And that exceptions likewise come from God's law because Adam answered as if by way of exception: 'The woman you gave me,' and so forth — while the specific form of citations and exceptions was given by civil law. But let us see what arguments they actually use to prove that this confession — formed or unformed — is God's command. They say: the Lord sent the lepers to the priests. But wait. Did He send them to confession? Who has ever heard that the Levitical priests were appointed to hear confessions? So they flee to allegories and say: the law of Moses commanded the priests to distinguish between one kind of leprosy and another; sin is a spiritual leprosy; therefore it is the priest's office to pronounce judgment on it. Before I answer, I ask this in passing: if this passage makes them judges of spiritual leprosy, why do they also claim authority over natural, physical leprosy? This is surely not treating Scripture seriously: the law gives the Levitical priests authority over leprosy, so we take that upon ourselves; sin is a spiritual leprosy, so we are therefore examiners of sin. My answer is this: since the priesthood has been removed, the law tied to it has been removed as well. All priesthoods have been transferred to Christ and fulfilled and completed in Him — so all the right and

honor of the priesthood belong to Him alone. If they are so fond of allegories, let them set Christ before them as the one priest and pile upon His judgment seat the full jurisdiction over all things. That we can readily accept. Furthermore, their allegory is very ill-suited — it treats as a ceremonial law something that is purely a civil regulation. Why then did Christ send the lepers to the priests? Because the priests would have criticized Him for breaking the law that required a person healed of leprosy to appear before the priest and be purified through sacrifice. So He commanded the cleansed lepers to fulfill what the law required. 'Go,' He said, 'and show yourselves to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded in the law, as a testimony to them.' Indeed, this miracle was meant to be a testimony to them — the priests had declared these men leprous, and now they would have to declare them healed. Were they not compelled, whether they wished it or not, to become witnesses to Christ's miracles? Christ left His miracle to them to examine; they could not deny it. But because they kept trifling with it, this work stands as a testimony against them. Similarly, in another place: 'This Gospel shall be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations.' And again: 'You will be brought before kings and governors as a testimony to them' — meaning that at God's judgment they may be more thoroughly convicted. If they prefer to follow Chrysostom: he also teaches that Christ did this for the Jews' sake, so that He would not be regarded as a lawbreaker. In such a clear matter I am embarrassed to need to cite any human authority — since Christ plainly shows that He was preserving the priests' legal rights intact, dealing with men who were sworn enemies of the Gospel and always ready to find fault, unless their mouths were stopped. So let the Roman Catholic priests keep that

privilege — let them openly ally with those who could only be silenced by force from speaking against Christ. For this has nothing to do with Christ's true ministers.

They bring their second argument from the same source — that is, from allegory. But allegories carry little weight in establishing doctrine. Let them carry what weight they may; I will show that I can use them more effectively for my side than they can for theirs. They say the Lord commanded His disciples, when Lazarus was raised, to unbind him and let him loose. First, this is simply false — there is no record anywhere that He said this to His disciples. It is far more likely He said it to the Jews standing nearby, so that the miracle would be all the more evident without any suspicion of fraud, and His power would appear all the greater — that without any touch, by His word alone He had raised the dead. My interpretation is this: that the Lord, in order to remove all false impressions from the Jews, commanded them to roll away the stone, to smell the stench, to see clear signs of death, and to witness the man rise by the power of His word alone — and to feel him living with their own hands. This is also Chrysostom's interpretation. But let us grant that He was speaking to the disciples. What do they gain from that? Only that the Lord gave His apostles the power to loose. But how much more fittingly could these things be applied through allegory — to say that by this sign the Lord meant to teach His people to loose those He had raised up. That is: not to call back to memory the sins He had forgotten; not to condemn as sinners those He had acquitted; not to reproach people with things He had forgiven; not to be harsh in punishment and easily offended where He is merciful and readily moved to spare. Truly nothing ought to

move us more readily to forgive than the example of the Judge who warns that He will be unrelenting toward those who are too harsh and ungentle. Let them go now and boast about their allegories.

Now they press closer when they fight — as they think — with explicit Scripture passages. Those who came to John's baptism confessed their sins, and James commands us to confess our sins to one another. No wonder those who were to be baptized confessed their sins, since John preached the baptism of repentance and baptized in water for repentance. Whom should he have baptized except those who confessed themselves sinners? Baptism is a sign of forgiveness of sins. Who should be admitted to that sign but sinners who acknowledge themselves as such? So they confessed their sins in order to be baptized. And there is good reason James commands us to confess to one another. But if they would notice what follows right after, they would understand that this passage also does little to support their case. 'Confess,' he says, 'your sins to one another, and pray for one another.' He joins mutual confession and mutual prayer together. If we must confess only to priests, then we must also pray only for priests. Indeed, what if it actually followed from James's words that only priests could confess? For when he says we should confess to one another, he is speaking only to those who are qualified to hear confessions. His word in Greek is *allelous* — mutually, interchangeably, by turns, or (if they prefer) reciprocally. But mutual confession requires people who are each qualified to hear the other's confession. Since they grant that privilege only to priests, then by the same logic only priests could do the confessing. Let us set aside such trifling and take the apostle's plain and simple meaning: that we should lay our weaknesses before one another to receive mutual

counsel, compassion, and comfort — and that, being aware of our brothers' weaknesses, we should pray for them to the Lord. Why then do they cite James against us, who so earnestly call for confession of God's mercy? But no one can confess God's mercy without first confessing his own misery. Indeed, we pronounce cursed anyone who does not confess himself a sinner before God, before His angels, before the church, and before all people. For the Lord has shut all people under sin, that every mouth might be stopped and all flesh humbled before God — so that He alone might be justified and exalted.

I am amazed that they dare to claim this confession they require is commanded by God's law, when its use — which we acknowledge is very ancient — was clearly optional in earlier times. Their own historical records show that no definite law or regulation about it existed before the time of Innocent III. If they had a more ancient law to appeal to, they would certainly have used it rather than resting their case on a decree of the Lateran Council — which makes them a laughingstock even to children. In other matters they freely produce forged decrees attributed to the most ancient councils, hoping to dazzle simple people with the appearance of antiquity. In this case it never occurred to them to do the same. So by their own evidence, it has not yet been three hundred years since Innocent III laid that burden on people and made confession a requirement. And beyond the question of timing, the sheer clumsiness of the wording undermines the law's credibility. For where these good fathers command every person of both sexes — male and female — to confess all their sins to their own priest once a year, sharp-witted critics cheerfully point out that this command covers only hermaphrodites, since it cannot technically refer to

someone who is either male or female alone. Since that time, an even grosser confusion has appeared among their scholars, who cannot agree on what 'his own priest' even means. Whatever all the Pope's hired talkers may prattle, we maintain two things: first, that Christ never authored this law compelling people to enumerate their sins; and second, that twelve hundred years passed from Christ's resurrection before any such law was made. This tyranny was first introduced at a time when all godliness and learning had been destroyed and the overseers of pastors had taken unlimited license upon themselves without accountability. There is clear testimony in the historical records and other ancient writers showing that this confession was a practical discipline established by bishops — not a law given by Christ or His apostles. I will cite just one example out of many, which will make this plain. Sozomenus reports that this bishops' regulation was carefully observed in all the western churches, especially at Rome — which shows it was not a universal ordinance binding on all churches. He also says that one priest was specially appointed to serve in this role — which thoroughly refutes the claim that the keys were given for this purpose to the entire priesthood equally. It was not the common duty of all priests, but the particular responsibility of one person chosen for it by the bishop. This is the person now called the Penitentiary in every cathedral church — the examiner of serious offenses and those whose punishment concerns public example. He then adds that the same practice was followed in Constantinople, until a certain woman, pretending to come for confession, was discovered to have used that cover for an immoral relationship with a deacon. Because of this, Nectarius — a man of notable holiness and learning who was bishop of that church — abolished the practice of con-

fession. Here let these critics prick up their ears. If auricular confession were a law of God, how could Nectarius dare to abolish and eliminate it? Will they accuse Nectarius — a holy man of God affirmed by the unanimous voice of the early fathers — as a heretic and schismatic? By the same reasoning they must condemn the church of Constantinople, in which Sozomenus confirms that the practice of confession was not merely interrupted for a time but discontinued right through his own memory. Indeed, let them condemn not only the church of Constantinople as apostate, but all the eastern churches as well — for they have all neglected this law which, if these men are right, is inviolable and binding on all Christians.

Chrysostom — who was also bishop of Constantinople — testifies so clearly and in so many places to this abolition that it is remarkable that anyone would dare to contradict him. 'Tell your sins,' he says, 'so that you may put them away. If you are ashamed to tell a person the sins you have committed, tell them daily in your soul. I do not say: confess them to a fellow servant who might reproach you. Tell them to God, who cares for you. Confess your sins on your bed, so that your conscience may daily recognize its wrongs.' And again: 'It is not necessary now to confess in the presence of witnesses. Let the examination of your sins be done in thought. Let this judgment have no witness. Let only God see you confessing.' And again: 'I do not bring you onto a stage before your fellow servants. I do not compel you to disclose your sins to people. Lay out your conscience before God. Show your wounds to the Lord, the best physician, and ask healing from Him. Show them to One who will reproach you with nothing, but will heal you most gently.' And again: 'Do not tell a man, lest he reproach you — for it

is not to a fellow servant that confession should be made, but to the Lord. Show your wounds to the Lord, who cares for you, who is both gentle and a physician.' He then brings in God speaking thus: 'I do not compel you to come into the middle of a stage and call many witnesses. Tell your sin to Me alone, privately, that I may heal your wound.' Are we to say that Chrysostom was being reckless when he wrote these things — that he would dare to free people's consciences from bonds laid on them by God's own law? Not at all. He simply did not require as a necessity what he did not understand to be commanded in God's Word.

To make the matter clearer and easier, I will faithfully set out what kind of confession God's Word actually teaches — and then describe their invented requirements, though not all of them (for who could drain such an infinite sea?), but at least those in which they summarize the essence of their private confession. I will not at length rehearse here how often the old Latin translator rendered the word 'confess' as 'praise' — something even uneducated people commonly know — except that it is useful to expose their arrogance in taking what was written about praising God and pressing it into service for their own tyrannical requirement. To prove that confession cheers the mind, they insert the psalm verse: 'In the voice of rejoicing and confession.' But if such sleight of hand is permitted, anything can be proved by anything. Since they have gone this far past all shame, let godly readers remember that by God's just judgment they have been given over to a depraved mind, which makes their presumption all the more detestable. But if we rest in Scripture's plain teaching, we will be safe from such deceptions. Scripture appoints one pattern for confession: since it is the Lord who forgives, forgets, and removes sins, we should confess

our sins to Him to obtain pardon. He is the physician — so let us show our diseases to Him. He is the One who is grieved and offended — so let us seek peace from Him. He knows hearts and is aware of all thoughts — so let us pour out our hearts before Him. He is the One who calls sinners — so let us not delay in coming to Him. 'I acknowledged my sin to You,' says David, 'and I did not hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord — and You forgave the guilt of my sin.' Such is David's model of confession. Furthermore, even those who find confession helpful should not be compelled by any commandment or drawn by any deception to reckon up all their sins — only as much as they themselves feel is needed to receive real benefit and comfort. Faithful pastors must not only leave this freedom to their congregations but also maintain it and defend it firmly, if they want tyranny kept out of their ministry and superstition away from the people.

Christ speaks of another kind of confession in Matthew: 'If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there and go first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.' In this way, charity that has been damaged by our fault is to be repaired by acknowledging our offense and asking pardon. This category also includes the confession of those who have sinned in a way that offends the whole church. For if Christ makes such a serious matter of a private offense against one person — barring from the holy mysteries all who have sinned against a brother until they have made proper amends — how much more reason is there for someone who has offended the church by a bad example to regain the church's favor by confessing the fault? In this way the

Corinthian was received back into fellowship once he submitted himself to correction. This form of confession was also practiced in the early church, as Cyprian mentions: 'They do penance for the proper time, and then come to confession, and by the laying on of hands by the bishop and the clergy they receive permission to take Communion.' Scripture knows of no other order or form of confessing, and it is not our place to bind consciences with new bonds — something Christ strictly forbids us to do. At the same time, I am so far from opposing the practice of the sheep presenting themselves to their shepherd when they intend to take the Lord's Supper that I would gladly see it observed everywhere. Those with a troubled conscience can receive singular benefit from it, and those who need to be admonished are thereby prepared to receive it — provided always that tyranny and superstition are absent.

In these three kinds of confession, the power of the keys has its proper place: when the whole church with solemn acknowledgment of its faults seeks pardon; when a private person who has caused widespread offense by some notable sin declares his repentance; or when someone who needs help with a troubled conscience discloses his weakness to the minister. The ways of removing offense differ, however, because though the peace of conscience is served by this practice, the primary goal is to remove hostility and bind people together in peace. But the use I have described should not be dismissed when it leads us more willingly to confess our sins. When the whole church stands as it were before God's judgment seat, confesses itself guilty, and has one refuge only — God's mercy — it is no small comfort to have Christ's ambassador present, charged with the ministry of reconciliation, from whom the congregation can hear absolution pronounced. Here the

usefulness of the keys is rightly commended, when this ministry is carried out faithfully and with the order and reverence it deserves. Likewise, when someone who had in a sense estranged himself from the church receives pardon and is restored to brotherly fellowship, how great a benefit it is that he understands himself to be forgiven by those to whom Christ said: 'Whatever sins you forgive on earth shall be forgiven in heaven.' Private absolution is no less effective or beneficial when it is sought by those who need special help for their weakness. It often happens that a person who hears the general promises directed to the whole congregation still remains in some doubt and cannot find peace, as if he had not yet obtained pardon. But if that same person discloses the secret wound of his heart to his pastor and hears the Gospel's words directed personally to him — 'Your sins are forgiven; take heart' — his mind is settled in assurance, and he is freed from the trembling that had tormented him. But when we speak of the keys, we must not dream of some power separate from the preaching of the Gospel. We will have occasion to treat this more fully elsewhere when we discuss the governance of the church. There we will see that all the power to bind and loose that Christ has given His church is tied to the Word. But this is most true in the ministry of the keys, whose entire force lies in this: that the grace of the Gospel is publicly and privately sealed in the hearts of believers by those whom the Lord has appointed — which can only be done through preaching.

But what do the Roman theologians say? They decree that every person of either sex, once they reach the age of reason, must confess all their sins at least once a year to their own priest — and that a sin is not forgiven unless the person has firmly resolved to

confess it. If they fail to act on that resolve when opportunity arises, the door to paradise is closed to them. They say the priest holds the power of the keys, with which he may bind and loose a sinner, because Christ's word is not empty: 'Whatever you bind,' and so forth. They fight vigorously among themselves about the nature of this power. Some say there is only one key in substance — the power to bind and loose — and that knowledge, while useful, is merely an accessory and not essentially connected to it. Others, seeing this as too unbridled a license, counted two keys: discernment and power. Still others, finding that even this moderation left too much room for priestly abuse, invented more keys: the authority to discern, which they use in passing judgment; power, which they exercise in carrying out the sentence; and knowledge, which stands by as a counselor. But they dare not simply explain this binding and loosing as forgiving and removing sins, because they hear the Lord declaring through the prophet: 'It is I, and I alone — it is I who put away your sins, O Israel.' So they say it is the priest's office to pronounce who is bound or loosed, and to declare whose sins are forgiven or retained — either through confession, when he absolves or retains sins, or through church discipline, when he excommunicates or readmits someone to the sacraments. Finally, when they realize they have not resolved the difficulty — since it can still be objected that their priests often bind or loose people undeservedly, and that such sentences are not therefore ratified in heaven — they retreat to their last refuge: Christ's promise must be understood with a qualification, namely that He will ratify at His judgment seat only those priestly sentences that have been justly pronounced according to what the person bound or loosed actually deserved. They also say that these keys were given by Christ to all

priests and are conferred by their bishops at ordination — but the free use of them belongs only to those exercising church offices, while excommunicated and suspended priests still possess the keys, though rusty and bound up. Even these men might seem modest and restrained compared to others who have forged new keys on a new anvil — keys they claim lock up the treasury of the church. Those keys we will examine in a later section where it is appropriate.

Now I will briefly answer each of these points in turn. For now I am not addressing the question of by what right they bind the souls of the faithful with their laws — we will consider that when the time is right. But where they burden people with the law of cataloguing all their sins; where they say sin is not forgiven unless a person has formed a firm intention to confess it; and where they claim no one can enter paradise if an opportunity for confession is neglected — this cannot be tolerated. Must every sin be catalogued? David, who had surely thought deeply about confessing his sins, still cried out: 'Who can discern his errors? Cleanse me from my hidden faults, O Lord.' And in another place: 'My iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.' He understood well the bottomless depth of our sins — how many kinds of wickedness there are, how many heads this Hydra bears, and how long a tail it drags behind it. So he did not attempt to compile a list of them. Instead, from the depths of his distress he cried to the Lord: 'I am overwhelmed, I am buried, I am choking — the gates of death have surrounded me. Stretch out Your hand and pull me from the deep pit where I am sinking and dying.' Who now would think of numbering his sins when David himself could find no end to them?

This system brutally tormented souls that had any genuine sense of God. First, they called themselves to account. Then they divided their sins into main categories, sub-categories, branches, and twigs according to the theologians' rules. Then they weighed their qualities, quantities, and circumstances. For a time it seemed they were making some progress. But the further they went, the more sky appeared on every side, the more open sea — no harbor, no safe anchorage. The more ground they had covered, the greater the mass of sins pressing into view, rising like mountains, with no hope of escape even after long wandering. So they remained stuck between the offering and the stone, and in the end nothing was found but despair. Then these cruel tormentors, to soothe the wounds they themselves had inflicted, applied a gentle plaster: every person should do what they could. But new anxieties rose up, and new torments assaulted these miserable souls: 'I have not spent enough time. I have not tried hard enough. I have passed over many things through carelessness, and forgetfulness born of carelessness is not excusable.' Then another plaster was applied to ease such pain: 'Repent of your negligence; if it is not completely careless, it will be forgiven.' But none of these remedies can close the wound. They are not true relief from the trouble but poisons coated with honey — so that the bitterness does not offend on the first taste but enters the gut before it is detected. So that terrible demand always calls to them and rings in their ears: 'Confess all your sins.' And this dread cannot be quieted except by certain comfort. Let readers consider how possible it is to account for everything done in an entire year and gather together every sin committed each day. Experience shows every person that when at evening he tries to reckon only the faults of that single day, his

memory is overwhelmed by the sheer number and variety of them. I am not speaking of gross, unfeeling hypocrites who think they have done enough if they have noted three or four major sins. I am speaking of genuine worshippers of God who, already overwhelmed by their own examination, also recall John's words: 'If our own heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart' — and so they tremble before that Judge whose knowledge far exceeds our own understanding.

A large part of the world found rest in such flatteries that diluted so deadly a poison — not because they believed God was truly satisfied, or because they themselves were truly satisfied, but the way a ship throws out an anchor in mid-sea to rest a moment from sailing, or the way a weary, fainting traveler lies down in the road. I will not labor long to prove this, since every person can be his own witness. I will state briefly what kind of law this was. First, it is simply impossible, and therefore it can do nothing but destroy, condemn, overwhelm, and plunge people into ruin and despair. Then, having led sinners away from a genuine sense of their sins, it makes them hypocrites — ignorant of God and themselves. For while they are wholly occupied with cataloguing their sins, they forget all along the hidden depths of vice, their concealed iniquities, and their inner filth — knowledge of which should have weighed most heavily on their minds. The true rule of confession was this: acknowledge that the bottomless depth of our evil is so great that it surpasses our understanding. We see the tax collector's confession follow this rule: 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner' — as if to say: 'I am, through and through, nothing but a sinner. I cannot grasp with my mind or express with my tongue the greatness of my sins. Let the bottomless depth of Your mercy swal-

low the bottomless depth of my sin.' But then you will ask: must not all our sins be confessed? Is no confession acceptable to God except one summed up in the two words 'I am a sinner'? Not at all. We must earnestly strive to pour out our heart before the Lord — not merely saying in a single word that we are sinners, but genuinely and honestly acknowledging ourselves to be such. We must consider with our whole heart how great and varied our filth of sin is: not merely that we are unclean, but what that uncleanness consists of, how great it is, and in how many ways we are unclean; not merely that we are debtors, but under what enormous debts and in how many ways we are burdened; not merely that we are wounded, but with how many and how deadly wounds. When the sinner has in this way poured himself out fully before God, he should earnestly and honestly recognize that there still remains more sin, and that the hidden depths of evil are so deep they cannot be fully uncovered. So he cries out with David: 'Who can discern his errors? Cleanse me, O Lord, from my hidden faults.' Now where they claim that sins are not forgiven without a firmly formed intention to confess, and that the gate of paradise is shut against anyone who neglects an available opportunity for confession — God forbid that we grant them that. There is no forgiveness of sins different from the forgiveness that has always existed. Those whom we read as receiving forgiveness from Christ's hand are not recorded as having confessed to any priest. Indeed they could not have, since at that time neither priests as confessors nor the practice of confession existed. And for many centuries afterward, this confession was unheard of — and sins were forgiven during all that time without any such condition. Rather than prolonging the argument over something uncertain, the plain Word of God — which

stands forever — settles it: 'When the sinner repents, I will no more remember all his iniquities.' Whoever dares add anything to this word is not binding sins but binding the mercy of God. When they say that no verdict can be given without first hearing the case, we have a ready answer: they presumptuously assume the role of judges — which no one in his right mind would grant them. It is remarkable that they so boldly build on principles that no sane person would accept. They boast that the office of binding and loosing is entrusted to them, as if it were a judicial authority combined with an inquisition. Their whole doctrine cries out that this authority was unknown to the apostles. Moreover it is not the priest, but the person seeking absolution, who must know with certainty whether the sinner is loosed — since the one hearing confession can never know whether the account given is complete and accurate. Absolution would therefore be valid only on the terms of the one being judged. Furthermore, the entire act of loosing rests on faith and repentance — two things hidden from human knowledge when judgment must be passed on another person. It follows that the certainty of binding and loosing is not subject to an earthly judge's verdict. The minister of the Word, when doing his duty, can only absolve conditionally. The words 'Whose sins you forgive,' and so forth, were spoken so that no one would doubt that the pardon promised by God's command and Word will be ratified in heaven.

It is no wonder then that we condemn auricular confession and desire to see it completely abolished — it is a practice so harmful and so destructive to the church in so many ways. But even if it were a neutral thing in itself, it has been of no use or benefit and has given rise to so many wickednesses, sacrileges, and errors —

who would not conclude it should be immediately abolished? They do list some supposed benefits, which they boast of as very useful, but these are either false or worthless. Their chief commendation is that the shame of confessing is itself a serious punishment, making the sinner more cautious in the future and causing him to punish himself and thereby forestall God's punishment. As if we do not humble a person sufficiently with shame when we call him before that highest judgment seat of heaven — that is, before God's own hearing. There may be some benefit in being restrained from sin by shame before one person — but it is a strange profit if we are not ashamed to have God as witness of our guilty conscience. And in fact even this claimed benefit is largely false. Nothing produces greater boldness or license for sin than when people, having made confession to a priest, think they can wipe their mouths and say, 'I did not do it.' Not only are they made bolder to sin throughout the year, but relying on the coming confession, they never sigh to God, they never return to themselves. They pile up sins all year until they disgorge everything at once. And when they have done so, they think themselves discharged of the burden — as if they have transferred judgment from God to the priest, and as if making the priest aware has caused God to forget. Furthermore, who greets the day of confession with joy? Who comes to it with a cheerful heart, rather than reluctantly and as if being dragged by the neck to prison? Unless perhaps it is the priests themselves, who cheerfully entertain one another with recitations of what they hear, as if swapping amusing stories. I will not waste much ink on the monstrous abuses that auricular confession is full of. I will say only this: if that holy man acted wisely in abolishing confession from his church — even from his congregation's memory — over a single

rumor of immorality, then we are given clear guidance about what must be done today, given the endless adulteries, incests, fornications, and depravities that have grown out of it.

When the confessors appeal to the power of the keys for this purpose and build upon it the pomp and power of their kingdom, as the saying goes — it is worth examining how far that argument actually reaches. 'Then were the keys given for no reason?' they say. 'Is it meaningless that Christ said: Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven? Are we making Christ's word void?' I answer: there was good reason for the keys to be given, as I have already shown and will make even plainer when I treat of excommunication. But what if I cut through everything they claim with a single sword — by saying that their sacrificing priests are not the successors or representatives of the apostles? That too must be treated elsewhere. But now they raise up the very argument they think is their strongest defense — and by it their whole structure can be demolished. For Christ did not give His apostles the power to bind and loose before He gave them the Holy Spirit. Therefore I say that no one has the power of the keys who has not first received the Holy Spirit. I deny that anyone can exercise the keys without the Holy Spirit going before him, teaching and directing him in what must be done. They glibly claim they have the Holy Spirit — but in practice they deny it, unless they wish to pretend (as they do pretend) that the Holy Spirit is some empty and worthless thing. But that pretense will not be believed. By this argument they are thoroughly undone — for whatever door they claim to hold the key to, anyone may always ask them whether they have the Holy Spirit, who is the true Judge and Governor of the keys. If they say they do, then they may be asked: can the Holy

Spirit err? They will not willingly say so outright, though their doctrine implies it in a roundabout way. It follows therefore that no priests have power of the keys who routinely and carelessly loose what the Lord would have bound, and bind what the Lord commanded to be loosed.

Seeing themselves exposed by the clearest evidence — that they indiscriminately bind and loose the worthy and unworthy alike — they are exercising a power without knowledge. And although they dare not deny that knowledge is necessary for its proper use, they still write that the power itself is given even to those who misuse it. But the power consists in this: 'Whatever you bind or loose on earth shall be bound or loosed in heaven.' Either Christ's promise must be a lie, or those who have this power truly bind and loose correctly. They cannot dodge the issue by saying Christ's words are limited according to the worthiness of the person being bound or loosed. We also acknowledge that no one can be bound or loosed except those who deserve to be. But the messengers of the Gospel and the church possess the Word by which they measure that worthiness. By this Word the Gospel's messengers may promise forgiveness of sins in Christ through faith to all people, and may pronounce condemnation on all who reject Christ. By this same Word the church declares that fornicators, adulterers, thieves, murderers, the greedy, and the unjust have no part in the kingdom of God, and binds them with the most certain bonds. By the same Word the church looses those it comforts when they repent. But what kind of power is it to not know what should be bound or loosed and to be unable to bind or loose without knowledge? Why then do they say they loose by delegated authority, when the loosing remains uncertain? What use is this imaginary power if it cannot be

exercised? I have already shown that there is either no use for it at all, or such an uncertain use that it amounts to nothing. They admit that a great number of priests do not use the keys rightly, and that power without proper use has no effect. But then who can assure me that the one who has just absolved me is a proper user of the keys? If he is not, his absolution amounts to saying: 'I do not know what should be bound or loosed in you, since I lack the right use of the keys — but if you deserve it, I loose you.' A layman could say as much — not to mention (which they could not bear to hear) a Turk or a devil. For it amounts to this: 'I do not have God's Word as the sure rule of loosing; I only have power given me to loose you, if your merits warrant it.' We see, then, what they meant when they defined the keys as the authority to discern and the power to execute — with knowledge as a counselor available for good use. Clearly they wanted to reign by their own will, freely, without God and without His Word.

If someone objects that the lawful ministers of Christ will be just as uncertain in their office — since absolution that depends on faith will always remain uncertain — and that sinners will therefore have no comfort or only cold comfort, since the minister is no competent judge of their faith and cannot be certain of their absolution: we have a ready answer. They say that no sins are forgiven by the priest except those he has personally heard confessed. So in their view, forgiveness depends on the priest's judgment — and if he does not wisely discern who deserves pardon, the whole act is void and meaningless. In short, the power they speak of is a jurisdiction combined with examination, to which pardon and absolution are attached. On this basis there is no solid ground — only a bottomless depth. For wherever a confession is incomplete, the

hope of pardon is crippled. And the priest himself remains in suspense, unable to know whether the sinner has faithfully recounted all his evil deeds. Furthermore, given the ignorance and incompetence of most priests, the majority are no more fitted for this task than a shoemaker is for plowing — and nearly all the rest should reasonably distrust themselves. This uncertainty and confusion in the Pope's system of absolution arises from their insisting that it be grounded in the person of the priest — and not only that, but also in his knowledge, so that he may judge only what has been presented, examined, and proved to him. If someone were to ask these learned doctors whether a sinner is reconciled to God when only some sins are forgiven, I do not see what they could answer. They would be compelled to admit that everything the priest pronounces about the forgiveness of the sins he has heard is worthless, as long as the other sins remain under condemnation. And as for the person confessing — how harmfully this anxious dependency ties down his conscience is clear enough: resting on the priest's discretion, as they call it, he cannot settle on any certainty through the Word of God. The doctrine we teach is free and clear from all these absurdities. For the absolution is conditional: the sinner must trust that God is merciful to him, sincerely seeking cleansing from sin in the sacrifice of Christ, and obeying the grace offered to him. So the one who, in the office of preacher, declares what God's Word has instructed him to declare cannot err. And the sinner may embrace a sure and clear absolution when that simple condition is stated — namely, receiving the grace of Christ — according to the Master's own general teaching in Matthew 9:29: 'Be it done to you according to your faith.' This truth has been wickedly despised in the papacy.

How foolishly they twist what Scripture says about the power of the keys I have promised to address elsewhere, and there will be a more fitting place for it when I treat of church government. But readers should note that what Christ says — partly about the preaching of the Gospel and partly about excommunication — is being wrongly twisted to apply to auricular, secret confession. So when they argue that the power of loosing was given to the apostles and that priests may use this power by forgiving sins confessed to them, it is clear they are starting from a false and foolish premise. The absolution that serves faith is nothing other than a witness of pardon drawn from the free promise of the Gospel. The other kind of confession — the one connected to church discipline — has nothing to do with secret sins. It concerns public example, so that the common offense caused by a grave sin can be removed. When they scrape together testimonies here and there to prove that it is not enough to confess sins to God alone or to a layman, but that a priest must hear the confession — their effort is shameless and something they ought to blush over. For when the early fathers advised sinners to open their hearts to their pastor, this cannot be interpreted as referring to the specific recitation that was not yet practiced at that time. Then Lombard and others like him — with their characteristic dishonesty — appear to have deliberately exploited forged documents under whose cover they could deceive the simple. They do honestly admit that since absolution always accompanies repentance, no bond properly remains when a person is truly repentant — even before he has confessed — and that the priest therefore does not so much forgive sins as pronounce and declare them already forgiven. Yet in the word 'declaring' they quietly smuggle in a serious error, substituting a cere-

mony for doctrine. And when they add that a person is absolved before the church who had already received pardon before God, they inappropriately apply to each individual what we have said is appointed for common discipline — dealing with the offense caused by a gross and public sin. But they then immediately corrupt this moderation by adding another kind of forgiveness involving the imposing of penalties and satisfaction — by which they presumptuously claim for their own sacramental acts the power to divide what God has everywhere promised us in full. For when God simply requires repentance and faith, this division and qualification amounts to robbing God. It is as if the priest, taking on the role of a civil judge, steps in as an intermediary before God and will not permit God in His free generosity to restore to favor the man who has lain prostrate before the judge's seat and been punished there.

The whole matter comes down to this: if they wish to make God the author of this counterfeit confession, their falsehood is exposed — as I have proven them to be false forgers in the few passages they cite. But since it is evident that this is a human-made law, I say it is both tyrannical and injurious to God — who, having bound people's consciences to His Word, wills them to be free from human bondage. When a requirement of this kind is imposed as necessary for obtaining pardon — a requirement God intended to be free — I say this is a sacrilege that cannot be tolerated, because nothing belongs more properly to God than the forgiveness of sins, on which our salvation depends. I have shown that this tyranny was first introduced when the world was plunged into wretched ignorance. I have also shown that it is a harmful law that either drives to despair those poor souls in whom any fear of God

remains, or where carelessness reigns, flatters them with empty reassurances and makes them spiritually duller. Finally I have shown that whatever softening measures they introduce serve no other purpose than to entangle, obscure, and corrupt pure doctrine, and to cover over ungodliness with a deceptive veneer.

They assign the third place in repentance to satisfaction — and everything they babble about it can be overthrown with a single word. They say it is not enough for a repentant person to stop doing evil and change his life for the better; he must also make satisfaction to God for what he has done. They claim there are many means by which we can redeem sins: weeping, fasting, offerings, and works of charity. By these we must win God's favor; by these we must pay our debt to God's righteousness; by these we must make amends for our offenses; by these we must earn pardon. For although in the largeness of His mercy God has forgiven our guilt, they say His justice retains the penalty — and that penalty must be redeemed with satisfactions. In the end, everything they say comes down to this: we obtain forgiveness of sins from God's mercy, but by means of our own works, through which the offense of our sins may be compensated and full satisfaction may be made to God's righteousness. Against these lies I set the free forgiveness of sins — nothing in all of Scripture is more plainly stated than this. First, what is forgiveness, if not a gift of sheer generosity? A creditor is not said to forgive when he issues a receipt confirming payment. He forgives when, without any payment, he voluntarily and freely cancels the debtor's bond. Second, why is the word 'freely' added, if not to rule out any notion of satisfaction? With what boldness, then, do they still set up their satisfactions, struck down as they are by such a powerful thunderbolt? Moreover, when the Lord cries

out through Isaiah — 'It is I, it is I, who blot out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins' — does He not openly declare that He draws the cause and ground of forgiveness from His own goodness alone? Furthermore, when all of Scripture testifies that forgiveness of sins is to be received in Christ's name, does that not exclude every other name? How then can they teach that it is received in the name of satisfactions? They cannot deny that this is what they are doing, even when they call satisfactions only helpful means. For when Scripture says 'in the name of Christ,' it means that we bring nothing and claim nothing of our own, but rest entirely on Christ's merit alone. As Paul says, where he affirms that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting their sins against them — he immediately shows the means and manner: because He who knew no sin was made sin for us.

Such is their perverseness: they say that forgiveness of sins and reconciliation are accomplished once and together when we are received into God's favor through Christ in baptism — but that after baptism we must rise again through satisfactions, and that Christ's blood profits us only insofar as it is distributed through the keys of the church. I am not speaking of something doubtful; they have exposed their own error in their plainest writings — not one or two of them, but the scholastic theologians as a whole. Their master, having confessed that Christ paid the penalty for sins on the cross according to Peter's teaching, immediately corrected himself with this qualification: that in baptism all temporal penalties of sins are released, but after baptism they are diminished through the help of penance, so that Christ's cross and our penance work together. But John says something very different: 'If anyone sins, we have an ad-

vocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins.' 'I am writing to you, children, because your sins have been forgiven for His name's sake.' He is speaking to the faithful. When he presents Christ as the propitiation for sins, he shows that there is no other satisfaction by which God's displeasure can be appeased. He does not say: 'God was once reconciled to you through Christ; now seek other means.' He presents Christ as a perpetual advocate, always restoring us by His intercession to the Father's favor — a perpetual propitiation, by which our sins are continually cleansed. For this remains forever true, as John the Baptist said: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' He takes them away — He and no other. That is to say: since He alone is the Lamb of God, He alone is also the offering for sin, He alone the propitiatory sacrifice, He alone the satisfaction. The right and power to forgive sins belongs properly to the Father, as distinguished from the Son. But Christ is placed in another rank — by taking on Himself the penalty we deserved, He has removed our guilt before God's judgment. It follows that we will have no share in the satisfaction made by Christ unless that honor remains entirely His — an honor that those who try to appease God with their own compensations are wrongfully taking for themselves.

Here two things must be kept in view: that Christ may retain His full and undivided honor, and that consciences, assured of the forgiveness of sins, may find peace with God. Isaiah says that the Father laid upon His Son the iniquity of us all, so that we might be healed by His wounds. Peter repeats this in other words, saying that Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross. Paul writes that sin was condemned in His flesh when He was made sin for us. That is: the power and curse of sin was destroyed in His flesh when

He was given as a sacrifice, upon which the entire weight of our sins was cast — with all their curse and condemnation, with God's dreadful judgment and the sentence of death. No room should be given to the view that after our first cleansing each person experiences the benefit of Christ's passion only in proportion to his own satisfactory repentance. Rather, whenever we fall, we are to be called back to Christ's satisfaction alone. Set before you now their harmful foolishness: for example, that God's grace works alone in the first forgiveness of sins, but that after a fall, our own works contribute to obtaining a second forgiveness. If this view holds, what happens to everything that has been ascribed to Christ alone? There is a world of difference between our iniquities being laid on Christ to be cleansed in Him, and our cleansing them by our own works; between Christ being the one who obtains mercy and our needing to make God merciful through our works. And when it comes to calming the conscience — what peace can a person's conscience find in hearing that his sins are redeemed by satisfactions? When will he ever know with certainty that he has satisfied enough? He will always doubt whether God is favorable to him; he will always be troubled and always trembling. Those who rest on trivial satisfactions hold God's judgment in too much contempt and have little sense of how great the gravity of sin is — as we will show in another place. But even if we were to grant that some sins can be redeemed by proper satisfaction, what will they do when they are weighed down by so many sins that a hundred lifetimes entirely devoted to the task could not suffice? Furthermore, all the passages affirming the forgiveness of sins are addressed not to beginners alone, but to the already regenerate children of God — those who have long been nurtured in the church's care. The mes-

sage Paul extols so highly — 'We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God' — is not directed to strangers, but to those who had already been regenerated. Yet Paul dismisses satisfactions entirely and sends them to the cross of Christ. Likewise, when he writes to the Colossians that Christ made peace through the blood of His cross — reconciling all things, whether on earth or in heaven — he does not limit this to the moment when we are first received into the church. He extends it to our entire life. This is plain from the passage itself, where he says that the faithful have redemption through the blood of Christ — that is, the forgiveness of sins. It would be unnecessary to pile up more passages, for they readily present themselves everywhere.

Here they flee to the refuge of their foolish distinction: that some sins are venial and some deadly; that deadly sins require serious satisfaction; and that venial sins are cleansed by easier remedies — saying the Lord's Prayer, receiving a sprinkling of holy water, receiving absolution at the mass. In this way they mock and trifle with God. Though the words 'venial' and 'deadly sin' are constantly on their lips, they have never been able to distinguish one from the other — except that they make ungodliness and uncleanness of heart into venial sins. But we, following Scripture as the rule of right and wrong, declare that the wages of sin is death, and that the soul that sins is worthy of death. The sins of the faithful are venial — not because they do not deserve death, but because by God's mercy there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because those sins are not imputed, because they have been taken away by pardon. I know how unjustly they slander this teaching of ours. They say it is the strange Stoic conclusion about the equality of sins. But they can easily be convicted by their own

words. I ask them: among the very sins they call deadly, do they not acknowledge that some are greater than others? It does not follow that sins are equal simply because they are all deadly together. When Scripture definitively states that the wages of sin is death, that obedience to the law is the way of life, and that transgression of the law brings death — they cannot escape that verdict. What end of satisfying will they ever find in such a mountain of sins? If the satisfaction for one day covers one sin, then while they are working on that one satisfaction, they are wrapping themselves in many new sins — since even the most righteous person does not pass a single day without falling many times. When they then set about making satisfaction for these new sins, they pile up an enormous number — indeed an uncountable one. When the hope of satisfying is thus cut off, what are they standing on? How dare they still speak of satisfying?

They try to wriggle free — but as the proverb says, the water still clings to them. They invent a distinction between guilt and penalty. They admit that God's mercy forgives the guilt, but insist that when the guilt is forgiven, the penalty remains — and that God's righteousness requires the penalty to be paid. Satisfactions, they say, properly belong to the release of that penalty. Good God, what a slippery sleight of hand this is! Now they admit that forgiveness of guilt lies freely open to people — though elsewhere they teach that it must be earned with prayers, weepings, and all kinds of preparations. But everything Scripture teaches about the forgiveness of sins stands directly against this distinction. Though I believe I have already more than sufficiently proven this, I will add some further testimonies to pin down these evasive opponents so firmly they cannot even curl the tip of their tail. This is the new

covenant the Lord has made with us in His Christ: that He will remember our iniquities no more. What He means by these words we learn from another prophet, where the Lord says: 'If the righteous turns from his righteousness, I will not remember any of his righteous deeds. If the wicked turns from his wickedness, I will not remember any of his iniquities.' When He says He will not remember their righteousness, it means He will not consider it when rewarding them. Therefore, not to remember sins means not to call them to punishment. The same idea is expressed elsewhere as: casting sin behind His back, wiping it away like a cloud, drowning it in the depths of the sea, not imputing it, and hiding it. By such expressions the Holy Spirit makes His meaning plain to us, if we are willing to listen and learn. Truly: if God punishes sins, He imputes them; if He takes vengeance, He remembers them; if He calls them to judgment, He has not hidden them; if He examines them, He has not cast them behind His back; if He looks upon them, He has not wiped them away like a cloud; if He sifts them, He has not cast them into the depths of the sea. Augustine expounds this plainly: 'If God has covered sins, He will not look upon them. If He will not look upon them, He will not note them. If He will not note them, He will not punish them — He will not acknowledge them but will rather pardon them. Why then did He say that sins were covered? That they should not be seen. What was meant by God seeing sins? That He punished them.' But let us hear also from another prophetic passage what conditions the Lord attaches to forgiving sins. 'If your sins are as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; if they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' And in Jeremiah we read: 'In that day the iniquity of Jacob shall be searched for, and it shall not be found; and the sins of

Judah shall not be — for I will pardon those I preserve.' Do you want a brief summary of what these words mean? Consider what is meant on the other side by these expressions: that the Lord ties up iniquities in a sack, gathers them into a bundle to store away, and engraves them with an iron stylus on a diamond stone. If these expressions mean (as is beyond doubt) that vengeance will be given as repayment, then it is equally beyond doubt that the opposite expressions affirm that the Lord remits all repayment of vengeance. Here I ask readers not to listen to my own interpretations, but only to allow God's Word to take its proper place.

What would Christ have done for us if we were still compelled to suffer pain for our sins? When we say that He bore all our sins in His body on the cross, we mean nothing other than that He suffered all the pain and punishment that our sins deserved. Isaiah has expressed this even more vividly: 'The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.' What is the punishment that brings peace, if not the pain due to sin — which we would have had to endure before we could be reconciled to God, had He not stepped into our place? You see it plainly: Christ suffered the pains of sin in order to deliver His own from those pains. Whenever Paul speaks of the redemption accomplished by Christ, he uses the Greek word *apolutrosis* — by which he means not merely redemption in the ordinary sense, but the actual price and satisfaction of redemption. In this sense he writes that Christ gave Himself as an *antilutron* — a ransom price paid on our behalf. As Augustine says: 'What propitiation is there before the Lord but sacrifice? And what sacrifice is there but the one offered for us in the death of Christ?' What was prescribed in the law of Moses for cleansing offenses provides us with a powerful argument. For the Lord there does not

prescribe this or that form of satisfying — He requires full recompense through sacrifices alone. And He does this while setting out every other ceremony of atonement with the most careful detail and order. Why then does He command that faults be repaid not through any human works at all, but only through sacrifices for satisfaction — unless it is His will to declare that there is only one kind of satisfaction by which His judgment is appeased? For the sacrifices the Israelites offered were not valued by the human act of offering, but by their truth — that is, by the one sacrifice of Christ alone. Hosea has expressed very well, in just a few words, what kind of payment the Lord accepts from us: 'Take away iniquity, O God' — there is the forgiveness of sins. 'And we will offer the calves of our lips' — there is the satisfaction. I know they will still slip away by distinguishing between eternal punishment and temporal punishments. But when they teach that temporal punishment is any punishment of body or soul that God inflicts, short of eternal death — this restriction helps them very little. For the passages cited above expressly mean that God receives us into favor on this condition: that in pardoning the guilt, He pardons all the punishment we deserved along with it. Whenever David or the other prophets ask pardon for sins, they also pray to be released from the punishment. Indeed the very sense of God's judgment drives them to do this. And whenever they promise mercy from the Lord, they almost always go on to speak expressly of the punishments and their forgiveness. When the Lord declares in Ezekiel that He will end the Babylonian exile — and that He will do so for His own sake, not for the Jews' sake — He sufficiently shows that

both forgiveness and release from punishment are free gifts. Finally, if through Christ we are delivered from the guilt of fault, the punishments that flow from it must also cease.

But since they also arm themselves with Scripture passages, let us see what kind of arguments they produce. They say: David, rebuked by the prophet Nathan for adultery and murder, received forgiveness of his sin — and yet was afterward punished by the death of the son born from that adultery. We are therefore taught to redeem with satisfactions those punishments that extend beyond the forgiveness of guilt. They add that Daniel advised Nebuchadnezzar to redeem his sins with acts of mercy. And Solomon writes that through righteousness and godliness iniquities are forgiven. And in another place, that love covers a multitude of sins — a statement Peter also confirms. Again, in Luke the Lord says of the sinful woman that many sins are forgiven her because she loved much. But they have always distorted and misunderstood God's ways. If they had noticed — as they should not have overlooked — that God's judgment comes in two kinds, they would have seen in David's punishment something very different from retributive vengeance. But because it matters greatly that we all understand what purpose God's chastisements serve when He corrects us for our sins, and how far they differ from the examples in which He pursues the wicked and reprobate in wrath — I think it useful to summarize this briefly. For the sake of clarity, let us call one kind of judgment the judgment of revenge, and the other the judgment of chastisement. When God punishes His enemies with the judgment of revenge, He acts in wrath against them: He confounds them, destroys them, and reduces them to nothing. So let us take retribution to be God's punishment when it is joined with

His indignation. His judgment of chastisement is not so severe: He is not acting in anger, He does not punish to destroy, He does not strike with lightning to kill. Therefore it is not properly punishment or retribution but correction and instruction. The one is the act of a judge; the other is the act of a father. When a judge punishes an offender, he focuses on the offense and punishes the very fault. When a father corrects his child with some firmness, he is not seeking revenge or inflicting punishment — he is teaching and making the child more careful going forward. Chrysostom uses a somewhat different comparison in one place, but it comes to the same point: 'A son is beaten, and a servant is also beaten — but the servant is punished as a slave because he has offended, while the son is chastised as a free person who needs correction. For one, the correction serves for benefit and improvement; for the other, it serves as a lash and punishment.'

To have the whole matter in a brief, ready summary, let this be the first of two distinctions. Wherever punishment is retributive, it displays God's curse and wrath — which He always withholds from the faithful. Chastisement, by contrast, is a blessing of God and bears witness to His love, as Scripture teaches. This distinction is sufficiently expressed throughout God's Word. Whatever afflictions the wicked suffer in this present life are like a foretaste of hell, giving them a distant view of their eternal condemnation. So far from being improved or benefited by such afflictions, they are through them being prepared for the cruel hell that finally awaits them. But the Lord disciplines His servants when He chastises them — He does not put them to death. Therefore they acknowledge that being struck by His rod was good for their genuine instruction. And just as we read everywhere that the saints endure

such punishments with a calm spirit, they have always prayed to escape the first kind of scourge. 'Discipline me, O Lord,' says Jeremiah, 'but in justice, not in Your anger, lest You reduce me to nothing' (Jeremiah 10:24). 'Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You, and on the kingdoms that do not call upon Your name.' And David says: 'O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, or discipline me in Your wrath' (Psalm 6:1; Psalm 38:1). It does not contradict this that the Lord is sometimes said to be angry with His own when He punishes their sins. As in Isaiah: 'I will praise You, O Lord, for although You were angry with me, Your anger turned away and You comforted me' (Isaiah 12:1). Again, Habakkuk: 'In wrath remember mercy' (Habakkuk 3:2). And Micah: 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him' (Micah 7:9). Here we are reminded that those who are justly punished gain nothing by murmuring against Him — but also that the faithful find relief from their sorrows by reflecting on God's purpose. In the same way it is said that He defiles His own inheritance — though we know He will never truly defile it. This is said not in respect of God's purpose in punishing, but of the intense feeling of grief experienced by those who bear any degree of His severity. But He not only presses His faithful with no small rigor — He sometimes wounds them so deeply that they feel they are not far from the condemnation of hell. In this way He shows them that they have deserved His wrath, so that they will loathe themselves for their sins, be moved with greater urgency to appease God, and make haste to seek pardon. But even in the very same act He displays a clearer testimony of His gracious kindness than of His wrath. For the covenant made with us in our true Solomon stands firm. He who cannot deceive has declared that it

shall never be nullified: 'If his children forsake My law and do not walk in My rules, if they violate My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not remove My steadfast love from him' (Psalm 89:30-33; 2 Samuel 7:14). To assure us of this love, He says that the rod with which He will correct Solomon's descendants will be 'of men' and 'stripes of the sons of men' — phrases that express moderation and gentleness, while also implying that those who feel God's hand against them in wrath are overwhelmed with crushing and deadly dread. How carefully He tends to this gentleness in chastising His Israel He shows in the prophet: 'I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction — but not in the manner of silver, or you would have been wholly consumed' (Isaiah 48:10). He teaches that chastisements serve to refine His people — but He also says that He uses them with such moderation that they are not consumed by them. And that is necessary. For the more a person reverently fears God and devotes himself to godliness, the more sensitive he is to bear God's displeasure. The reprobate, even when groaning under His scourges, do not consider the cause — they turn their backs on their own sins and on God's judgment. This carelessness produces hardness, or else their murmuring and kicking against Him and their raging against their Judge overwhelms them with mad fury. But when the faithful are warned by His correction, they immediately turn to examine their sins. Struck with dread and horror, they flee in humility to pray to Him for pardon. If the Lord did not soothe the sorrows with which these poor souls torment themselves, they would faint a hundred times even under small tokens of His displeasure.

Now let this be the second distinction: when the reprobate are struck by God's scourges, they have already begun in some sense to suffer the pains of His judgment. Though they will not escape unpunished for having disregarded such tokens of God's wrath, they are not punished for the purpose of bringing them to a better mind — only to prove to their own great harm that God is a Judge and Avenger. But children are beaten with rods not to punish them before God for their sins, but to bring them to improvement. Therefore chastisements have their eye on the future more than on the past. I would rather express this in Chrysostom's words than my own: 'For this God lays suffering upon us — not to punish our past sins, but to correct us against the future.' And Augustine says: 'What you suffer, what makes you grieve — this is medicine for you, not pain; chastisement, not damnation. Do not cast off the scourge, if you do not wish to be cast off from the inheritance. Know, brothers, that all this misery of humanity, while the world groans, is a medicinal sorrow, not a penal sentence.' I have cited these statements so that the way I have spoken above does not seem new or unusual to anyone. To this same end belong all the complaints full of indignation in which the Lord frequently reproaches the people for stubbornly despising His punishments. In Isaiah He says: 'Why should I strike you any more? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint; from the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness.' But since the prophets are full of such sayings, it is enough to have shown briefly that God punishes His church for no other purpose than to tame and amend it. So when He cast Saul out of the kingdom, He punished him in retribution. When He took from David his infant son, He corrected David for his amendment. Along these lines is Paul's statement to

be understood: 'When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.' That is: when we who are God's children are afflicted by our heavenly Father's hand, this is not punishment meant to destroy us, but only chastisement meant to instruct us. Augustine is plainly on our side here. He teaches that the pains by which God chastises people alike must be understood differently — because to the saints they are battles and exercises after the forgiveness of their sins, while to the reprobate they are pains of wickedness without forgiveness. In this connection he recalls how pains were laid on David and other godly people, and says that they served this purpose: that their godliness should be exercised and proven through such humbling. And where Isaiah says that the Jewish people had their iniquity forgiven because they had received full chastisement at the Lord's hand — this does not prove that pardon of sins depends on full payment of the penalty. It amounts to this: 'Because you have already suffered enough, and through the severity and extent of it have been worn away with long mourning and grief, the time has now come that, receiving the announcement of full mercy, your hearts should rejoice and find in Me your Father.' For there God took on the character of a father who relents even of his just severity when he has been compelled to correct his son sharply.

The faithful must be furnished with these thoughts in the bitterness of afflictions. Judgment begins at the house of the Lord, where His name is called upon. What would God's children do if they believed the severity they feel from God to be His retribution? For the one who, being struck by God's hand, imagines God to be a punishing judge, can only conceive of Him as angry and hostile — and detests God's very scourge as a curse and condemnation. In

the end, he can never be persuaded that God loves him if he thinks God is still intent on punishing him. Only the one who thinks God is angry with his sins, yet merciful and loving toward him personally, benefits under God's rod. Otherwise what must necessarily happen is what the prophet complained of: 'Your wrath, O God, has swept over me; Your terrors have overwhelmed me.' And what Moses writes: 'We have come to an end in Your wrath; we are brought to an end by Your anger. You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence. For all our days pass away under Your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.' By contrast, David speaks of God's fatherly chastisements to show that the faithful are helped by them rather than crushed: 'Blessed is the man whom You discipline, O Lord, and whom You teach out of Your law, to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.' It is a hard temptation when God seems to spare unbelievers and wink at their faults while appearing more severe toward His own. Therefore He gave His people a reason for comfort in the instruction of the law, by which they learn that being called back to the right path is a provision for their salvation — while the wicked are carried headlong in their errors, whose end is the pit. And it makes no difference whether the punishment is eternal or temporary. War, famine, pestilence, and sickness are just as much God's curses as eternal death when they are laid upon people as instruments of the Lord's wrath and vengeance against the reprobate.

I think everyone can now see where the Lord's chastisement of David was aimed: it was instruction, showing that God is gravely displeased with murder and adultery — as He made plain by His great anger toward even His beloved and faithful servant — and

teaching David never to be so bold as to repeat such a deed. It was not a penalty by which David was to make a certain payment to God. The same must be said about the other correction in which the Lord punished His people with a severe plague for the disobedience David had fallen into by counting the people. God freely forgave David the guilt of his sin. But because it served both the public example of all generations and David's own humbling that so grave an offense should not go without visible consequence, He chastised him sharply with His rod. We ought also to keep this purpose in view when considering the universal curse on humanity. After we obtain pardon, we still suffer the miseries laid on our first parent as a penalty for sin. Through these trials we are reminded how gravely God is displeased with the transgression of His law — so that, being cast down and humbled by the awareness of our own miserable condition, we may more earnestly long for true blessedness. But the person who thinks that the calamities of this present life are laid upon us as payment for the guilt of sin is profoundly mistaken. I believe that was also Chrysostom's meaning when he wrote: 'If God therefore lays penalties upon us to call us, persisting in evil, to repentance, then once repentance is shown the penalty is superfluous.' Therefore, as He knows it to be useful for each person's character, He deals with one person more roughly and with another more tenderly. So when He intends to teach that He is not without limit in exacting punishment, He reproaches the hard-hearted and stubborn people for continuing to sin even while under the rod. In this sense He complains that Ephraim was like a half-baked loaf — scorched on one side and raw on the other — because the corrections did not reach their minds, so that the people might have their vices driven out and be

made ready to receive pardon. Whoever speaks this way shows that as soon as a person repents, God will immediately be moved to relent — and that He is driven to severity in chastising faults by our own stubbornness, which should have been replaced with willing amendment. Yet since we are all so hard and dull that we universally need chastisement, God in His wisdom as our Father has seen fit to exercise all without exception with a shared scourge throughout their lives. But it is remarkable that they fix their eyes so narrowly on David's one example while not being moved by the many examples in which they could see free forgiveness of sins. We read that the tax collector left the temple justified. No penalty followed. Peter received pardon for his offense. His tears we read about, says Ambrose — his satisfaction we do not read about. And the paralyzed man heard these words: 'Rise, your sins are forgiven you.' No penalty was imposed on him. All the accounts of absolution recorded in Scripture are presented as freely given. From this large number of examples a general rule should have been drawn — not from that one special case that contains its own particular circumstances.

When Daniel exhorted Nebuchadnezzar to redeem his sins with righteousness and his iniquities with mercy to the poor, he did not mean that righteousness and mercy are satisfying appeasements of God that redeem penalties — God forbid that there should ever be any redemption except the blood of Christ alone. Rather, Daniel uses the word 'redeeming' with reference to people rather than to God. He was saying: 'O king, you have governed with injustice and violence, you have crushed the humble, you have plundered the poor, you have treated your people harshly and wrongfully. For your unjust exactions, your violence and oppres-

sion — now show them mercy and justice.' Similarly, Solomon says that love covers a multitude of sins — but before men, not before God. For the full verse reads: 'Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.' Following his usual pattern of contrasting opposites, Solomon is comparing the evils that grow from hatred with the fruits of love: those who hate each other bite, bark at, reproach, and slander one another, turning everything to the worst. But those who love each other overlook many things, look the other way at many things, and forgive many things — not because they approve of one another's faults, but because they bear with them and help one another through gentle correction rather than wounding one another with reproach. There is no doubt that Peter cites this verse in the same sense — unless we are willing to accuse him of distorting and wrongfully twisting Scripture. When he teaches that sin is purged by mercifulness and generosity, he does not mean that compensation is thereby made for sin before God, so that God is appeased by such satisfaction and releases a penalty He would otherwise have imposed. Rather, in the customary manner of Scripture, he declares that those who turn away from their former vices and iniquities and turn to God in godliness and truth will find Him merciful. It is as if he were saying that God's wrath ceases and His judgment rests when we cease from our evil ways. He is not describing the cause of pardon but the manner of true conversion. This is similar to the way the prophets frequently declare that hypocrites vainly trouble God with invented ceremonies in place of repentance — for it is uprightness of life and the duties of love that please Him. Likewise the author of the letter to the Hebrews, commending generosity and kindness, teaches that such sacrifices please God. And when Christ, rebuking the Pharisees for

attending only to the washing of cups while neglecting the cleanness of the heart, commanded them to give alms so that all might be clean — He was not urging them to make satisfaction, but only teaching what kind of cleanness pleases God. We have treated this type of expression elsewhere.

As for the passage in Luke, no one who has read the parable the Lord recited there with sound judgment will raise a dispute with us about it. The Pharisee thought to himself that the Lord did not know the woman He had so readily received into His presence. He assumed Christ would not have received her if He had known what a sinner she was. From this he concluded that Christ could not be a prophet — otherwise He would have seen through her. To show that she was not a sinner, since her sins had already been forgiven, the Lord told this parable. Two debtors owed money to the same creditor: one owed fifty, the other five hundred. Both had their debts forgiven. Which one would love him more? The Pharisee answered: the one forgiven more. The Lord replied: understand from this that this woman's sins are forgiven her, because she loved much. In these words — as you can see — He makes her love not the cause but the proof of her forgiveness. The comparison is drawn from the debtor who was forgiven five hundred: the Lord does not say that the debt was forgiven because he loved much, but that he loved much because it was forgiven. The parable must be applied in this way: 'You think this woman is a sinner. But you should know she is not — for her sins have been forgiven. And that her sins have been forgiven, her love should prove to you, since by it she is giving thanks for the benefit received.' It is an argument drawn from the effect that follows, in which something is proved by the signs that come after it. By what means she obtained

forgiveness the Lord openly declares: 'Your faith,' He says, 'has saved you.' Therefore we obtain forgiveness by faith; by love we give thanks and testify to the Lord's generosity.

As for what is commonly found in the books of the early writers about satisfaction, it moves me very little. I see that many of them — I will speak plainly — indeed nearly all of those whose writings survive have either erred on this point or spoken on it too harshly and obscurely. But I will not grant that they were so untrained and unskilled as to have written these things in the sense that the modern satisfactionists read into them. Chrysostom writes in one place: 'Where mercy is sought, examination ceases; where mercy is asked, judgment is not strict; where mercy is pleaded, there is no room for punishment; where mercy is present, there is no inquisition. Where mercy is present, the answer is pardon.' However these words may be twisted, they can never be made to agree with the scholastic theologians' doctrine. In the book of Ecclesiastical Doctrines, attributed to Augustine, it is written: 'Satisfaction for repentance is to cut off the causes of sins and not to allow entry to their suggestions.' This shows that even at that time the doctrine of satisfaction as a payment for sins already committed was being set aside — since they referred all satisfaction to watchfulness in avoiding sins in the future. I will not cite what Chrysostom says elsewhere — that God requires nothing of us except that we confess our sins to Him with tears — since such statements are found frequently in his writings and others'. Augustine in some places does call works of mercy remedies for obtaining forgiveness of sins. But so that no one should stumble over that expression, he himself corrects it in another place: 'The flesh of Christ — the true and only sacrifice for sins — covers not only those sins wholly put

away in baptism, but also those that afterward creep in through weakness, for which the whole church prays daily: Forgive us our trespasses. And they are forgiven by that singular sacrifice.'

For the most part the early writers called satisfaction not a repayment owed to God, but a public declaration by which those who had been excommunicated, when seeking readmission to fellowship, would assure the church of their repentance. Certain fastings and other practices were prescribed for repentant persons, by which they could demonstrate to others that they were truly and sincerely weary of their former life — or rather, to blot out the memory of their former conduct. And so they were said to make satisfaction not to God but to the church. Augustine also expresses this in his *Enchiridion* to Laurence: 'From that ancient custom the confessions and satisfactions in use today took their beginning.' These are truly poisonous offspring, through which there remains not even a shadow of the better original form. I know the early writers sometimes speak harshly on this subject, and as I just said, I do not deny that perhaps they erred in it. But what was sprinkled with only a few spots, once handled by these men's unwashed hands, is left thoroughly defiled. And if we must contend on the authority of the early writers — good God, what kind of early writers do they put before us? A large part of what Peter Lombard, their champion, has stitched into his patchwork *Sentences* was cobbled together from the tasteless nonsense of certain monks that circulates under the names of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom. On this particular question he draws almost everything from a book called Augustine's *On Repentance* — a work foolishly cobbled together, mixing good and bad, by some compiler. It bears Augustine's name, but it is the kind of book that any

moderately educated person would refuse to acknowledge as his. But I will not examine their foolishness more narrowly than this — let the readers forgive me, for I want to spare them the tedium. It would not be very laborious for me, and yet would be quite satisfying, to expose to their well-deserved shame the things they have so long boasted of as deep mysteries. But since my purpose is to teach faithfully and usefully, I pass them by.

THE FIFTE CHAPTER. ¶ OF THE SUP- PLIYNGES WHICHE THEY ADDE TO SATISFACTIONS, AS PARDONS AND PURGATORY.



Out of this doctrine of satisfactions flows the doctrine of indulgences or pardons. They say that whatever our own power lacks in making satisfaction is supplied by these pardons. They run so far into madness that they define indulgences as the distribution of the merits of Christ and the martyrs, which the Pope dispenses through his bulls. Though they need treatment for their frenzied minds more than they need arguments in response — and it is hardly worth the trouble to refute such trifling errors that have already been battered by many arguments and are on their own collapsing into decayed old age — yet a brief refutation will be useful to some who do not know them, so I will not pass over it entirely. As for the fact that indulgences have so long stood unchallenged and gone unpunished, being peddled with such outrageous and frenzied licentiousness: this may teach us in what a dark night of errors people in certain past ages were plunged. They saw themselves openly and shamelessly mocked by the Pope and his indulgence-sellers; they saw profitable markets being made of

the salvation of their souls; they saw the price of salvation set at a few coins, with nothing given freely; they saw through this cover that their offerings were being filthily spent on brothels, pimps, and banquets; they saw that the loudest promoters of indulgences were their greatest despisers; they saw this monster daily spreading through the world with growing licentiousness and excess, with no end in sight — new lead seals arriving daily and new money being collected. Yet they received indulgences with reverence, they worshiped them and bought them. Those among them who saw a little more clearly still thought them to be pious frauds by which people might be tricked into some benefit. In the end, as the world allowed itself to become somewhat wiser, indulgences grew cold, and little by little became frozen, until they vanished away entirely.

But since many who see the filthy games, the deceits, thefts, and robberies by which the indulgence-sellers have mocked and cheated us still do not see the very fountain of ungodliness from which they spring, it is worth showing not only what kind of thing indulgences are, but what they actually are when all the disguises are stripped away. They call the treasure of the church the merits of Christ and of the holy apostles and martyrs. The chief custody of this storehouse — as I have already mentioned — they claim was entrusted to the bishop of Rome, so that he should have the distribution of such great gifts, dispensing them either himself or granting jurisdiction to others to distribute them. From this come from the Pope sometimes full pardons and sometimes pardons for certain years; from the Cardinals, pardons for a hundred days; from the bishops, pardons for forty days. But in plain description, they are the profaning of Christ's blood, a mockery of Satan, designed to lead the Christian people away from God's grace, away from the

life that is in Christ, and to turn them from the true way of salvation. For how could Christ's blood be more shamefully profaned than when it is denied to be sufficient for the forgiveness of sins, for reconciliation and satisfaction — as if it were withered and wasted and must be supplemented from another source? 'The law and all the prophets,' says Peter, 'bear witness of Christ, that through Him forgiveness of sins is to be received' (Acts 10:43). Pardons grant remission of sins through Peter, Paul, and the martyrs. 'The blood of Christ cleanses us from sin,' says John (1 John 1:7). Pardons make the blood of martyrs the washing away of sins. 'Christ,' says Paul, 'who knew no sin was made sin for us — that is, the satisfaction for sin — so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5:21). Pardons place the satisfaction for sins in the blood of martyrs. Paul cried out and testified to the Corinthians that only Christ was crucified and died for them (1 Corinthians 1:13). Pardons declare that Paul and others died for us. In another place Paul says that Christ purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). Pardons assign another purchase price in the blood of martyrs. The apostle says that Christ by one offering perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14). Pardons cry out to the contrary — that sanctification is perfected by the martyrs, without whom it would be insufficient. John says that all the saints washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). Pardons teach people to wash their robes in the blood of saints.

Leo, bishop of Rome, writes admirably against these sacrileges in his letter to the Palestinians. 'Although,' he says, 'the death of many saints has been precious in the sight of the Lord, yet the killing of no innocent man has been a propitiation for the world.

The righteous received crowns; they did not bestow them. The courage of the faithful produced examples of patience, not gifts of righteousness. For their deaths were each singular to themselves, and none of them by his own end paid another's debt — for there is one Lord Christ, in whom all are crucified, all are dead, buried, and raised again.' These words were so worth remembering that he repeated them in another place. Nothing could be stated more plainly to destroy this wicked doctrine. Augustine speaks no less aptly to the same effect: 'Though we brothers die for brothers, yet no martyr's blood is shed for the forgiveness of sins. That is what Christ did for us — and He did not do it in order that we should imitate Him in this, but that we should have cause to rejoice in it.' And again in another place: 'Just as only the Son of God was made the Son of man, in order to make us with Him sons of God — so He alone bore for us punishment without evil deserving, that through Him we might without any good deserving of our own receive a grace not owed to us.' Truly, although their entire doctrine is stitched together from horrible sacrileges and blasphemies, this one is more monstrous than all the rest. Let them recall whether these are not their own decrees: that the martyrs, through their deaths, did more for God and deserved more than was needed for themselves; that they had such a surplus of merit left over that it overflowed to benefit others; and therefore, lest such great goodness go to waste, their blood is mingled with Christ's blood, and from both is made the treasury of the church for the remission and satisfaction of sins. And that Paul's words are to be taken in this sense: 'I complete in my body what is lacking in Christ's sufferings for His body, which is the church.' What is this but to leave Christ only the name, while otherwise reducing Him to a common minor

saint who can barely be distinguished from the rest? He alone, He alone, should have been preached, He alone set forth, He alone named, He alone looked to, when the obtaining of forgiveness, satisfaction, and sanctification are in view. But let us hear their truncated arguments: 'Lest the blood of the martyrs should be shed in vain, let it be applied to the common benefit of the church.' Is that so? Was it no profit to glorify God by their deaths? To confirm His truth with their blood? By despising this present life, to testify that they sought a better one? By their steadfastness to strengthen the faith of the church and overcome the obstinacy of her enemies? But this is really what they mean: they acknowledge no profit in the martyrs' deaths if Christ alone is the propitiation, if He alone died for our sins, if He alone was offered up for our redemption. So, they say, Peter and Paul could have obtained the crown of victory even if they had died in their beds. Since they fought even to the shedding of their blood, it would not suit God's justice to leave that sacrifice barren and fruitless. As if God did not know how to increase His servants' glory according to the measure of His gifts. But the church receives ample common benefit when it is encouraged by their triumphs to a zealous desire to fight the same battle.

But how maliciously they twist the passage of Paul where he says that he supplies in his body what is lacking in Christ's sufferings! Paul does not refer this lacking or supplying to the work of redemption, satisfaction, and atonement. He refers it to those afflictions with which all the members of Christ — that is, all the faithful — must be exercised as long as they remain in this flesh. He is saying that there remains of Christ's sufferings this: that He daily suffers in His members the same things He once suffered in Himself. Christ honors us so greatly as to count and reckon our af-

flictions as His own. When Paul added the words 'for the church,' he did not mean for the redemption, reconciliation, or satisfaction of the church, but for its edification and benefit. As in another place he says that he endures all things for the sake of the elect, so that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. And he wrote to the Corinthians that he suffered all his troubles for their comfort and salvation. And immediately in that same place he explains himself further, saying he was made a minister of the church — not for redemption, but according to the commission given to him to preach the Gospel of Christ. If they want another interpreter, let them hear Augustine: 'The sufferings of Christ are in Christ alone as the head, and in both Christ and the church as the whole body. Therefore Paul, being one member, says: I supply in my body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. So if you who hear this are a member of Christ, whatever you suffer at the hands of those who are not members of Christ — that was what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ.' But the purpose to which the apostles' sufferings on behalf of Christ's church tend, Augustine explains in another place: 'Christ is for me a door to you, because you are the sheep of Christ, purchased with His blood. Acknowledge your price — not paid by me, but proclaimed by me.' He then adds: 'As He gave His life, so we ought to give our lives for our brothers, to build up peace and strengthen faith.' Those are Augustine's words. But God forbid that Paul should have thought anything was lacking in Christ's sufferings with respect to the full measure of righteousness, salvation, and life — or that he intended to add anything to them. He who so plainly and honorably declares that the abundance of grace poured out by Christ far surpassed all the power of sin! By that grace alone all the saints

have been saved — not by the merit of their own life or death, as Peter expressly testified. Anyone who would place the worthiness of any saint anywhere other than in God's mercy alone is slandering both God and Christ. But why do I linger on this as if it were still a doubtful matter, when the mere exposure of such monstrous errors is sufficient refutation of them? Now, to pass over such abominations — who taught the Pope to enclose the grace of Jesus Christ in lead and parchment, when the Lord willed it to be distributed through the word of the Gospel? Either the Gospel of God is false, or their pardons are false. For that Christ is offered to us in the Gospel — with all the fullness of heavenly benefits, all His merits, all His righteousness, wisdom, and grace, without any reservation — Paul testifies where he says that the word of reconciliation was given to ministers, so that they might use this form of message, as if Christ were appealing through them: 'We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.' And the faithful know how great a treasure is this common fellowship with Christ, which — as the same apostle testifies — is offered to be enjoyed in the Gospel. Pardons, by contrast, draw out a small portion of grace from the Pope's storehouse and fasten it to lead, parchment, and a particular place — severing it from the Word of God. If someone asks where this abuse began, it seems to have arisen from the fact that when penitents in earlier times were burdened with satisfactions so severe that not all could bear them, those who felt crushed by their imposed penance asked the church for relief. The mitigation that was granted to such persons was called an indulgence or pardon. But when they shifted satisfactions from the church to God — saying

they were payments by which people could buy themselves out of God's judgment — they also drew these indulgences along with them, making them propitiatory remedies to deliver people from deserved punishments. As for the blasphemers whose doctrine we have described, they forged their claims so shamelessly that they cannot maintain them with even a pretense of support.

Now let them trouble us no longer with their purgatory — it has already been cut down, hewn apart, and demolished to its foundations by this same axe. I do not agree with those who think it best to say nothing on this point at all, on the grounds that great controversy arises from purgatory while little edification results. I would also consider such trifles worth passing over with a light touch, if they did not treat them as weighty matters. But since purgatory is built out of many blasphemies, is daily propped up with new ones, and gives rise to many serious offenses — it cannot simply be ignored. Perhaps it could have been overlooked for a time that it was invented by bold and reckless presumption without the Word of God; that it was believed through some revelations forged by Satan's craft; and that certain Scripture passages were foolishly twisted to support it. The Lord does not permit human presumptuousness to break into the secret places of His judgments, and He has strictly forbidden people to inquire of the dead for truth while neglecting His Word, and He does not allow His Word to be so irreverently defiled. But let us grant that all those things might have been tolerated for a while as matters of no great consequence. When the cleansing of sins is sought anywhere other than in the blood of Christ, when satisfaction is assigned to anything else — then it is most dangerous to stay silent. We must therefore cry out, not only with vehement voice but with every ounce of our strength:

that purgatory is a damnable invention of Satan; that it makes void the cross of Christ; that it lays an intolerable slander on God's mercy; and that it weakens and overthrows our faith. For what else is purgatory in their system, but the satisfaction that departed souls pay after death? Therefore, once the doctrine of satisfaction is overthrown, purgatory is immediately demolished at its very roots. But if our earlier discussion has made it abundantly clear that Christ's blood is the only satisfaction, propitiatory sacrifice, and cleansing for the sins of the faithful — what remains but that purgatory is a sheer and horrible blasphemy against Christ? I pass over the robberies of God by which it is daily defended, the offenses it breeds in religion, and the countless other evils we see flowing from the same spring of ungodliness.

It is useful to wrest out of their hands the Scripture passages they have falsely and wrongfully seized upon. They say: when the Lord declares that the sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this world or in the world to come, He implies that some sins are forgiven in the world to come. But who does not see that the Lord is there speaking about the guilt of sin? And if so, what does that have to do with their purgatory? For in their own view, purgatory is where the punishment is suffered for sins whose guilt they admit is forgiven in this present life. But so they cannot keep raising objections, here is an even plainer solution. When the Lord intended to cut off all hope of pardon from such heinous wickedness, He thought it insufficient merely to say it would never be forgiven. To emphasize it further, He used a division encompassing both the judgment that every person's conscience experiences in this life and the final judgment that will be openly pronounced at the resurrection — as if to say: 'Beware of malicious rebellion, as of

the most immediate condemnation. For the person who deliberately sets out to extinguish the light of the Holy Spirit will obtain no pardon — neither in this life, which is given to sinners for their conversion, nor on the last day, when the angels of God will separate the sheep from the goats and the kingdom of heaven will be cleansed of all offenses.' Then they bring forward the parable from Matthew: 'Settle with your opponent quickly, lest he hand you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison, from which you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.' If in this passage the judge represents God, the opposing plaintiff represents the devil, the officer represents an angel, and the prison represents purgatory — I will gladly yield to them. But if it is obvious to everyone that Christ was showing how many dangers and troubles people bring on themselves by stubbornly insisting on the letter of the law rather than dealing in fairness and equity — in order to urge His disciples all the more earnestly toward fair settlement — then where in this passage is purgatory to be found?

They draw an argument from Paul's statement that at the name of Christ every knee will bow — in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. They take it as established that 'under the earth' cannot refer to those condemned to eternal damnation. Therefore, they conclude, it must refer to souls suffering pain in purgatory. This reasoning would not be entirely bad if Paul meant bowing the knee to signify true, heartfelt worship. But since Paul is only teaching that dominion has been given to Christ, by which all creatures are to be brought into submission, what prevents us from understanding 'under the earth' as referring to the devils — who will be brought before God's judgment to acknowledge Him as their judge with

fear and trembling? Paul himself explains this same prophecy in another place: 'All will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me.' As for the passage in Revelation — 'I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, all that is in them, saying to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb: Blessing and honor and glory and power, forever and ever' — I can easily grant that passage. But what creatures do they suppose are described here? It is entirely clear that the passage includes creatures without reason and without feeling. This affirms nothing other than that all parts of creation, from the highest summit of the heavens to the very center of the earth, declare in their own way the glory of their Creator. As for what they cite from the history of the Maccabees, I will not dignify it with a response, lest I appear to count that work among the holy books. But, they say, Augustine received it as canonical. Yet with what confidence did he receive it? He says: 'The Jews do not regard the book of Maccabees as they do the law, the prophets, and the psalms, of which the Lord Himself bore witness, saying: Everything written about Me in the law, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled. But the church has received it profitably, if it is read or heard soberly.' And Jerome states plainly, without hesitation, that it carries no authority for establishing doctrine. And it is clear from the old work entitled under Cyprian's name concerning the exposition of the Creed that it held no place at all in the early church. But why do I press this point? As if the author himself does not show clearly enough how much credit he deserves — since at the end he asks pardon in case he has said anything that was not right. Truly, anyone who confesses his own writings may need pardon is plainly saying they

are not the oracles of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the godliness of Judas Maccabeus is praised for no other reason than that he had a firm hope of the final resurrection when he sent an offering for the dead to Jerusalem. And the writer of that history does not present what Judas did as a price of redemption, but as a means by which those who died for their country and religion might share in eternal life with the other faithful. This act was indeed not without some superstition and misguided zeal. But those who extend a law-age sacrifice all the way to our day are more than foolish — for we know that all such practices were brought to an end by the coming of Christ.

But they claim to have an invincible stronghold in Paul that cannot be so easily battered down. 'If anyone builds on this foundation — gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.' 'What fire,' they ask, 'can that be, but the fire of purgatory, by which the filth of sin is cleansed away so that we may enter pure into the kingdom of God?' Most of the early writers understood this to mean a different kind of fire — that is, tribulation and the cross, by which the Lord tries His own so that they do not rest in the filthiness of the flesh. That interpretation is far more reasonable than inventing purgatory. Yet I do not agree with those writers either, because I believe I have arrived at a certain and much plainer understanding of this passage. But before I state it, I want them to answer: must the apostles and all the saints have passed through this fire of purgatory? I know they will say no — for it

would be far too incongruous that those whose merits they imagine overflow in abundance to all the members of the church should themselves have needed purging. But the apostle says otherwise. He does not say that the work of some will be tested, but the work of all. This is not my own argument but Augustine's — who uses it in exactly this way to refute that interpretation. And there is a further absurdity: Paul does not say they will pass through the fire for all their works — but that if they have faithfully built the church, they will receive their reward when their work is tested by fire. We see first that the apostle is using a metaphor when he calls doctrines invented by human minds 'wood, hay, and straw.' The metaphor has a clear meaning: just as wood placed in fire quickly consumes and is destroyed, so such doctrines cannot survive when subjected to examination. Now it is clear to everyone that this kind of testing comes from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to follow the natural meaning of his metaphor and match all the parts in proper relation, he calls the testing of the Holy Spirit 'fire.' Just as gold and silver placed in fire show themselves to be genuine and pure the more closely they are tested — so the Lord's truth receives all the greater confirmation of its credibility the more closely it is examined by spiritual scrutiny. Just as hay, wood, and straw placed in fire quickly burn up and are destroyed — so the inventions of people that are not grounded in God's Word cannot bear the testing of the Holy Spirit, but immediately collapse and perish. Finally, if invented doctrines are compared to wood, hay, and straw because like wood, hay, and straw they are burned and destroyed by fire — and they are not destroyed except by the Spirit of the Lord — then it follows that the Holy Spirit is the fire by which they will be tested. And this testing, Paul calls 'the Day of the Lord,' following

the common usage of Scripture. For it is called the day of the Lord whenever He makes His presence known to people in any way. But His face shines most clearly when His truth shines upon us. So we have shown that Paul means no other fire than the testing of the Holy Spirit. But how are those saved by fire who suffer loss of their work? That is not hard to understand if we consider what kind of people he is speaking about. He is addressing those builders of the church who, keeping the true foundation, build upon it material that is inconsistent with it — that is, those who, without departing from the chief and necessary articles of faith, err in smaller and less dangerous points, mixing their own ideas with the Word of God. Such people, I say, will suffer loss of their work, having their inventions destroyed. But they themselves are saved, though only as through fire — meaning not that their ignorance and error is acceptable before the Lord, but that they are cleansed from it by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore all who have defiled the pure gold of God's Word with the dung of purgatory will inevitably suffer loss of their work.

But they will say: it has been an ancient practice of the church. Paul answers this objection when he includes his own generation in that statement, saying that all who build anything on the foundation that does not agree with it will suffer loss of their work. Therefore when opponents object that it has been practiced for more than thirteen hundred years to pray for the dead, I ask them in return: by what Word of God, by what revelation, by what example was it done? For not only do they lack scriptural testimony — all the examples of holy men recorded in Scripture show nothing of the kind. There are at times lengthy accounts of mourning and funeral customs — but of prayers for the dead you cannot find a sin-

gle trace. And the more weighty the matter is, the more clearly it should have been stated. Even the early fathers themselves who prayed for the dead recognized that they lacked both God's command and legitimate precedent for doing so. Why then did they dare to do it? In this, I say, they yielded to human weakness — and therefore what they did should not be held up as an example. For the faithful ought to undertake nothing except with a settled conscience, as Paul teaches, and this certainty is especially required in prayer. It is likely they were moved by some consideration: they sought some comfort to ease their grief, and it seemed unnatural not to show before God some token of love for the dead. How deeply human nature inclines toward such feelings, everyone knows from experience. Established custom also acted like a burning torch to kindle the minds of many. We know that among all peoples and in all ages ceremonies have been performed for the dead and their souls annually purged. Though Satan deceived foolish people with these practices, he took his opportunity from a true principle: that death is not destruction but a passage from this life to another. And there is no doubt that even such superstition condemns the Gentiles before God's judgment seat for neglecting the care of the life to come, which they professed to believe in. Now Christians, not wanting to appear inferior to the pagans, were ashamed to do nothing for the dead — as if the dead were simply gone. From this came that poorly considered eagerness: if they were slow in attending to funeral rites, in banquets and offerings, they feared bringing great shame upon themselves. What began as misguided imitation of the pagans grew through repeated additions until it became the chief devotion of the papacy — helping the dead in distress. But Scripture offers a much better and more

perfect comfort when it testifies that those who die in the Lord are blessed. It adds the reason: from that point on they rest from their labors. We must not so tenderly follow our own affection of love that we establish a wrongful form of prayer in the church. Anyone with even modest wisdom can see that everything recorded on this subject in the early writers was written to accommodate common usage and the ignorance of the people. Those writers themselves, I grant, were also carried along by error — as uncritical credulity routinely robs men of sound judgment. But even reading them shows how hesitantly and doubtfully they commend prayers for the dead. Augustine in his *Confessions* reports that his mother Monica earnestly desired to be remembered in the celebration of the Eucharist at the altar. This was an old woman's wish, which her son never examined by the rule of Scripture but — driven by natural affection — wished to have honored by others. As for the book Augustine wrote on care for the dead, it contains so many uncertainties that its very tepidness ought by rights to quench the heat of foolish zeal. If anyone wants to serve as an advocate for the dead, its cold arguments will leave even previously anxious supporters without much cause for concern. One of its main arguments is that the custom of praying for the dead has grown into general use and should therefore not be despised. But though I grant to the early church fathers that it was a charitable practice to offer something on behalf of the dead — we must still hold to one rule that cannot deceive: it is not lawful for us to bring anything of our own into our prayers. Our requests must be subject to God's Word, for it is His will to appoint what He will have asked of Him. Since neither the entire law nor the Gospel gives even a syllable of permission to pray for the dead, it is a profane misuse of prayer to

venture beyond what God has commanded. But lest our opponents boast that the ancient church shares their error, I say there is a great difference between them. The early church used a memorial of the dead so as not to appear to have cast away all concern for them — but even in doing so they confessed their uncertainty about the state of the dead. As for purgatory, they held it with such uncertainty that it was never a settled conviction. But these men demand that their invented doctrine of purgatory be held without question as an article of faith. The early church commended their dead to God lightly and briefly, only in passing, during communion. These men are continually occupied with care for the dead and with importunate praise of it, exalting it above all other works of charity. Indeed, it would not be difficult to bring forward testimonies from the early writers that plainly overthrow all those prayers for the dead that were then in use. For instance, Augustine, when teaching that all people await the resurrection of the body and eternal glory, says that each person enters into the rest that follows death — if he is worthy when he dies. He then testifies that all the godly immediately after death enjoy blessed rest, just as the prophets, apostles, and martyrs do. If their condition is such, I ask — what will our prayers profit them? I pass over the grosser superstitions by which they have bewitched the minds of simple people, which are so numerous and for the most part so monstrous that no honest excuse can be made for them. I also pass over the most shameful buying and selling they have practiced while the world was wrapped in such dense and senseless ignorance. For I could never reach the end of it, and readers will find in what has been said here more than sufficient ground on which to establish their consciences.

THE SIXT CHAPTER. ¶OF THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN MAN: AND FIRST BY WHAT ARGUMENTES THE SCRIPTURE EXHORTETH VS THERUNTO.



We have already said that the goal toward which regeneration moves is this: that in the lives of the faithful there should appear a harmony and agreement between God's righteousness and their obedience, so confirming the adoption by which they have been received as children. But although the law already contains in itself this newness by which God's image is renewed in us, our dullness still needs many spurs and aids. It will therefore be useful to draw together from various parts of Scripture an ordered approach to the shaping of life, so that those earnestly seeking improvement do not lose their way in the attempt. When I take up the subject of shaping a Christian's life, I am aware that I am entering an extensive and rich topic that could easily fill a large volume if I tried to treat it exhaustively. We see how lengthy are the exhortatory works of the early writers, each one dealing with a single virtue alone. And this is not mere idle wordiness — for whatever virtue a person sets out to discuss, the subject itself expands with so much material that no treatment

seems adequate unless much has been said. But my intention is not to stretch the instruction I am offering to that length, going through every individual virtue or ranging widely in exhortations. Those things can be found in other writers, especially in the homilies of the early fathers. It will be enough for me to show an orderly approach by which a godly person may be guided toward the right goal in shaping his life, and to briefly lay out a certain general rule by which he can well measure his duties. Perhaps there will be a fitting time for more extended treatment elsewhere, or I will leave that to others — it is not something I am particularly suited to do. By nature I love brevity, and a more expansive style would probably not suit me well anyway. And even if a fuller manner of teaching were ever so attractive, the design of this present work requires that I keep the instruction as concise as possible. Just as philosophers have their certain principles of right and virtue from which they derive specific duties and the full range of virtues — so Scripture has its own order in this matter, a most beautifully arranged structure far more certain than any philosopher's system. The one difference is that philosophers, being vain and ambitious men, labored carefully to achieve an elegant order that would display the sharpness of their intellect. The Spirit of God, teaching without such self-conscious artistry, has not maintained the same level of systematic method throughout — yet wherever He does use it, He shows plainly enough that it is not to be neglected by us.

The instruction Scripture gives — which we are now discussing — rests chiefly on two elements. The first is that a love of righteousness should be instilled and poured into our minds, to which we are by nature in no way inclined. The second is that a rule should be set before us that will not allow us to wander off the path

in following righteousness. Scripture offers many excellent reasons for commending righteousness; we have touched on some of them in various earlier places, and will briefly mention a few others here. Where could such instruction better begin than with the reminder that we must be holy, because our God is holy? For when we had wandered like straying sheep and scattered through the maze of the world, He gathered us again to join us with Himself into one flock. When we hear of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be its bond. Not that by the merit of holiness we enter into fellowship with Him — for we must first cleave to Him, and then, endued with His holiness, follow wherever He calls. Rather, holiness is essential because it greatly concerns His glory that He have no fellowship with wickedness and uncleanness. Therefore Scripture also teaches that this is the purpose of our calling, which we ought always to keep in view if we are to respond rightly to the God who calls us. For what purpose were we drawn out of the wickedness and filth of the world, if we are still free to spend our entire lives wallowing in them? Moreover, Scripture reminds us that to be counted among the people of God we must dwell in the holy city Jerusalem — which, since God has set it apart for Himself, must not be profaned by the uncleanness of its inhabitants. From this come the sayings that those who walk blamelessly and pursue righteousness will have a place in God's tabernacle — for it is not fitting that the sanctuary in which He dwells should be like a stable filled with filth.

To awaken us more fully, Scripture shows that God the Father, having joined us to Himself in His Christ, has printed for us in Christ an image after which He intends us to be fashioned. Now let anyone find me a better framework than this among the philoso-

phers, who think that moral philosophy is properly their own domain. When they want to exhort us excellently to virtue, their best argument is that we should live in accordance with nature. But Scripture draws its exhortation from the true source. It not only teaches us to refer our life to God its Author, to whom it is bound — it also, having taught that we have strayed from our true original and the condition of our creation, immediately adds that Christ, through whom we are restored to God's favor, is set before us as an example whose form we should express in our lives. What more effective motivation could anyone ask? Indeed, what more could anyone ask at all? For if the Lord has made us His children by adoption on this condition — that our lives should resemble Christ, the bond of our adoption — then if we do not give and devote ourselves to righteousness, we are not only betraying our Creator with the most wicked disloyalty, but also renouncing Him as our Savior. Then Scripture draws its material for exhortation from all of God's benefits toward us and from every aspect of our salvation. It shows that since God has proved Himself our Father, we would deserve to be condemned for the most extreme ingratitude if we did not in turn show ourselves His children. Since Christ has cleansed us with the washing of His blood and made us partakers of that cleansing through baptism, it is not fitting that we should be stained with new filth. Since He has grafted us into His body, we must take careful heed not to soil ourselves — we who are His members. Since our Head Himself has ascended into heaven, it is fitting that we, laying aside earthly desires, should aspire with our whole heart toward what is above. Since the Holy Spirit has dedicated us as temples to God, we must strive to display God's glory honorably through us and must not do anything that would defile

us with the filth of sin. Since both our soul and body are destined for heavenly immortality and an undying crown, we must diligently labor to keep them pure and undefiled until the day of the Lord. These, I say, are the best foundations on which to build a human life — foundations of a kind that cannot be found among the philosophers, who in commending virtue never rise above the natural dignity of man.

This is an appropriate place to address those who, possessing nothing but the title and badge of Christ, still wish to be called Christians. But with what face do they boast of His holy name, when no one has fellowship with Christ except those who have received true knowledge of Him from the word of the Gospel? The apostle says that all who have not been taught to put off the old self — corrupted by its deceitful desires — and to put on Christ have not rightly learned Christ. It is therefore proven that they falsely — indeed wrongfully — claim knowledge of Christ, even if they can speak about the Gospel eloquently and fluently. For the Gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue but of life. It is not received like other learning, through understanding and memory alone, but only when it takes possession of the whole soul and finds a seat and dwelling place in the innermost affection of the heart. Therefore, let them either stop boasting of what they are not — to the dishonor of God — or let them show themselves worthy students of Christ their Master. We have given first place to doctrine, in which our religion is contained, because our salvation begins with it. But doctrine must be poured into our hearts and pass into our conduct — indeed, it must transform us — or it will be fruitless for us. If the philosophers rightly become angry with those who, claiming to practice an art that should be the schoolmaster of life, turn it into

mere sophisticated wordplay and drive them from their company with deserved shame — how much more should we detest these trifling sophisticates who are content to roll the Gospel around on the tip of their tongues, when its effective power ought to pierce into the deepest affections of the heart, take up residence in the soul, and transform the whole person a hundred times more powerfully than the cold exhortations of any philosopher?

Yet I do not require that the conduct of a Christian person show nothing but absolute Gospel perfection — though this would indeed be desirable, and we must press toward it. But I do not demand Gospel perfection so severely that I would refuse to acknowledge as a Christian anyone who has not yet reached it. For then everyone would be excluded from the church, since no one is found who is not still far from it, and many who have so far made only a little progress would be unjustly cast away. What then? Let the goal be set before our eyes as the single mark toward which all our effort is directed. Let it be appointed as the finish line to which we run and press forward. For it is not permitted to make a division with God — taking upon yourself the parts of what His Word commands that you find acceptable, and leaving the rest to your own choice. He everywhere commends integrity as the chief part of worshipping Him. By this word He means a pure simplicity of mind, free from all deceitful disguise and pretense — the opposite of a divided heart. He is saying that the beginning of living rightly is inward: when the inward disposition of the mind is without pretense given to God in the practice of holiness and righteousness. But since no one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength to run at the pace he perfectly ought to keep, and the greater number are so weak that they stagger and limp, even

crawling along the ground, advancing only slowly — let each of us go according to the measure of his little power and continue on the journey already begun. No one will advance so poorly but that he will gain some ground each day, even if only a little. Therefore let us not stop pressing forward, so that we may continually make some progress in the way of the Lord. And let us not despair at the slowness of our progress. Even if our success falls short of our desire, our labor has not been lost if this day surpasses yesterday — provided that with pure simplicity we keep our eye on our mark and press toward the end of our course. This means not soothingly flattering ourselves, not gently making excuses for our own faults, but with continual effort striving to become better than we were, until we attain to goodness itself. This is what we seek and pursue our whole lives. We will fully attain it only when, stripped of the weakness of the flesh, we are received into complete fellowship with it.

THE SEUENTH CHAPTER. ¶THE
SUMME OF A CHRISTIAN LYFE:
WHERE IS [•]UTREATED OF THE FOR-
SAKING OF OUR SELUES.



Although the law of the Lord has a most finely ordered arrangement for shaping a person's life, the heavenly Teacher saw fit to instruct people with an even more precise rule leading to the same goal He had already set forth in His law. That rule begins here: it is the duty of the faithful to present their bodies to God as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice — and in this consists the true worship of Him. From this comes the exhortation that we must not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may prove what the will of God is. This is a great thing — that we be consecrated and dedicated to God, and that from that point on we think, speak, imagine, and do nothing except for His glory. For what is consecrated cannot be applied to unholy uses without doing great wrong to Him. If we are not our own but the Lord's, it becomes clear what errors are to be avoided and toward what end all the actions of our life must be directed. We are not our own: therefore let neither our own reason nor our own will govern our counsels and

actions. We are not our own: therefore let us not set as our goal seeking what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: therefore as much as we are able, let us forget ourselves and all that belongs to us. On the other side, we are God's: therefore let us live and die to Him. We are God's: therefore let His wisdom and will govern all our actions. We are God's: therefore let all the parts of our life move toward Him as their only lawful end. How greatly has he profited who has learned that he is not his own, and has taken from himself the rule and governance of himself to give it to God! For just as the most powerful pestilence destroying people is that they obey themselves — so the only haven of safety is to know nothing and will nothing of oneself, but only to follow God as He goes before. Therefore let this be the first step: that a person depart from himself, to apply all the force of his mind to obeying the Lord. By obeying I mean not only external conformity to the Word's commands, but the kind of obedience in which the human mind — emptied of its own fleshly impulse — bends itself wholly to the will of God's Spirit. This transformation — which Paul calls the renewing of the mind — is the first entry into life, and of it all the philosophers were ignorant. They make reason alone the ruler of a person; they say reason alone ought to be heard; and to reason alone they give and assign the governance of conduct. But Christian philosophy commands reason to yield and submit to the Holy Spirit — so that a person may no longer live for himself, but bear Christ living and reigning in him.

From this also follows the next point: that we seek not what belongs to ourselves, but what accords with the Lord's will and advances His glory. This is also a sign of great progress: that in a manner forgetting ourselves, and giving up concern for ourselves

altogether, we labor to devote our attention to God and His commandments. For when Scripture tells us to set aside private regard for ourselves, it roots out not only greed for possessions and the hungry pursuit of power and human approval, but also ambition and all desire for worldly glory, and other more hidden evils. Truly, a Christian must be so fashioned and disposed as to keep in mind throughout all his life that he has to do with God. In this way, as he examines all his actions by God's will and judgment, he will reverently direct all his earnest and focused effort toward Him. For the one who has learned to look to God in everything he does is thereby turned away from all empty thinking. This is the self-denial that Christ so earnestly commended to His disciples from the very beginning of their instruction — and once it has taken hold of the heart, it leaves no room: no room first for pride, arrogance, or vainglorious boasting, and then no room for greed, filthy desire, excess, self-indulgence, or the other evils that are bred by self-love. Wherever it does not reign, either the most shameful vices roam about freely, or whatever trace of virtue exists is corrupted by the perverse desire for praise. Show me, if you can, anyone who — unless he has denied himself according to the Lord's command — will freely do good to others. All who have not been possessed by this disposition, if they have pursued virtue, have done so at least for the sake of praise. And all the philosophers who most strongly insisted that virtue should be desired for its own sake were so puffed up with pride that it was clear they desired virtue for no other reason than to have something to be proud of. But God takes no pleasure at all either in those who hunt for people's applause or in these proud beasts — He declares that they have already received their reward in this world, and He says that tax collectors and

prostitutes are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than they are. And yet we have not fully stated how many and how great the obstacles are that hinder a person from what is right, as long as he has not denied himself. It was truly said long ago that a whole world of vices lies hidden in the soul of man. And the only remedy is this: denying yourself and setting aside concern for yourself, to bend your mind to seeking what the Lord requires of you — and to seek it for this reason alone: that it pleases Him.

In another place the same Paul goes through all the parts of a well-ordered life more plainly, though briefly, saying: 'The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.' Having set forth the grace of God to motivate them and clear the path for the worship of God, Paul removes two obstacles that most hinder us: ungodliness, to which we are naturally far too inclined, and worldly desires, which extend even further. Under the name of ungodliness he means not only superstition, but includes everything that is opposed to genuine fear of God. And worldly lusts amount essentially to the cravings of the flesh. Therefore he commands us, in light of both tables of the law, to set aside our own judgment and to give up everything that our own reason and will would direct us toward. He brings all the actions of our life under three headings: sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. Sobriety without doubt refers to chastity and temperance, as well as a pure and moderate use of earthly things

and patient endurance of poverty. Righteousness contains all the duties of fairness — giving every person what is due them. Godliness is the third — it separates us from the defilements of the world and joins us to God in true holiness. When these are bound together with an inseparable bond, they constitute full perfection. But since nothing is harder than forsaking the reasoning of the flesh — indeed subduing and renouncing its desires, giving ourselves to God and to our neighbor, and striving for an angelic life in this filthy earthly condition — Paul, to free our minds from all entanglements, calls us back to the hope of blessed immortality. He reminds us not to strive in vain, since just as Christ appeared once as Redeemer, at His final coming He will display the fruit of the salvation He has purchased. In this way Paul drives away the enticements that blind us and prevent us from aspiring toward heavenly glory as we ought — teaching us that we must travel through this world as strangers far from home, lest the heavenly inheritance be lost or slip away from us.

We see from these words that self-denial has reference partly to other people and partly — indeed chiefly — to God. When Scripture tells us to conduct ourselves toward people in such a way that we honor them above ourselves and faithfully devote ourselves wholly to promoting their well-being, it calls for a disposition our minds cannot receive unless they are first emptied of their natural inclination. For with what blindness we all rush into self-love: every person thinks he has a just reason to exalt himself and to look down on everyone else by comparison. If God has given us any good gift, we immediately seize on it as a reason to feel bold and confident — not only swelling with pride, but nearly bursting with it. The vices we are full of we diligently hide from others,

while to ourselves we flatteringly portray them as light and trivial, sometimes even embracing them as virtues. And if those same good gifts that we praise in ourselves appear in others — often surpassing our own — we, unwilling to yield to them, defame them with envy and find fault with them. If others have faults, we are not content to note them firmly and move on, but amplify them with ugly exaggeration. From this springs the arrogance by which each of us acts as if he were specially privileged above the common level — looking down on every other person carelessly and proudly, or despising them as inferiors. The poor yield to the rich, the common people to the gentry, servants to masters, the uneducated to the learned — and yet there is no one who does not secretly nurse some opinion of his own superiority. So every person, flattering himself, carries a kind of kingdom in his own chest. Presumptuously finding in themselves whatever pleases them, they pass judgment on the wit and conduct of everyone else. But let contention arise, and their poison bursts out. Many show great gentleness so long as everything goes smoothly and pleasantly. But how many maintain that consistent pattern of modesty when they are provoked and stirred to anger? There is no cure for this except to tear out from the bottom of the heart the deadly pestilence of the love of rank and self-love, as the teaching of Scripture tears it out. For there we are taught that the good gifts God has given us are not our own possessions but free gifts of God — and anyone who is proud of them reveals their own ingratitude. 'Who made you to differ from one another?' Paul says. 'If you received all things, why do you boast as if you had not received them?' Then we are taught to continually call ourselves back to humility by acknowledging our faults. This leaves nothing in us to be proud of —

but much reason to humble ourselves. Further, we are commanded that whatever gifts of God we see in other people, we should so honor and esteem those gifts that we also honor the people in whom they reside. It would be great wickedness to strip from them the honor that God has chosen to give them. As for their faults, we are taught to overlook them — not to flatter them into continuing, but so that we do not use those faults as a reason to despise people to whom we owe goodwill and honor. The result will be that with whatever person we have to deal, we will conduct ourselves not only with restraint and modesty, but also with gentleness and friendliness. For a person will never come to true humility by any other path than by having a heart that is formed to abase itself and to honor others.

Now how difficult it is to do your duty in seeking your neighbor's good! You will labor in vain unless you depart from concern for yourself and in a manner put yourself aside. For how can you perform what Paul describes as the works of love unless you forsake yourself in order to give yourself wholly to others? 'Love,' he says, 'is patient and kind, not proud, not arrogant, does not envy, does not boast, does not insist on its own way, is not irritable,' and so forth. If this one requirement — that we not seek our own things — is demanded of us, we will be doing great violence to our nature, which bends us so thoroughly toward self-love that it does not easily allow us to pass ourselves and our concerns aside and watch for what benefits others, or to surrender what is rightfully ours to another. But Scripture, as if taking us by the hand to lead us there, warns us that whatever gifts of grace we receive from the Lord are entrusted to us on this condition: that they should be spent for the common benefit of the church. Therefore the true use

of all God's gifts is a generous and liberal sharing of them with others. No more reliable rule, no more powerful motivation could be found for keeping this principle than when we are taught that all the good things we have are things belonging to God, entrusted to us on the condition that they be administered for the benefit of our neighbors. But Scripture goes even further when it compares these gifts to the capacities with which the members of the human body are endowed. No member has its capacity for itself, nor uses it for its own private benefit — instead it pours it out to the other members of the same body, and receives benefit from it only through the common good of the whole body. So whatever a godly person is capable of doing, he ought to be able to do it for his brothers, providing for himself privately in no other way than by having his mind set on the common building up of the church. Let this therefore be our guiding principle for kindness and doing good: that whatever God has entrusted to us by which we can help our neighbor, we are the stewards of it and are accountable for how we use it. And the only true use of it is what is tested by the rule of love. This will result in our not only joining labor for others' benefit with care for our own well-being, but actually placing others' benefit ahead of our own. And so that we do not remain ignorant that this is the true law of stewardship for all the gifts we receive from God, He established this same law even in the smallest tokens of His generosity in the old covenant. He commanded the firstfruits of grain to be offered to Him, by which the people testified that it was unlawful to enjoy any produce of their goods before it was first consecrated to Him. If God's gifts are consecrated to us only when we have with our own hand dedicated them to their Author, then any use of them that does not reflect that dedication is a profane

misuse. But it will be useless for you to try to enrich the Lord by giving things to Him. Therefore, since — as the prophet says — your generosity cannot reach Him directly, you must exercise it toward His saints who are on earth. This is why alms are compared to holy offerings, so that they may correspond now to what those offerings were in the old covenant.

But so that we do not grow weary of doing good — which would quickly happen otherwise — there must be added what the apostle speaks of: that love is patient and not provoked to anger. The Lord commands us to do good to everyone without distinction, and a large part of them are quite unworthy if judged by their own merits. But here Scripture provides a very helpful principle: it teaches that we must not look at what people deserve from us, but must consider the image of God in them — an image to which we owe all honor and love. And this principle is to be applied most diligently to those of the household of faith, in whom the image has been renewed and restored by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, whatever person you encounter who needs your help, you have no reason to withdraw from doing him good. If you say he is a stranger — the Lord has given him a mark that should be familiar to you, since God forbids you to despise your own flesh. If you say he is lowly and worthless — the Lord shows him to be someone on whom He has bestowed the beauty of His own image. If you say you owe him nothing for anything he has done — God has placed him, as it were, in His own position, in whose regard you know how many great benefits have bound you to God. If you say he is unworthy that you should exert yourself at all for his sake — the image of God by which he is commended to you is worthy for you to give yourself and all you have in its honor. But if he has not only done

nothing good for you but has provoked you with wrongs and injuries — even this is no just reason to stop both loving him and doing the dutiful works of love for him. You will say: he has treated me very differently. But what has the Lord deserved of you? When He commands you to forgive everything in which this person has offended you, He wills that offense to be charged to His own account. Truly, this is the only way to arrive at what is utterly against man's nature and all the more difficult for him — that is, to love those who hate us, to repay evil with good, to return blessings for reproaches. This becomes possible when we remember that we must not consider the malice of people, but instead look at the image of God in them — which, overshadowing and covering their faults, draws us with the beauty and dignity of itself to embrace them.

This mortification will take hold in us only when we are actually performing the duties of love. But it is not the person who merely performs them — even if he leaves none undone — who truly fulfills love. It is the one who performs them from a genuine affection of love. For it is possible to fulfill every outward duty toward all people and yet be far from truly fulfilling them. You may observe some people who seem very generous, yet they give nothing without either looking down with pride or stinging with harsh words. And we have come to such a sorry state in this unhappy world that almost no alms are given — at least not by most people — without accompanying reproach. Such behavior would not have been tolerated even among the pagans. But from Christians something more is required than showing a pleasant face and making their actions agreeable with gentle words. They must first take on the condition of the person they see needing their help — and then

feel for that person's situation as if they themselves felt and bore it — so that they are moved by genuine compassion and tenderness, just as they would be if they were helping themselves. The person who comes to help his brother in this spirit will not only not defile his actions with any arrogance or reproach, but will neither look down on the brother he is helping as someone in need of his charity, nor trample him underfoot as someone now indebted to him. This is no more appropriate than reproaching a sick limb for whose relief the whole body labors, or treating it as specially obligated to the other members because it has received more help than it has repaid. For the mutual sharing of duty among the members of one body is considered not a free gift but rather a payment of what nature's law requires — and to deny it would be monstrous. From this it follows that a person may not think himself discharged by performing one kind of duty, as the common practice goes — where a rich man, having given something of his own, considers all further obligation to belong to others and not to him. Rather, each person should think of himself as wholly indebted to his neighbors, and should set no limit to his generosity except the limit set by his own capacity — however great that capacity may be, it must always be measured by the rule of love.

Now let us describe more fully the chief aspect of self-denial — the part we said has reference to God. We have already said much about it, which it would be unnecessary to repeat. It will be enough to speak of it as far as it shapes us for contentment and patient endurance. When Scripture addresses the seeking of convenience and comfort in this present life, it calls us to this end: that surrendering ourselves and our things to the Lord's will, we yield to Him the passions of our heart to be tamed and subdued. To seek wealth

and honors, to grasp for authority, to heap up riches, to accumulate all the things that serve for display and pomp — our craving is boundless and our greed infinite. On the other side, toward poverty, obscurity, and low social standing, we have a deep fear and strong aversion that drive us to labor by every means to avoid them. From this one can see what a restless mind people have, how many schemes they attempt, with what anxious effort they wear out their lives when they manage their lives by their own design — striving to attain what their ambition or greed demands, and straining equally to escape poverty and obscurity. Therefore the godly must take a different path, so as not to be caught in such traps. First, let them neither desire, hope for, nor even think of any means of prospering except through the Lord's blessing — and let them rest in it confidently and freely. For however much the flesh considers itself self-sufficient when it labors diligently on its own, strives with its own effort, or finds help from others in attaining honor and wealth — it is certain that all of these things amount to nothing, and that nothing we accomplish through our own intelligence or toil will succeed except to the extent that the Lord prospers it. On the other hand, His blessing alone opens a way through every obstacle, making everything proceed to a joyful and successful outcome. Although we might seem to obtain glory or wealth without His blessing — as we see daily that the wicked heap up great honors and riches — yet since those upon whom His curse rests experience no portion of true happiness, everything we obtain without His blessing will only turn to our harm. And the thing that makes people more miserable is not at all to be coveted.

Therefore if we believe that all the means of good and desirable success lie in God's blessing alone — and that without it, every kind of misery and calamity must befall us — it follows that we must not greedily pursue wealth and honors by depending on our own cleverness and diligence, leaning on the favor of people, or trusting in some vague notion of fortune. Instead we must always look to the Lord, to be guided by His direction to whatever lot He has appointed. This will first result in our not violently rushing to seize riches or grab honors by dishonesty, deceit, wicked scheming, or extortion that harms our neighbors — but following only those paths that do not lead us away from integrity. For who can hope for the help of God's blessing through fraud, extortion, and other underhanded wickedness? Just as God's blessing follows only the person who thinks purely and acts rightly, so it calls back from crooked thoughts and corrupt conduct all who desire that blessing from Him. Then we will be restrained from burning with uncontrolled desire for wealth or ambitiously craving honors. For how can a person expect to be helped by God to obtain what God's own Word forbids? God forbid that God should give His blessing's support to the very things He curses with His own mouth. Finally, if things do not succeed according to our wish and hope, we will be restrained from impatience and from cursing our situation — whatever it may be — because we know that this is to murmur against God, in whose hands the distribution of riches and poverty, obscurity and honor, rests. In brief, the person who rests on God's blessing in the manner described above will neither chase by crafty schemes after what people commonly pursue with such recklessness — thinking that such cunning will gain him nothing — nor, when something goes well, will he credit it to himself, his own dili-

gence, effort, or fortune, but will assign it to God as its Author. But if while others flourish he advances only slowly, or even slips backward, he will bear his difficult circumstances with greater calm and moderation of mind than a godless man bears even modest success that falls somewhat short of his desires — because the godly person has a comfort in which he may rest more quietly than upon the highest peak of wealth and power. He reckons that his affairs are ordered by God in whatever way best serves his salvation. This was David's disposition — he submitted to be ruled by God, described himself as like a weaned child, and said he did not occupy himself with things too great or too wonderful for him.

Godly minds must cultivate this contentment and patient endurance not only in this one area but extending to all the circumstances to which our present life is subject. No one has truly denied himself unless he has surrendered himself wholly to the Lord, allowing all the parts of his life to be governed by God's will. A person formed in this way, whatever happens, will neither think himself miserable nor bitterly accuse God of injustice. How necessary this disposition is becomes clear when you consider how many accidents we are exposed to. Various diseases trouble us; sometimes pestilence rages cruelly; sometimes we are sharply afflicted by the calamities of war; sometimes frost or hail destroys the year's harvest and brings famine; sometimes a wife, parents, children, or relatives are taken by death; a house is consumed by fire. These are the things at whose occurrence people curse their lives, detest the day of their birth, despise heaven and the light, murmur against God, and — as if eloquent in blasphemy — accuse Him of injustice and cruelty. But a faithful person must even in these circumstances behold God's merciful kindness and fatherly tenderness.

Therefore, even if he sees his house destroyed or his relatives slain, he will not on that account stop praising God — but will turn to this thought: 'Yet the Lord's grace that dwells in my house will not leave it desolate.' Or if, when his grain is blighted, ravaged by frost, or beaten down by hail, he sees famine approaching, he will not despair or speak hatefully against God, but will remain in this confidence: 'We are still under the Lord's protection, sheep kept in His pastures — He will therefore find us food even in the most extreme scarcity.' Or if he is burdened with sickness, he will not let the bitterness of pain drive him to burst out in impatience and quarrel with God — but, considering the righteousness and gentleness in God's correction, he will call himself back to patience. In short, whatever happens, because he knows it is ordered by God's hand, he will receive it with a willing and thankful mind — lest by stubbornly resisting God's authority he dishonor the One to whose power he has surrendered himself and all that belongs to him. Therefore let the foolish and utterly miserable comfort of the pagans be far from a Christian's heart. To steel their minds against adversity, the pagans attributed it to fortune — whom they thought it foolish to resent, since she was blind and rash, dealing wounds indiscriminately to the deserving and undeserving alike. The rule of godliness is the opposite: God's hand alone is the judge and governor of all outcomes, and it moves not with thoughtless and sudden caprice but with perfectly ordered justice, distributing both good and evil among us.

THE EIGHT CHAPTER. ¶ OF THE BEARYNG OF THE CROSSE, WHICHE IS A PART OF THE FORSAKING OF OUR SELUES.



But a godly mind must climb yet higher — to what Christ calls His disciples to: that each one should take up his cross. For all whom the Lord has chosen and received into His company must prepare themselves for a hard, laborious, and restless life, full of many and varied hardships. Such is the will of the heavenly Father — to exercise them in this way so that He may have genuine proof of those who are His. Beginning with Christ, His firstborn Son, He follows this same pattern with all His children. For although Christ was the most beloved Son, in whom the Father's heart was fully satisfied, we see that He was not treated tenderly or with ease. It can truly be said that He was not only exercised with a perpetual cross throughout His life on earth — His life was in itself a kind of unbroken cross. The apostle explains why: it was necessary for Him to learn obedience through what He suffered. Why then should we claim a privilege from the condition to which Christ our Head had to submit — especially since He submitted to it for our sake, to show us in Himself an example of pa-

tience? Therefore the apostle says that this is the appointed destiny for all God's children: to be conformed to Him. From this arises great comfort in the hard and painful circumstances that are counted as adversity and evil — that we share in Christ's sufferings, and as He passed out of all trouble into heavenly glory, so we too may be brought through various tribulations into that same glory. Paul himself says that by learning to share in His afflictions we also grasp the power of His resurrection, and by being conformed to His death we are prepared to share in His glorious rising. How much does this ease all the pain of the cross — that the more we are afflicted with adversity, the more surely our fellowship with Christ is confirmed? Through this fellowship, our sufferings are not only made a blessing to us but also greatly advance our salvation.

Beyond that, our Lord had no need to bear the cross Himself except to testify and demonstrate His obedience to His Father. But we have various reasons why we need to live our lives under a continual cross. First — since we are by nature inclined to credit everything to the flesh — unless our weakness is shown to us plainly before our eyes, we easily overestimate our own strength and feel certain that whatever happens, it will hold firm and undefeated against every difficult assault. This carries us into a foolish and empty confidence in the flesh, and trusting in it we proudly stiffen ourselves even against God, as if our own powers were sufficient without His grace. This arrogance He can best demolish by proving to us through experience not only how feeble but also how fragile we are. So He afflicts us with shame, poverty, loss of children, sickness, or other calamities — and since we cannot bear these in our own strength, we immediately sink under them. Being so humbled,

we learn to call upon His strength, which alone is able to keep us standing under the heavy weight of affliction. Indeed, even the most holy, though they know well enough that they stand by God's grace and not their own strength, are too confident in their own strength and steadiness — unless the trial of the cross brings them to a deeper knowledge of themselves. David fell into complacency: 'I said in my prosperity: I shall never be moved. Lord, by Your favor You had established me as a strong mountain. You hid Your face; I was dismayed.' He confesses that in the ease of prosperity his senses had grown dull — no longer looking to the grace of God on which he should have depended, he had leaned on himself and promised himself permanent security. If this happened to so great a prophet — which of us should not be afraid, so that we may be watchful? Therefore when the prosperous flatter themselves with thoughts of great steadiness and patience, but are then humbled by adversity, they discover that their earlier confidence was nothing but self-deception. The faithful, warned by such demonstrations of their weakness, profit by them toward humility — stripped of their wrongful confidence in the flesh, they resort to the grace of God. And once they have come to His grace, they feel the presence of God's strength, which provides them with abundantly sufficient help.

This is what Paul teaches: that tribulation produces endurance, and endurance produces proven character. For since God has promised the faithful that He will be present with them in trouble, they find this to be true when they stand patiently — upheld by His hand — in a way they would have been unable to do in their own strength. Endurance therefore brings to the saints a proof by experience that God, when need arises, will actually carry out the help

He has promised. From this their hope is also strengthened — for it would be the worst ingratitude not to expect in the future the same faithfulness of God they have already proven by experience to be constant and sure. We see now how many good things come to us bound together in the cross. By overturning the false opinion we hold of our own strength, and exposing the self-deception that pleases us, the cross shakes away the damaging confidence of the flesh and teaches us, so humbled, to rest on God alone. From this it follows that we are neither crushed nor fall. And after victory comes hope, as the Lord, in fulfilling what He has promised, establishes His faithfulness for the future. Truly, even if there were no other reasons than these, it is clear how necessary the exercise of the cross is for us. It is no small thing to have the blind love of yourself wiped away, so that you may know your own weakness well. To feel your own weakness, so that you may learn to distrust yourself. To distrust yourself, so that you may transfer your confidence from yourself to God. To rest with confident trust in God, so that, upheld by His help, you may continue undefeated to the very end. To stand firm by His grace, so that you may understand He is true in His promises. To know by experience the truth of His promises, so that your hope may be strengthened by it.

The Lord has yet another purpose in afflicting His own: to test their patience and train them in obedience. Not that they can exercise any obedience toward Him other than the obedience He Himself gives them — but it pleases Him to demonstrate through open examples the graces He has bestowed on His saints, so that those graces do not lie dormant and hidden within them. Therefore when He draws out into open display the strength of endurance and steadfastness with which He has equipped His ser-

vants, He is said to be testing their patience. From this comes the statement that God tested Abraham and had proof of his godliness when Abraham did not refuse to offer up his only son as a sacrifice. Therefore Peter teaches that our faith is proved in trials as gold is tested in a furnace. And who can say it is not fitting that the most noble gift of patience — which a faithful person has received from his God — should be brought into use, so that it may become clearly known and manifest? For otherwise people will not value it as it deserves. Now if God acts rightly in providing occasions to stir up the virtues He has given His faithful, so that they do not lie hidden — indeed unused and wasted — then the afflictions of the saints are entirely justified, without which their patience would be nothing. I also say that by the cross they are trained in obedience, because they are taught to live not according to their own wishes but according to God's will. Truly, if everything flowed to them as they desired, they would not know what it means to follow God. Seneca records that it was an old proverb, used to encourage someone to bear adversity: 'Follow God.' By this they meant that a person truly came under God's yoke only when he yielded his hand and back to God's correction. Now if it is entirely right that we should show ourselves obedient to the heavenly Father in all things, we ought not to refuse the various means by which He trains us in obedience to Him.

But we do not fully grasp how necessary this obedience is unless we also consider how quickly our flesh moves to throw off God's yoke once it has been handled gently and tenderly for even a short while. The same thing happens to it that happens with stubborn horses: if they are pampered idly for a few days, they can afterward no longer be tamed for their unruliness, and they no

longer know the rider whose guidance they had begun to accept. This is what God continually complained of in the people of Israel — that being well fed and fat, they kicked against the One who had fed and nourished them. God's generosity should indeed have drawn us to recognize and love His goodness. But since our corrupt nature is such that we are always spoiled by His gentle treatment, it is more than necessary that we be restrained by some discipline, lest we rush headlong into stubborn willfulness. So, that we should not grow fierce with excessive wealth, proud from exaltation to honors, or insolent from the swelling of other gifts — whether of soul, body, or circumstances — the Lord Himself, foreseeing when it is useful, acts to prevent it. With the remedy of the cross He subdues and restrains the willfulness of our flesh in various ways, according to what is beneficial for each person. For not everyone is sick with the same disease or in equal need of severe treatment. This is why some are exercised with one kind of cross and others with another. The heavenly Physician deals with some more gently and purges others with sharper remedies, as He plans for the health of all — yet He leaves no one exempt or untouched, because He knows that all without exception are diseased.

Furthermore, our most merciful Father not only needs to prevent our weakness — He often needs to correct our past offenses as well. Therefore, as often as we are afflicted, the memory of our past sins ought immediately to come to mind — and without doubt we will find that we have done something deserving of chastisement. Yet our chief reason for patience should not be grounded in acknowledging our sin. Scripture provides us with a far better consideration: the Lord corrects us with adversity so that we should not be condemned with the world. Therefore even in the sharpest

tribulations we ought to acknowledge the kindness and goodness of our Father toward us — for even then He does not cease to work for our salvation. He afflicts, not to destroy or kill us, but to deliver us from the world's condemnation. This thought will lead us to what Scripture teaches in another place: 'My son, do not reject the Lord's discipline or be weary when He rebukes you. For the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He embraces as a father the child he loves.' When we know His rod to be the rod of a father, is it not our duty to show ourselves obedient and willing to learn, rather than stubbornly behaving like desperate people hardened by evil? The Lord loses us if He does not call us back by correction when we have gone astray from Him — so the author of the letter to the Hebrews rightly says that we are illegitimate children and not true children if we are without discipline. Therefore we are being utterly perverse if we cannot submit to Him when He is showing His goodwill and His care for our salvation. Scripture teaches this to be the difference between unbelievers and the faithful: unbelievers, as slaves of a deep and hardened wickedness, are made worse and more obstinate by whipping; the faithful, like children with an honest and free nature, profit by it toward repentance. Now you must choose which group you belong to. But since I have treated this subject elsewhere, I am content to touch it briefly here and bring the discussion to a close.

Moreover, there is a singular comfort in suffering persecution for righteousness. For then we should think of the great honor God is pleased to bestow on us — adorning us with the distinctive mark of His soldiers. I mean by those who suffer for righteousness not only those who suffer in defense of the Gospel, but also those who are troubled for defending any righteous cause. Whether, there-

fore, in maintaining the truth of God against Satan's lies, or in taking up the defense of the good and innocent against the wrongs of the wicked, we are driven into the world's displeasure and hatred, whereby our life, goods, or reputation come into danger — let us not consider it a grievous thing to serve God, nor count ourselves miserable in the things where He Himself has with His own mouth declared us blessed. Poverty, considered in itself, is indeed miserable — likewise exile, contempt, imprisonment, disgrace, and finally death, which is the worst of all calamities. But when the favor of our God breathes upon us, none of these things fails to become our blessing. Therefore let us rest in Christ's testimony rather than in the false judgment of the flesh. The result will be that we shall rejoice as the apostles did when God counts us worthy to suffer disgrace for His name. Why? Because if we, being innocent and knowing our conscience is clear, are stripped of our goods by the evil dealings of wicked men — we are reduced to poverty among people, but true riches are thereby growing for us in heaven before God. If we are driven from our homes, we are all the more deeply welcomed into God's household. If we are troubled and despised, we take all the deeper root in Christ. If we are marked with reproach and shame, we receive all the more honorable standing in the kingdom of God. If we are slain, the way is opened for us to blessed life. Let us be ashamed to value these things less — upon which the Lord has set so great a price — than the shadowy and fleeting pleasures of the present life.

Since, therefore, Scripture gives sufficient comfort through these and similar exhortations for the shame and calamities we suffer in defense of righteousness, we are most ungrateful if we do not gladly and cheerfully receive them from the Lord's hand — es-

pecially since this kind of cross belongs most properly to the faithful, through which Christ will be glorified in us, as Peter also teaches. But for people of tender nature, suffering shame is more grievous than a hundred deaths — and so Paul expressly warns that we must endure not only persecutions but also reproaches, because we have set our hope on the living God. As in another place he teaches us by his own example to walk through dishonor and honor alike. Yet the cheerfulness required of us is not such as removes all feeling of bitterness and sorrow — otherwise the patience of the saints in the cross would be no patience at all, unless they were both tormented with pain and troubled with grief. If there were no hardship in poverty, no pain in sickness, no grief in shame, no horror in death, what courage or self-control would it take to bear them without complaint? But when each of these bites into the hearts of all of us with its natural bitterness — here the courage of a faithful person shows itself: tried by the feeling of such bitterness, however greatly he is troubled by it, he overcomes it by valiantly resisting. His patience shows itself here: when sharply provoked, he is still so restrained by the fear of God that he does not burst into any fit of disorder. His joy shows itself here: wounded by sadness and grief, he rests on God's spiritual comfort.

Paul has described very well this conflict that the faithful sustain against the natural feeling of sorrow while they strive for patience and self-control (2 Corinthians 4:8): 'We are hard pressed in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.' You see that to bear the cross patiently is not to be altogether numb and without any feeling of pain. In ancient times the Stoics foolishly described a courageous person as one who had stripped away all

human feeling and was unmoved equally by prosperity and adversity, by sorrow and joy — indeed, one who, like a stone, was moved by nothing. And what did they accomplish with this lofty wisdom? They painted a picture of wisdom that never existed and never will exist among human beings. By seeking too exacting and precise a patience, they actually removed all practical use of patience from human life. And today there are also new Stoics among Christians who count it a fault not only to groan and weep, but even to feel sad or anxious. But these strange opinions generally come from idle people who, occupying themselves with speculation rather than action, can produce nothing but such newly invented doctrines. We have nothing to do with that stony philosophy, which our Master and Lord has condemned not only by His Word but by His own example. For He mourned and wept at both His own and others' adversities. 'The world,' He says, 'will rejoice, but you will mourn and weep' (John 16:20). And so that no one should find fault with mourning, He has in His open declaration pronounced those who mourn to be blessed (Matthew 5:4; Luke 6:21). And no wonder. For if all weeping were wrong, what shall we say about the Lord Himself, from whose body bloody sweat dropped? If every fear is a mark of unbelief, what shall we say about that shaking fear by which we read He was no slightly struck? If all sadness is condemned, what shall we say about His confession that His soul was sorrowful even to death?

I wanted to say this in order to call godly minds back from despair — so that they would not give up altogether on pursuing patience just because they cannot shed the natural emotion of grief. That would inevitably happen to those who make patience a kind of senseless numbness, and turn a courageous and steadfast per-

son into a block of wood. For Scripture praises the patience of the saints when, though hard pressed by adversity, they are not overcome or thrown down by it; when, though stung by bitterness, they are also filled with spiritual joy; when, though distressed by grief, they are encouraged again by the comfort of God. Yet all along that conflict remains in their hearts: natural feeling shrinks from and dreads whatever it knows to be harmful, but the disposition of godliness labors through all those difficulties toward obedience to God's will. The Lord expressed this conflict when He said to Peter: 'When you were young you dressed yourself and walked where you wanted, but when you are old, another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go' (John 21:18). It is not likely that when the time came for Peter to glorify God by his death he was dragged to it unwillingly and resisting — for then his martyrdom would have had little worth. But though he obeyed God's ordinance with great readiness of heart, he had not put off human nature — and so was pulled in two directions by two conflicting wills. When he thought on his own about the bloody death he must suffer, he was struck with horror and would gladly have escaped it. On the other hand, when it came into his mind that he was called to it by God's command, conquering and trampling down that fear, he took it on gladly — indeed cheerfully. This is therefore what we must strive for if we would be disciples of Christ: that our minds be filled inwardly with so great a reverence and obedience to God as to tame and subdue to His ordinance every contrary feeling. So it will come about that with whatever kind of cross we are afflicted, even in the greatest anguish of mind, we maintain patience steadily. Adversities will have their sharpness by which we will be stung. When sick, we will groan and be troubled and long for

health. When weighed down by poverty, we will be pricked by the sting of worry and grief. We will be struck with pain from shame, contempt, and injury. We will shed natural tears at the grave of those we love. But the conclusion will always be: 'The Lord willed it this way — therefore let us follow His will.' Indeed, even in the midst of grief's stings, in the midst of mourning and tears, this thought must make its way in to incline the heart to receive cheerfully the very things by which it is so moved.

But since we have drawn the chief reason for bearing the cross from a consideration of God's will, we should in a few words define the difference between philosophical and Christian patience. Very few of the philosophers climbed to so high a principle as understanding that God's hand exercises us through afflictions, and that in this God is to be obeyed. But they offer no other reason than this: it must be so out of necessity. What is this but saying: yield to God because you will wrestle against Him in vain? For if we obey God only because we must, then if we could escape we would stop obeying. But Scripture directs us to consider something far different in the will of God: first, justice and equity, and then care for our salvation. These therefore are the Christian motivations for patience. Whether poverty, exile, imprisonment, disgrace, sickness, loss of parents or children, or any similar affliction grieves us — we should consider that none of these things happen except by God's will and providence, and that He does nothing except in perfect order. For think: do not our countless daily offenses deserve to be punished far more sharply and severely than the afflictions the merciful kindness of God lays upon us? Is it not entirely fitting that our flesh be tamed and, as it were, broken to the yoke, so that it does not run wild by its nature? Are not the righteousness and

truth of God worth enduring some pain for? But if a clear righteousness appears in our afflictions, we cannot resist or murmur against it without wrongdoing. We no longer hear that cold argument — 'We must yield because we have no choice' — but rather a lively and powerful lesson: 'We must obey because it is wrong to resist; we must endure patiently because impatience is a stubbornness against the righteousness of God.' But now, since only what we know to be for our safety and benefit is truly worthy of our acceptance — our good Father also comforts us in this way, by affirming that even when He afflicts us with the cross, He is providing for our salvation. If it is certain that afflictions are beneficial to us, why should we not receive them with a thankful and willing heart? Therefore in enduring them patiently we are not reluctantly submitting to necessity, but freely agreeing to our own benefit. These reflections — I say — produce this effect: that however much our minds are grieved by the cross through the natural feeling of bitterness, they are equally cheered by spiritual joy. From this also follows thanksgiving, which cannot exist apart from joy. But if praise of the Lord and thanksgiving proceeds from nothing but a cheerful and joyful heart, and if nothing should interrupt that praise and thanksgiving in us — then it is clear how necessary it is that the bitterness of the cross be tempered with spiritual joy.

THE .IX. CHAPTER. ¶OF THE MEDI- TATION OF THE LIFE TO COME.



But whatever kind of affliction distresses us, we must always keep this end in view: to train ourselves in contempt of this present life and thereby be stirred to meditation on the life to come. For because God knows well how much we are by nature inclined to a beastly love of this world, He uses the most fitting means to draw us back and shake off our sluggishness, so that we do not cling too tightly to that love. Every one of us wants to appear to aspire toward heavenly immortality throughout our lives. For we are ashamed to be no better than animals, whose condition would be no worse than ours if no hope of eternity after death remained to us. But if you examine the plans, pursuits, and actions of any person, you will find nothing in them but earth. From this comes that blindness: our minds, dazzled by the empty glitter of riches, power, and honors, are so dulled that they cannot see further. Our hearts, taken over by greed, ambition, and desire, are so weighed down that they cannot rise higher. Finally, our whole soul, entangled in the enticements of the flesh, seeks its happiness in the earth. The Lord, to remedy this evil, uses continual examples of misery to teach the vanity of this present life. So that we should not promise ourselves a stable and peaceful life in this

world, He allows us to be frequently disturbed and troubled by wars, upheavals, robbery, or other injuries. So that we should not too greedily grasp for fragile and passing riches, or rest complacently in riches already possessed, He sometimes through exile, sometimes through crop failure, sometimes through fire, and sometimes through other means brings us to poverty — or at least keeps us within bounds. So that we should not take too easy a pleasure in the blessings of marriage, He either troubles people with difficult wives, or crushes them with wayward children, or punishes them with childlessness. But if in all these things He deals with them gently, still — lest they swell with foolish pride or rejoice with reckless confidence — He sets before their eyes through diseases and dangers how unstable and fleeting all possessions subject to mortality really are. We rightly profit from the discipline of the cross only when we learn that this life, considered in itself, is restless, troubled, and miserable in countless ways — never fully blessed — and that all the things counted as its good things are uncertain, fleeting, empty, and corrupted by many evils mixed in with them. From this we conclude that nothing is to be sought or hoped for here but struggle, and that when we think of our crown, we must lift our eyes to heaven. For this we must believe: our mind is never truly raised to the desire and meditation of the life to come until it has first conceived a contempt of this present life.

For between these two there is no middle ground — the earth must either become worthless in our eyes, or it will hold us captive with its excessive love. Therefore if we have any care for eternity, we must diligently work to loosen ourselves from these chains. Now because this present life has many flattering pleasures to allure us, a great show of pleasantness, charm, and sweetness to de-

light us — we very much need to be called away from time to time, so that we are not bewitched by such enticements. For what would happen if we enjoyed here a constant stream of good things and happiness — when we cannot even be sufficiently awakened by the constant pressures of evil to consider how miserable this life is? Not only the educated, but ordinary people have no more common saying than that a person's life is like smoke or a shadow. And because they saw it was a truth well worth knowing, they have adorned it with many striking sayings. But there is nothing we consider more carelessly or remember less. We go about everything as if we were building ourselves an immortality on earth. If a coffin passes by or we walk among gravestones, then — because death's image is right before our eyes — we do indeed speak very philosophically about the vanity of this life. Though we do not do so consistently, since often such things move us not at all. But when it does happen, our philosophy lasts only a moment — as soon as we turn our backs it vanishes without leaving a trace, fading like the applause in a theater at some entertaining spectacle. And we, forgetting not only death but also our own mortality, as though we had never heard a word about it, settle back into a careless certainty of earthly immortality. If someone reminds us of the saying that a person is a creature of a day, we do indeed agree — but so carelessly that the thought of permanent continuance still lingers in our minds. Who then can deny that it is greatly beneficial to all of us to be convinced — not only by words but by every kind of practical experience — of the miserable condition of earthly life? For even when we are convinced, we can barely stop marveling at it with perverse and foolish admiration, as if it contained the highest good. But if it is necessary that God instruct us, it is

likewise our duty on our part to listen when He calls and stirs our dullness — so that despising the world we may with all our hearts press toward the meditation of the life to come.

But let the faithful train themselves in such a contempt of the present life as neither produces hatred of it nor ingratitude toward God. For this life, however full it is of countless miseries, is still rightly counted among the not insignificant blessings of God. If we acknowledge no benefit of God in it, we are guilty of no small ingratitude toward Him. But especially for the faithful it ought to be a testimony of God's goodwill — since it is entirely directed toward the advancement of their salvation. For before He openly bestows on them the inheritance of eternal glory, His will is to show Himself a Father to them through lesser proofs — and these are the benefits daily given to us. Since, therefore, this life serves to help us understand God's goodness, shall we despise it as if it contained not a crumb of goodness? We must therefore put on this disposition: to count it among the good gifts that are not to be refused. For even if Scripture did not testify to this — though it does, both abundantly and plainly — nature itself urges us to give thanks to the Lord for having brought us into its light, for granting us its use, and for providing all necessary help for preserving it. And this is all the more reason for gratitude when we consider that we are through it in some manner being prepared for the glory of the heavenly kingdom. For the Lord has ordained that those who will be crowned in heaven must first fight certain battles on earth, so that they may not triumph until they have overcome the hard challenges of the fight and won the victory. Then there is another reason: through various blessings in this life we begin to taste the sweetness of God's generosity, so that our hope and longing may

be sharpened toward its full revelation. Once this is settled — that earthly life is a gift of God's mercy, for which we are bound to Him and ought to be mindful and grateful — then we will be in the right frame of mind to consider its most miserable condition. The purpose is so that we may be freed from the excessive love of it to which, as I said before, we are naturally inclined.

Now whatever is taken away from the disordered desire for this life ought to be added to the desire for a better life. I grant that those spoke truly who thought it best not to be born, and next best to die quickly. For what could people, deprived of the light of God and true religion, see in this life but unhappiness and misery? They had reason to mourn and weep at their friends' births and to celebrate formally at their deaths — but they did so without profit, because lacking the right teaching of faith, they could not see how what is of itself neither blessed nor desirable might yet turn to good for the godly. And so their conclusion ended in despair. Therefore let this be the mark of the faithful in judging mortal life: that understanding it to be in itself nothing but misery, they may turn all the more eagerly and freely to the eternal life to come. When we reach this comparison, this present life may not only be safely set aside, but utterly despised and even rejected in comparison with that other. For if heaven is our homeland, what is the earth but a place of exile? If departing the world is entering into life, what is the world but a grave? To remain in it — what is that but to be submerged in death? If being freed from the body is being set in full freedom, what is the body but a prison? If enjoying the presence of God is the highest sum of happiness, is it not misery to lack it? But until we escape the world, we are wandering far from the Lord. Therefore when earthly life is compared with heav-

only life, it plainly ought to be despised and set underfoot. Yet it is never to be hated except insofar as it keeps us in bondage to sin — and even that hatred is not properly directed at life itself. However it may be, we must be moved by such weariness or distaste for this life that, desiring its end, we are also ready to remain in it as long as the Lord wills — so that our weariness is entirely free from all resentment and impatience. For it is like a battle post where the Lord has stationed us, which we are to hold until He calls us away. Paul did lament that he was held in the bonds of the body longer than he wished and sighed with fervent longing for his redemption — yet, to obey the Lord's command, he declared himself ready for either outcome, acknowledging that he owed it to God to glorify His name in both death and life, and that it was God's prerogative to determine what was most suitable for His glory. Therefore if we are to live and die to the Lord, let us leave to His will the timing of our life and death — yet in such a way that we remain fervent in our desire for death, continually occupied in meditating on it, despising this life in comparison to the coming immortality, and willing to leave it whenever the Lord pleases because of the bondage of sin.

But it is monstrous that instead of that desire for death, many who boast of being Christians are so afraid of it that they tremble at every mention of it as if it were an omen of misfortune. Truly it is no wonder that natural feeling in us recoils with fear when we hear of our dissolution. But what is entirely intolerable is that there should be no light of godliness in a Christian's heart to overcome and suppress that fear — however great — with greater comfort. If we consider that this unstable, flawed, corruptible, frail, withering, and rotting body is dissolved so that it may afterward be

restored into a firm, perfect, incorruptible, and heavenly glory — will not faith compel us to fervently desire what nature fears? If we consider that by death we are called home out of exile to inhabit our true country — yes, a heavenly country — will we find no comfort in that? But there is nothing that does not naturally want to continue existing. I grant it — and therefore I insist that we must look to the coming immortality, where we may obtain a stability found nowhere on earth. For Paul teaches very well that the faithful ought to go to death cheerfully — not because they want to be unclothed, but because they desire to be newly clothed. Shall brute animals, indeed even lifeless creation — stocks and stones — knowing their present vanity, earnestly long for the last day of the resurrection so that they may be delivered from vanity along with the children of God? And shall we, endued with the light of reason, and beyond reason enlightened by God's Spirit, fail when it matters most to lift our minds above this earthly decay? But it is not my purpose or the right place here to argue extensively against this perverseness. I said at the beginning that I would not take on the extended treatment of common topics. I would advise such timid minds to read Cyprian's book *On Mortality* — unless they are fit to be sent to the philosophers, so that they might begin to be ashamed when they see the contempt of death shown by those without the Gospel. But this let us hold as firmly settled: no one has truly profited in Christ's school who does not joyfully look forward to both the day of death and the day of the last resurrection. For Paul marks all the faithful by this very sign, and Scripture commonly calls us to this whenever it wants to set before us the solid foundation of perfect joy. 'Rejoice,' says the Lord, 'and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near.' Is it reasonable, I

ask, that the thing He intended to have such power to raise up joy and gladness in us should produce nothing but sorrow and discouragement? If it does, why do we still boast of Him as our Teacher? Let us therefore adopt a sounder mind and — however much the blind and senseless craving of the flesh fights against it — let us not hesitate to long for the Lord's coming, not only in desire but in groaning and sighing, as the happiest thing of all. For He will come as our Redeemer, to draw us out of this immeasurable gulf of evils and miseries and to lead us into the blessed inheritance of His life and glory.

This is certainly true: all the company of the faithful, as long as they live on earth, must be like sheep appointed for slaughter, so that they may be conformed to Christ their head. They would therefore be in the most pitiful condition — unless their minds were lifted up to heaven and raised above everything in the world, passing beyond the present appearance of things. But once they have lifted their heads above all earthly things, even if they see the wealth and honors of the wicked flourishing, see them enjoying quiet peace, see them proud in the splendor and abundance of everything, see them overflowing with all kinds of pleasures — and even if they are plundered by the wicked's greed, suffer contemptuous treatment from their pride, are robbed by their covetousness, or vexed by any other violence from them — they will easily sustain themselves in such adversities. For that day will be before their eyes: the day when the Lord will receive His faithful into the quiet of His kingdom; when He will wipe all tears from their eyes; when He will clothe them with the robe of glory and gladness; when He will feed them with the unspeakable sweetness of His delights; when He will elevate them to share in His high estate; and

finally, when He will be pleased to share His own happiness with them. But the wicked who have flourished on earth He will cast into extreme shame; He will turn their pleasures into torments; their laughter and merriment into weeping and gnashing of teeth; He will disturb their peace with terrible torment of conscience; He will punish their self-indulgence with unquenchable fire; and He will place their heads in subjection to those godly people whose patience they abused. For this is righteousness, as Paul testifies: to give relief to the miserable and to those unjustly afflicted, and to repay with affliction the wicked who afflicted the godly, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven. This is truly our only comfort — and if it is taken away, we must inevitably either despair or soothe ourselves with the world's empty comforts, to our own destruction. Even the prophet confesses that his feet nearly slipped when he dwelt too long on the present prosperity of the wicked, and that he could only stand firm when he entered into the sanctuary of God and directed his eyes to the final end appointed for both the godly and the wicked. To conclude in a single sentence: the cross of Christ triumphs in the hearts of the faithful over the devil, the flesh, sin, and the wicked only when our eyes are turned to the power of the resurrection.

THE TENTH CHAPTER. ¶ HOWE WE OUGHT TO VSE THIS PRESENT LYFE, AND THE HELPES THEREOF.



Through such instruction Scripture also teaches us clearly what the right use of earthly gifts is — something not to be neglected in shaping an ordered life. For if we must live, we must also use the means necessary to sustain life, and we cannot avoid even those things that seem to serve delight more than necessity. We must therefore keep a measure, using them with a clear conscience for either necessity or enjoyment. The Lord sets that measure through His Word when He teaches that this life is for His people a journey through a foreign country, by which they travel toward the kingdom of heaven. If we are only passing through the earth, we ought to use its good things to the extent that they aid rather than hinder our journey. Therefore Paul wisely counsels us to use this world as though not using it, and to acquire possessions with the mindset of those who are about to sell them. But because this path is slippery and steep on both sides, so that we can easily fall in either direction, let us work to plant our foot where we can stand safely. Some men who were otherwise good and holy, seeing that intemperance and excess continually ran

rampant unless sharply restrained, and wanting to correct so great an evil, could find no better way than to allow people to enjoy earthly goods only as far as necessity demanded. This was indeed a godly intention, but they were too severe. For — which is a very dangerous thing — they placed stricter bonds on consciences than those to which the Word of God had bound them. They defined necessity as abstaining from everything a person could do without. By their standard, a person could scarcely take more than bread and water. And some go even further — as is recorded of Crates the Theban, who threw his possessions into the sea, reasoning that if they were not destroyed, they would destroy him. Many today, seeking an excuse by which the flesh's intemperance in the use of outward things may be excused — and working to clear a path for the flesh's wild license — take as an established point what I do not grant them: that this freedom is not to be restrained by any standard of measure but should be left to each person's conscience to use as much as he finds lawful. Truly I acknowledge that consciences neither ought nor can be bound in this matter by specific and precise legal rules. But since Scripture teaches general principles for lawful use, we must surely measure our use according to those principles.

Let this be a principle: the use of God's gifts does not go wrong when it is directed toward the end for which the Creator Himself made and intended them for us — since He created them for our good and not our harm. Therefore no one can follow a more correct path than the one who carefully keeps this end in view. Now if we consider the purpose for which God created foods, we shall find that He intended to make provision not only for necessity but also for delight and pleasure. Similarly in clothing, beyond necessity He

appointed another end: decency and propriety. In herbs, trees, and fruits, beyond their various practical uses there is also a pleasantness to the eye and sweetness to the smell. For if this were not true, the prophet would not list among God's benefits that 'wine gladdens the heart of man and oil makes his face shine.' Scripture would not everywhere, in setting forth His generosity, declare that He has given all such things to people. The very natural qualities of things show clearly enough for what purpose and to what extent we may use them. If the Lord has placed in flowers such great beauty as presents itself to our eyes, and has given such sweetness of fragrance as naturally flows to our sense of smell — will it be unlawful for our eyes to enjoy that beauty or for our sense of smell to receive that sweet fragrance? What? Has He not so distinguished colors as to make some more pleasing to the eye than others? What? Has He not given to gold and silver, to ivory and marble, a special beauty that makes them more precious than other metals and stones? In short, has He not made many things attractive to us beyond any necessary use?

Therefore away with that inhuman philosophy which, by granting us no use of created things except what necessity demands, not only stingily strips us of the lawful enjoyment of God's generosity, but also cannot even be put into practice without first stripping a person of all his senses and turning him into a block of wood. But on the other hand we must with equal diligence provide a check for the lust of the flesh — which, if not brought into order, overflows without limit. And as I said, it has defenders who, under the pretense of allowed freedom, grant it everything. The first restraint to be put on it is this: let it be established that all things are created for us so that we should know their Author and give thanks to Him

for His kindness toward us. Where is your thanksgiving if you gorge yourself on rich food or wine so that you become senseless or unfit for the duties of godliness and your calling? Where is the acknowledgment of God if your flesh, boiling over with excess into filthy desire, infects your mind with its uncleanness so that you can see nothing that is right or honorable? In clothing, where is thanksgiving to God if with its costly splendor we both admire ourselves and look down on others? If with its elegance and neatness we prepare ourselves for sexual immorality? Where is the acknowledgment of God if our mind is fixed on the showiness of our clothes? For many give themselves so completely to bodily pleasures that their minds lie buried. Many are so delighted with marble, gold, and paintings that they become like men turned to stone, as if they themselves were transformed into metal, or like painted images. The smell of the kitchen or the sweetness of flavors dulls some so thoroughly that they can discern nothing spiritual. The same is true of the rest. It is therefore certain that in this way the license for abuse is somewhat restrained, and Paul's rule is confirmed: make no provision for the flesh in its cravings — for if we grant too much, they boil over all measure and moderation.

But there is no surer or more direct path than the one laid out by contempt of this present life and meditation on heavenly immortality. From this follow two rules. The first: those who use this world should be minded as if they did not use it; those who marry as if they were not married; those who buy as if they did not buy — as Paul teaches. The second: they should learn to bear poverty quietly and patiently, just as they bear abundance moderately. The one who bids you use this world as if you did not use it cuts away not only gluttony in food and drink and excessive self-indulgence,

sumptuous display, pride, arrogance, and fussiness in meals, buildings, and clothing — but also every care and affection that might either draw you away from or hinder you from thinking of the heavenly life or from working to adorn your soul. It was well said long ago by Cato: that there is great care for trimming the body and great carelessness toward virtue. And it is an old proverb that those who are too busy caring for their body are generally careless of their soul. Therefore, although the freedom of the faithful in outward things is not to be restricted to any single precise form, it must truly be subject to this law: to indulge their own desires very little; to keep calling themselves back with their mind continually alert to cut off every appearance of superfluous excess; still more to restrain riotous waste; and to take diligent care that they do not turn helps into hindrances.

The second rule is this: those who have little and meager resources should learn to lack patiently — not to be driven by excessive desire for more. Those who maintain this patience have made no small progress in the Lord's school — and anyone who has not made at least some progress in this regard can hardly offer any proof that he is a disciple of Christ. For besides the fact that the desire for earthly things comes packaged with most other vices, the person who bears poverty impatiently typically reveals the opposite disease in abundance. By this I mean: the one who would be ashamed of a plain coat will be proud of an expensive one; the one who is not content with a modest meal will be restless for a fancier one, and would also use those fancies intemperately if he had them; the one who bears a humble and obscure station poorly will not abstain from pride if he rises to honors. Therefore let all who have a genuine zeal for godliness strive to learn by the apostle's ex-

ample how to be full and to be hungry, to have abundance and to suffer want. Scripture also has a third rule by which it governs the use of earthly things — something we touched on when treating the commandments of love. For Scripture decrees that all earthly things are given to us by God's generosity, appointed for our benefit, but as goods entrusted to us to keep, for which we must one day give an account. We must therefore manage them in such a way that the words 'Give an account of your stewardship' are always sounding in our ears. And let this also come to mind: who it is that demands such an account — the One who has so highly commended self-restraint, sobriety, honest frugality, and modesty, and who detests excessive luxury, pride, ostentation, and vanity; who allows no use of possessions except what is joined with love; and who has already with His own mouth condemned all those pleasures that draw a person's mind away from purity and integrity, or cloud his understanding with darkness.

Finally, this is to be noted: the Lord bids every one of us, in all the actions of our life, to keep our calling in view. For He knows how restlessly the human mind boils, with what skipping lightness it is carried here and there, how greedily ambition reaches out to grasp many things at once. So that all things should not be thrown into confusion by our foolishness and recklessness, He has appointed to every person his duties in his particular station of life. And so that no one might rashly overstep his bounds, He has given every such station the name of a calling. Therefore every person's particular station is, as it were, a post appointed to him by God — so that people should not wander aimlessly through life. And this ordering is so necessary that all our actions are measured by it in God's sight — often contrary to the judgment of human reason and

philosophy. No deed is counted more noble, even by the philosophers, than for a person to deliver his country from tyranny. But by the verdict of God's judgment, the private citizen who raises his hand against a tyrant is openly condemned. But I will not delay to multiply examples. It is enough to know that the Lord's calling is in everything the beginning and foundation of right action — and the person who does not direct himself by it will never keep a straight course in his life. He may perhaps occasionally do something that appears praiseworthy — but whatever that may be in the eyes of people, it will be rejected before God's throne. Moreover, there will be no fitting coherence in the different parts of his life. Therefore our life will be most soundly ordered when it is directed toward this goal — for then no one, carried away by his own rashness, will attempt more than his calling can bear, knowing that it is not permitted to overstep his bounds. The person of humble station will live contentedly in a private life, lest he abandon the place where God has set him. Furthermore, it will be no small relief in cares, labors, griefs, and other burdens when a person knows that in all these things God is his guide. The magistrate will carry out his duties more willingly, the head of the household will bind himself to his responsibilities, and every person will bear and work through the discomforts, cares, tedium, and hardships of his particular station — when each is persuaded that the burden resting on him has been laid there by God. From this also grows a remarkable comfort: there is no task so lowly and unglamorous that — if it is done in obedience to your calling — it does not shine and become most precious in God's sight.

THE ALEUENTH CHAPTER. ¶OF THE
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I think I have already sufficiently shown how, for people condemned by the law, there remains one single means of recovering salvation; what faith is; and what benefits of God it bestows on people and what fruits it produces in them. The sum of it all was this: Christ is given to us by God's goodness and grasped and possessed by us through faith. By sharing in Him we receive chiefly two graces: first, being reconciled to God by His innocence, we now have in heaven a merciful Father instead of a Judge; second, being sanctified by His Spirit, we devote ourselves to innocence and purity of life. As for regeneration — which is the second grace — we have already spoken of it as thoroughly as seemed necessary. Justification was therefore touched upon less, because for our previous purpose it was enough to understand two things: first, how the faith by which alone we freely receive righteousness through God's mercy is not detached from good works; and second, what the good works of the saints actually are — which part of the question we treated at length. These things must therefore now

be thoroughly discussed — and discussed with the awareness that this is the chief pillar supporting all of religion, so that we may be all the more careful and attentive about it. For unless you first know what your standing is before God and what His judgment of you is — you have no foundation on which to establish your salvation, and also none from which to develop reverent fear of God. But the necessity of this knowledge will be better understood from the knowledge itself.

But so that we do not stumble at the very entrance — which we would do if we entered into debate over a term we had not defined — let us first declare what is meant by these expressions: a person being justified before God, being justified by faith, being justified by works. A person is said to be justified before God when he is pronounced by God's judgment to be both righteous and accepted on account of his own righteousness. For as wickedness is abominable before God, a sinner cannot find favor in His sight — not as long as he is regarded as a sinner. Therefore wherever sin is, the wrath and vengeance of God also appear. The person who is justified is the one not counted as a sinner but as a righteous person — and because of this he stands firm before God's judgment seat when all sinners fall. Just as when an innocent person is brought to trial before a righteous judge and the verdict is given according to his innocence — he is said to be justified before the judge. In the same way, the person justified before God is one who, being removed from the number of sinners, has God as the witness and affirmer of his righteousness. Therefore in the same sense a person is said to be justified by works when such purity and holiness are found in his life that they deserve the verdict of righteousness at God's throne, or when he can by the uprightness of his works an-

swer and satisfy God's judgment. Conversely, the person is said to be justified by faith who, being shut out from the righteousness of works, lays hold by faith of the righteousness of Christ — clothed with which, he appears before God not as a sinner but as righteous. So we simply define justification as an acceptance by which God, receiving us into His favor, regards us as righteous. And we say that this consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

For confirmation of this there are many clear testimonies in Scripture. First, it cannot be denied that this is the proper and most common meaning of the word. But because it would take too long to gather all the relevant passages and compare them, it will be enough to point the readers to them, as they can easily identify them for themselves. But I will bring forward some passages where the justification we are speaking of is explicitly dealt with by name. First, where Luke says that the people who had heard Christ justified God — and where Christ declares that wisdom is justified by her children — He does not mean in either case that they are giving righteousness to God or His wisdom, which always remains perfect in itself, no matter how much the world may try to take it away. Both statements amount to giving God and His teaching the praise they deserve. Again, when Christ reproaches the Pharisees for justifying themselves, He does not mean they are attaining righteousness through their deeds, but that they are boastfully seeking the reputation of righteousness from which they are in fact empty. Those skilled in the Hebrew language understand this expression better — in that tongue, a person is called wicked not only when he is guilty in conscience of some wicked deed, but also when he comes under the danger of a verdict of condemnation. For when

Bathsheba says that she and Solomon will be wicked doers, she is not confessing any offense but is lamenting that she and her son will be put to shame by being numbered among the condemned. But from the flow of the text itself it is easily apparent that the Latin word also, in this kind of usage, must be taken in a relational sense — not as signifying any inner quality. But regarding the subject before us: where Paul says that the Scripture foresaw that God justifies the Gentiles by faith — what can that mean except that God imputes righteousness through faith? Again, when he says that God justifies the wicked person who has faith in Christ — what can that mean but that through the benefit of faith, God delivers them from the condemnation their wickedness deserved? And he speaks even more plainly in his conclusion, when he cries out: 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who shall condemn? It is Christ who died — yes, who was raised — and who now intercedes for us.' This amounts to saying: Who shall accuse those whom God acquits? Who shall condemn those for whom Christ stands as advocate and defender? To justify, therefore, is nothing other than to acquit from guilt the person who was accused, by declaring his innocence. Since God therefore justifies us through Christ's intercession, He acquits us — not by approving our own innocence, but by imputing righteousness, so that we may be counted righteous in Christ, though not righteous in ourselves. Similarly in Acts chapter 13, in Paul's sermon: 'Through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him everyone who believes is justified from everything from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.' You see that justification is added after forgiveness of sins, as an explanation of it. You see plainly that it is taken to mean acquittal. You see that it is dis-

tinguished from the works of the law. You see that it is the sheer gracious gift of Christ. You see that it is received through faith. And finally you see that a satisfaction is spoken of when it is said that we are justified from sins through Christ. Similarly, when it is said that the tax collector went home from the temple justified, we cannot say that he obtained righteousness by any meritorious works. What is said is that after receiving pardon for his sins, he was counted righteous before God. He was therefore righteous not by approval of his works, but by God's free acquittal. Therefore Ambrose speaks very well when he calls the confession of sins a lawful justification.

But to set aside striving over the word: if we look at the thing itself as Scripture describes it, no further doubt remains. For Paul expresses justification under the name of acceptance when he says (Ephesians 1:5-6) that we were predestined for adoption through Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, by which He made us accepted — or, favored. For this means the same as what is said elsewhere: that God justifies freely. In Romans chapter 4 he first calls it an imputation of righteousness, and does not hesitate to say it consists in the forgiveness of sins. 'The man,' he says, 'is called blessed by David to whom God counts righteousness apart from works, as it is written: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven.' And so on. Truly he is not there treating one aspect of justification, but the whole of it. He testifies that David in that passage is giving a definition of justification when he declares those to be blessed to whom free forgiveness of sins is given. From this it is clear that the righteousness he speaks of is set in direct contrast to guilt. But the best passage for this purpose is where he teaches that this is the

whole content of the Gospel's message: that we should be reconciled to God, since it is His will to receive us into favor through Christ by not imputing sins to us. Let readers weigh carefully the entire flow of the text. For right afterward, when he adds by way of explanation that Christ who was without sin was made sin for us — in order to express the manner of reconciliation — he clearly means nothing other by the word 'reconciling' than 'justifying.' And what he says elsewhere — that we are made righteous by the obedience of Christ — could not stand unless we are counted as righteous before God in Him and apart from ourselves.

But Osiander has introduced a strange doctrine of essential righteousness which, even though he did not intend to destroy the doctrine of free righteousness, has wrapped it in such mystery that it darkens the minds of godly people and robs them of any genuine sense of Christ's grace. Before moving on, it is worth the effort to refute this confused error. His speculation amounts to nothing more than idle curiosity. He does gather many Scripture passages to prove that Christ is one with us and we with Him — which requires no proof — but because he misidentifies the nature of this union, he ties himself in knots. We, who hold that we are made one with Christ by the power of His Spirit, can easily untangle all of them. He had conceived something very close to the Manichaeian idea that God's substance is transferred into human beings. From this arises his further invention that Adam was fashioned after the image of God because, even before the fall, Christ was ordained as the pattern of human nature. But to be brief, I will stay with the matter at hand. He says that we are one with Christ. We agree. But we deny that Christ's substance is mingled with ours. Furthermore, we reject the argument that Christ is our righteous-

ness because He is the eternal God, the fountain of righteousness and God's own righteousness itself — Osiander wrongly uses this claim to prop up his errors. I ask readers to forgive me for only touching on these things now, since the proper order of teaching requires them to be addressed more fully elsewhere. Although Osiander disclaims any intention other than opposing the view that we are counted righteous for Christ's sake, he plainly reveals that he is not satisfied with the righteousness purchased for us by Christ's obedience and sacrifice. Instead, he invents the idea that we are substantially righteous in God — not only by quality but by substance poured into us. This is why he insists so forcefully that not only Christ but also the Father and the Holy Spirit dwell in us. I grant that this is true, but I say he twists it badly. He should have considered the manner of this dwelling — that the Father and the Holy Spirit are in Christ, and as the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him, so we possess the whole God in Him. Therefore everything he says separately about the Father and the Holy Spirit ultimately serves no purpose except to draw simple believers away from Christ. He then forces in a mixture of substances, by which God pours Himself into us and makes us, as it were, a part of Himself. He treats it as nearly nothing that the Holy Spirit works in us so that we grow into one with Christ, that He is our head and we are His members — unless Christ's very substance is mingled with us. But in what he says about the Father and the Holy Spirit, he reveals his thinking more openly: that we are justified not by the grace of the Mediator alone, and that righteousness is not simply and completely offered to us in His person, but that we are made partakers of the righteousness of God when God is essentially united with us.

If Osiander had said nothing more than that Christ, in justifying us, is made ours through essential union — that He is not only our head as a man, but that the substance of the divine nature is poured into us — he would have been indulging an eccentric idea causing less damage, and perhaps this great controversy would not have needed to be raised over such a confused error. But since this beginning is like a cuttlefish that hides its many tentacles behind a cloud of dark ink, we must resist it earnestly — unless we are willing to have taken from us the righteousness that alone gives us confidence to glory in our salvation. Throughout all of Osiander's argument, the word 'righteousness' and the act of 'justifying' are extended in two directions: to be justified is not only to be reconciled to God through free pardon, but also to be made righteous. And righteousness is not a free imputation but a holiness and uprightness that the substance of God dwelling in us breathes into us. He then boldly denies that Christ is our righteousness in the sense that, as a priest, He appeased the Father on our behalf by atoning for sins — but only in the sense that He is the eternal God and life. To prove his first point — that God justifies not only by forgiving but also by regenerating — he asks whether God leaves those He justifies just as they were by nature, changing nothing of their vices. The answer is straightforward: just as Christ cannot be torn apart, so the two things we receive together in Him — righteousness and sanctification — are inseparable. Therefore, everyone God receives into His favor He also gives the Spirit of adoption, by whose power He reshapes them into His image. But if the brightness of the sun cannot be separated from its heat, does it follow that the earth is warmed by light and illuminated by heat? There is no better illustration for this purpose. The sun gives the earth life

and fruitfulness through its heat and gives light and brightness through its rays. These two are inseparably joined together, yet reason forbids us to assign to one what belongs to the other. The same absurdity lies in the confusion of the two kinds of grace that Osiander forces together. Because God does indeed renew those whom He freely counts as righteous, Osiander confounds the gift of regeneration with this free acceptance and claims they are one and the same thing. But Scripture, while joining both together, still treats them as distinct — so that the manifold grace of God might more clearly appear to us. Paul's words are not redundant when he says that Christ was given to us as both righteousness and sanctification. And whenever Paul reasons from the salvation purchased for us by God's fatherly love and Christ's grace to prove that we are called to holiness and purity, he plainly shows that being justified and being made new creatures are two different things. When Osiander turns to Scripture, he corrupts every passage he cites. Where Paul says that faith is counted as righteousness to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the wicked, Osiander interprets it to mean 'makes righteous.' With equal recklessness he corrupts the whole of Romans chapter 4, and does not hesitate to similarly distort the passage I cited earlier: 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies' — where it is plain that Paul is speaking simply of guilt and acquittal, and the apostle's argument turns on a comparison of opposites. Osiander therefore shows himself to be a foolish reasoner, both in his own arguments and in his use of Scripture. He also mishandles the righteousness of Abraham, saying that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness after he had embraced Christ — who is the righteousness of God and God Himself — and had excelled in

exceptional virtues. In this way he wrongly fuses two distinct passages into one corrupt reading. The righteousness spoken of in that passage does not pertain to the whole course of Abraham's calling. Rather, the Holy Spirit testifies that although Abraham's virtues were exceptionally excellent and had grown over a long period of time, he still pleased God in no other way than by receiving through faith the grace offered in the promise. It follows, therefore, that in justification there is no place for works — as Paul clearly affirms.

As for Osiander's objection that justifying power does not reside in faith itself but only in relation to its receiving Christ — I gladly agree. For if faith justified by itself, or by its own intrinsic power as they call it, then since faith is always weak and imperfect, it could only justify in part, producing a maimed justification that offers us only a piece of salvation. We imagine no such thing. We say properly that God alone justifies; we then attribute the same to Christ, because He was given to us as righteousness; and faith we compare to a vessel. Unless we come empty, with the mouth of our soul open to receive Christ's grace, we cannot receive Christ. From this we gather that we do not rob Christ of His justifying power when we teach that He must first be received by faith before His righteousness is received. But I do not accept the twisted reasoning of this sophist when he says that faith is Christ — as if a clay pot were a treasure simply because gold is hidden inside it. The comparison is apt enough: faith, though it has no worth or value in itself, can justify us by bringing Christ, just as a pot full of money makes a person rich. Therefore I say that faith — which is only the instrument for receiving righteousness — is wrongly confused with Christ, who is the material cause and both the author and giver of

so great a benefit. With this, the question of how the word 'faith' should be understood in discussions of justification is also resolved.

Osiander goes further in his account of receiving Christ, claiming that the inner Word is received through the ministry of the outer word — a move designed to draw us away from Christ's priesthood and the person of the Mediator toward His divine nature alone. We do not divide Christ. We say that He is the same eternal Word of God who, by reconciling us to God in His flesh, gave us righteousness. We confess that He could not have fulfilled the office of Mediator or purchased righteousness for us unless He had been the eternal God. But Osiander's teaching is this: because Christ is both God and man, He was made righteousness for us with respect to His divine nature, not His human nature. But if righteousness belongs properly to His divine nature, then it would not be unique to Christ but common to the Father and the Holy Spirit as well — since there is not one righteousness belonging to one and another belonging to another. Moreover, what has existed naturally from eternity cannot properly be said to have 'been made' for us. And even if we grant that God was made righteousness for us, how does it fit that what stands between us is 'made of God'? That properly belongs to the person of the Mediator — who, while containing the nature of God within Himself, is here specifically identified by His particular title that distinguishes Him from the Father and the Holy Spirit. Osiander foolishly boasts in the single word from Jeremiah, where God promises that the Lord Jehovah shall be our righteousness. But from that he can draw nothing more than that Christ, who is our righteousness, is God openly revealed in the flesh. In another place Paul's sermon states

that God purchased the church with His own blood. If someone were to conclude from this that the blood by which sins were purged was divine and of the nature of the Godhead, who could tolerate such a gross error? Yet Osiander thinks he has won everything with such a childish argument. He swells with pride, leaps for joy, and fills many pages with grand words. But there is a plain and ready answer: the Word Jehovah, when He comes as the offspring of David, shall indeed be the righteousness of the godly. But Isaiah explains in what sense this is true: 'My righteous servant shall justify many by His knowledge.' Here the Father speaks, assigning to the Son the office of justifying. He adds the reason — that He is righteous — and sets out the means by which Christ is known and through which this is accomplished. It is better to take the Hebrew word *da'ath*, meaning 'knowledge,' as passive in this context. From this I draw two conclusions: first, that Christ was made righteousness when He took on the form of a servant; second, that He justified us by showing Himself obedient to His Father. Therefore He does this for us not according to His divine nature, but according to the role of the work entrusted to Him. For although God alone is the fountain of righteousness and we are made righteous only by partaking of Him, because we are estranged from His righteousness through sin, we must come down to this lower remedy: that Christ justifies us by the power of His death and resurrection. If Osiander objects that this work is of such excellence that it surpasses human nature and therefore must be attributed to the divine nature alone, I grant the first point but say he is badly mistaken on the second. For although Christ could not cleanse our souls with His blood, appease the Father with His sacrifice, acquit us from guilt, or perform the office of priest unless

He had been true God — because human strength alone would have been too weak for so great a burden — yet it is certain that He performed all these things according to His human nature. For if we ask how we are justified, Paul answers: by the obedience of Christ. But did He obey in any other way than by taking the form of a servant? From this we gather that righteousness was given to us in His flesh. Likewise in the other passage — which I am amazed Osiander is not ashamed to cite so often — the source of righteousness is placed nowhere else but in the flesh of Christ: 'He who knew no sin He made sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' Osiander loudly trumpets 'the righteousness of God' and triumphs as though he had proved his imaginary theory of essential righteousness — when the words say something quite different: that we are righteous through the cleansing accomplished by Christ. Even the most basic students of Scripture know that 'the righteousness of God' refers to the righteousness that God approves — just as in John, where the glory of God is contrasted with the glory of men. I know that sometimes it is called the righteousness of God because God is its author and gives it to us. But any reader with sound judgment can see that in this passage nothing other is meant than that we stand upright before God's judgment seat, sustained by the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death. Nor does the precise wording carry so much weight, provided that Osiander agrees with us on this point: that we are justified in Christ because He was made a propitiatory sacrifice for us — which cannot be attributed to His divine nature. Along the same lines, when Christ intends to seal the righteousness and salvation He has brought us, He sets before us a sure pledge of it in His flesh. He calls Himself the living bread, but to explain the

manner of it He adds that His flesh is truly food and His blood is truly drink. This same pattern appears in the Sacraments, which, while directing our faith to the whole Christ and not to half of Christ, also teach that the substance of righteousness and salvation resides in His flesh — not that as merely a man He either justifies or gives life of Himself, but because it pleased God to display openly in the Mediator what was hidden and incomprehensible in Himself. This is why I am accustomed to say that Christ is like a fountain opened for us, from which we may draw what would otherwise lie hidden and inaccessible in the deep spring — brought to us in the person of the Mediator. In this way and meaning, I do not deny that Christ as God and man justifies us, and that this is also the work of the Father and the Holy Spirit. And finally, the righteousness of which Christ makes us partakers is the eternal righteousness of the eternal God — so long as Osiander yields to the clear and solid arguments I have presented.

So that his arguments do not mislead those unfamiliar with these questions, I readily grant that we lack this incomparable benefit until Christ becomes ours. We therefore place in the highest importance the union of the head and the members, the dwelling of Christ in our hearts, and the mystical union — so that Christ, being made ours, may make us partakers of the gifts with which He is endowed. We do not, therefore, behold Him from a distance outside ourselves in order to have righteousness imputed to us. Rather, because we have put on Him, have been grafted into His body, and He has graciously made us one with Himself, we can rightly claim a share in His righteousness. This also puts to rest Osiander's slanderous argument — where he charges that we treat faith itself as righteousness, as if we were robbing Christ of His

proper role by saying that we come to Him empty, making room for His grace so that He alone may fill us. Osiander, refusing this spiritual union, forces a crude physical mingling with believers instead. He therefore mockingly labels as Zwinglians all who will not subscribe to his fantastical theory of essential righteousness, on the grounds that they do not believe Christ is physically eaten in the Lord's Supper. As for me, I count it a great honor to be reproached by a proud man captive to his own errors. He attacks not only me but also other writers well known in the world, whom he ought to have shown modest respect. It troubles me nothing, since I am not defending a personal cause — and precisely because I am free from corrupt self-interest, I handle this matter all the more sincerely. What Osiander so insistently demands with his essential righteousness and essential dwelling of Christ in us amounts to this: first, that God should pour Himself into us through a crude mixture — as he also imagines a physical eating of Christ in the Supper; second, that God should breathe His righteousness into us so that we are truly righteous with Him. In his view, this righteousness is as much God Himself as it is God's goodness, holiness, or purity. I will not spend much effort refuting the Scripture passages he brings forward, which he wrongly applies to our present state rather than to the life to come. Through Christ, says Peter (1 Peter 1:4), we have been given precious and very great promises, so that through them we may become partakers of the divine nature — as though we were already what the Gospel promises we will be at Christ's final coming. Indeed, John tells us (1 John 3:1) that we shall then see God as He is, because we shall be like Him. I men-

tion these things only to give readers a brief taste of why I deliberately pass over the rest. It is not that they are difficult to refute, but because I have no desire to be tedious in work that is unnecessary.

But there is more poison hidden in his second point, where he teaches that we are righteous together with God. I believe I have already sufficiently shown that, even if this doctrine were not so harmful, it is cold and fruitless, so empty in itself that it dissolves on inspection — and therefore ought rightly to be rejected by sound and godly readers. But it is an intolerable offense to use the pretense of a double righteousness to undermine the firm assurance of salvation, to carry people into the clouds so that they cannot lay hold by faith on the grace of propitiation and call on God with a quiet mind. Osiander mocks those who teach that the word 'justifying' is a legal term, insisting that we must be truly righteous in fact. And there is nothing he abhors more than to say that we are justified by free imputation. But if God does not justify us by acquitting and pardoning, what do Paul's words mean: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them'? And: 'Him who knew no sin He made sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' First I gain this much: those who are reconciled to God are declared righteous. The manner is stated plainly: God justifies by forgiving. And in another place, justification is set as the opposite of accusation — and comparing these as contraries clearly shows it is a term drawn from legal usage. Anyone even moderately familiar with the Hebrew language and of sound mind knows where this phrase comes from, what purpose it serves, and what it means. Now, when Paul says that David described the righteousness apart from works in these words — 'Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven'

— let Osiander tell me whether this is a full definition or only a half one. Paul does not bring in the prophet as a witness to show that forgiveness of sins is merely one part of righteousness or one factor among others in justification. Rather, he includes the whole of righteousness within free forgiveness, pronouncing blessed the one whose sins are covered, to whom God has forgiven iniquities, and against whom God counts no transgressions. He measures and defines this person's blessedness by the fact that he is righteous not in actuality but by imputation. Osiander objects that this would be slanderous to God and contrary to His nature — to justify those who remain truly wicked. But we must remember, as I have already said, that the grace of justification is never separated from regeneration, even though they are distinct things. However, since experience makes abundantly clear that remnants of sin always remain in the righteous, it is necessary that they be justified in a very different sense from the sense in which they are renewed into newness of life. This renewal God begins in His elect and continues throughout their whole lives, advancing it gradually and sometimes slowly — so that they always stand before His judgment seat in danger of the sentence of death. But He justifies them not in pieces but completely, so that, clothed with the purity of Christ, they may stand freely in heaven. No partial righteousness could satisfy our consciences until they are assured that God is fully pleased with us — because we are righteous before Him without qualification. It follows, therefore, that the doctrine of justification is twisted and overturned from its very foundation when doubt is cast into people's minds, when confidence in salvation is shaken, when free and fearless prayer is hindered, and when quiet, peace, and spiritual joy are not established. Paul therefore draws an argu-

ment from opposites to prove that the inheritance does not come by the law. For if it did, faith would be made meaningless — because faith, if it rests on works, is destroyed, since no one, however holy, will find in his works any ground for confidence. This distinction between justification and regeneration — which Osiander confuses, calling them two kinds of righteousness — is expressed very clearly by Paul. When speaking of his actual righteousness in practice, the uprightness with which he was truly endowed (what Osiander calls essential righteousness), he cries out miserably: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?' But when he flees to the righteousness grounded in God's mercy alone, he triumphs gloriously over life, death, disgrace, hunger, sword, and every adversity. 'Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.' 'For I am convinced that nothing will be able to separate us from His love in Christ.' He openly declares that he possesses the righteousness that fully suffices before God for salvation — so that the wretched bondage he had just lamented within himself cannot diminish or hinder his boldness to glory. This distinction is well known and familiar to all the saints who groan under the burden of sin and yet, with victorious confidence, rise above every fear. As for Osiander's objection that this conflicts with God's nature, it falls back on himself. Though he clothes the saints with a double righteousness like a fur-lined garment, he is forced to admit that without forgiveness of sins they never pleased God. If that is true, then at least let him grant that those who are not truly righteous in fact are counted as righteous through what they call imputation, in the measure appointed for it. But how far can a sinner extend this free acceptance that stands in place of righteousness? Is he to measure it out by the

pound or by the ounce? He will hang uncertain and wavering back and forth, because he may not claim enough righteousness to establish confidence. It is fortunate that the one who would bind God to such a law is not the judge in this case. But this will stand firm: 'You are justified in Your words and will prevail when You are judged.' What great presumption it is to condemn the chief Judge when He freely acquits — as if this answer should carry no force: 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.' Yet the intercession of Moses, which God silenced with this very saying, aimed not at sparing no one, but at acquitting all — removing their condemnation though they were guilty of offense. We say that those who were lost have their sins buried and are thus justified before God — for as God hates sin, He can love only those whom He justifies. And this is a wonderful manner of justifying: that those covered with the righteousness of Christ do not fear the judgment they have deserved, and though they rightly condemn themselves, they are counted righteous apart from themselves.

But readers should be warned to pay close attention to the mystery Osiander boasts he will not hide from them. After laboring long and hard to prove that we do not obtain favor with God merely through the imputation of Christ's righteousness -- because, he claims, it would be impossible for God to count as righteous those who are not truly righteous (I am using his own words) -- he finally concludes that Christ was given to us for righteousness not with respect to His human nature but with respect to His divine nature. And although this righteousness can only be found in the person of the Mediator, it is the righteousness of God, not of man. He no longer ties his argument together with two kinds of righteousness but plainly takes the power of justifying away from

Christ's human nature. But it is worth noting how he contradicts himself. Paul says in the same passage that Christ was made our wisdom, which belongs to the eternal Word alone. Does it follow that Christ as man is not wisdom? I answer that the only begotten Son of God was indeed His eternal wisdom, but in Paul's writings that title is applied to Him in different ways, because all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are stored up in Him. What Christ had with His Father, He revealed to us. So what Paul says does not refer to the essence of the Son of God but to our experience of Him. It is rightly applied to Christ's human nature, because although His light shone in the darkness before He took on flesh, it was a hidden light until Christ came forth in human nature as the Sun of Righteousness. He therefore calls Himself the light of the world. Osiander's objection that the power of justifying is far above both angels and humans is also foolish, because this power depends not on any creature's worth but on God's appointment. If angels tried to make satisfaction to God, they could accomplish nothing, because they were not appointed for that purpose. But this task uniquely belonged to Christ as man, who was made subject to the law to redeem us from the curse of the law. Osiander also falsely claims that those who deny Christ is our righteousness according to His divine nature leave only part of Christ and -- worse still -- make two gods. Although they confess that God dwells in us, they also say we are not made righteous by the righteousness of God. But although we call Christ the author of life because He suffered death to destroy the one who had the power of death, we do not take that honor away from the whole Christ who was openly revealed as God in the flesh. Rather, we simply explain how God's righteousness is channeled to us so we can enjoy it. This

is where Osiander has gone very badly wrong. We do not deny that what is openly given to us in Christ comes from the secret grace and power of God. We do not argue against this -- that the righteousness Christ gives us is the righteousness of God that proceeds from God. But we firmly maintain that we have righteousness and life in the death and resurrection of Christ. I pass over the heap of Scripture passages he should be embarrassed about, which he has tediously used to burden readers without good judgment, all to prove that wherever righteousness is mentioned, it must mean this essential righteousness. For example, when David calls upon God's righteousness to help him -- which he does more than a hundred times -- Osiander does not hesitate to twist all those passages. His other objection is equally weak: that only what moves us to act rightly should properly be called righteousness, and that God alone works in us both to will and to do. We do not deny that God reforms us by His Spirit into holiness and righteousness of life. But we must first ask whether He does this directly by Himself, or through His Son, with whom He has stored up all the fullness of His Holy Spirit to supply the needs of His members. Furthermore, although righteousness comes to us from the secret source of the Godhead, it does not follow that Christ, who sanctified Himself in the flesh for our sake, was our righteousness according to His divine nature. Osiander's claim that Christ Himself was righteous by the righteousness of God is equally foolish. He reasons that unless the Father's will had moved Him, He could not have fulfilled the office entrusted to Him. Although we said elsewhere that all of Christ's own merits proceed from the pure goodwill of God, this does not support the fantastical idea with which Osiander deceives both himself and simple people. Who would accept the conclusion

that because God is the source and beginning of our righteousness, we are therefore essentially righteous, and the essence of God's righteousness dwells in us? Isaiah says that in redeeming the church, God put on His righteousness as armor. But did He do this to strip Christ of the armor He had given Him, making Him an incomplete Redeemer? The prophet meant nothing more than that God borrowed nothing from outside Himself and needed no one's help to redeem us. Paul expressed this briefly in other words: God gave us salvation to display His righteousness. But this does not overthrow what Paul teaches elsewhere: that we are made righteous by the obedience of one man. In the end, whoever wraps up a double righteousness -- so that poor souls cannot rest in the pure mercy of God alone -- mockingly crowns Christ with thorns.

But since most people imagine that righteousness is composed of both faith and works, let us also show this: the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of works are so different that when one is established, the other must be overthrown. The apostle says he counted all things as garbage so that he might gain Christ and be found in Him, having not his own righteousness from the law but that which comes through faith in Jesus Christ -- the righteousness from God by faith. You see that here is a comparison of opposites. He declares that whoever wants to obtain the righteousness of Christ must abandon their own righteousness. In another place he says that this was the cause of the Jews' downfall: trying to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God. If establishing our own righteousness means rejecting God's righteousness, then to obtain God's righteousness our own must be completely abolished. He makes the same point when he says our boasting is excluded -- not by the law, but by faith. From

this it follows that as long as any righteousness of works remains, no matter how little, there is still something to boast about. Now if faith excludes all boasting, then the righteousness of works cannot in any way be joined with the righteousness of faith. Paul speaks so plainly about this in the fourth chapter of Romans that he leaves no room for excuses or evasions. "If Abraham was justified by works," he says, "he has something to boast about." And immediately he adds: "But he has no ground for boasting before God." It follows, therefore, that he was not justified by works. Then he presses another argument based on contrasts: when a reward is given for works, it is paid as a debt, not given as grace. But righteousness is given to faith according to grace. Therefore, it does not come from the merits of works. So farewell to the fantasy that imagines a righteousness made of a mixture of faith and works.

The Sophists think they have a clever escape, amusing themselves by twisting Scripture and inventing pointless objections. They explain the "works" in that passage as those done by unregenerate people, acting merely by the letter through the effort of free will apart from Christ's grace. They say it does not apply to spiritual works. According to their view, a person is justified by both faith and works, as long as the works are not their own but the gifts of Christ and fruits of regeneration. They claim Paul spoke this way only to convince the Jews -- who were trusting in their own works -- that they were foolish to claim righteousness for themselves, since only the Spirit of Christ gives it, not any natural human effort. But they fail to notice that in Paul's comparison of the righteousness of the law with the righteousness of the Gospel, all works are excluded, no matter what title they may carry. He teaches that the righteousness of the law means the person who

does what the law commands will live. But the righteousness of faith means believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and that the Father raised Him from the dead. Furthermore, we will show later that sanctification and righteousness are distinct benefits of Christ. From this it follows that even spiritual works do not factor into the equation when the power of justifying is attributed to faith. When Paul denies -- as I just mentioned -- that Abraham had anything to boast about before God because he was not made righteous by works, this should not be limited to merely external virtues or the efforts of free will. Although Abraham's life was spiritual and practically angelic, he still did not have enough merit from works to purchase righteousness before God.

The mainstream Scholastics teach a somewhat cruder version by mixing in their preparatory works. But these others are more dangerous to the simple and untrained, hiding behind the language of the Spirit and grace while obscuring the mercy of God -- which alone can bring peace to trembling consciences. We confess with Paul that the doers of the law are justified before God. But since all of us fall far short of keeping the law, we conclude that the works which should have most contributed to righteousness are of no help because we lack them. As for the common Papists or Scholastics, they are doubly wrong. First, they define faith as merely a confidence of conscience in expecting reward from God for merits. Second, they interpret God's grace not as the free imputation of righteousness but as the Holy Spirit's assistance in pursuing holiness. They read in the apostle that whoever comes to God must first believe that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. But they fail to notice how seeking should actually look.

That they are wrong about the meaning of grace is clearly proven by their own writings. Lombard explains that the justification given through Christ comes in two ways. "First," he says, "the death of Christ justifies us by stirring up love in our hearts, which makes us righteous." "Second, through that same death, sin is destroyed -- the sin through which Satan held us captive -- so that he no longer has grounds to condemn us." You see that he primarily understands God's grace in justification as the Holy Spirit directing us to good works. He intended to follow Augustine's opinion, but he follows him from a great distance and strays far from tracking him accurately. Wherever Augustine said something clearly, Lombard obscures it. Wherever Augustine said something not entirely precise, Lombard corrupts it. The Scholastics have strayed further and further, slipping from bad to worse, until they finally tumbled headlong into Pelagian error. Even Augustine's own language is not entirely satisfactory. Although he excellently strips all praise of righteousness from human beings and gives it entirely to God's grace, he refers that grace to sanctification, by which we are renewed to a new life through the Holy Spirit.

But Scripture, when it speaks of the righteousness of faith, leads us in a very different direction. It tells us to turn away from looking at our own works and look only to the mercy of God and the perfection of Christ. It teaches this order of justification: first, God in His pure and free goodness embraces the sinner, seeing nothing in them but misery that might move Him to compassion. He sees them completely naked and empty of good works, and He finds the reason to do them good entirely within Himself. Then He moves the sinner with a sense of His goodness, so that the sinner - - despairing of their own works -- casts the entire sum of their sal-

vation on God's mercy. This is the experience of faith, through which the sinner enters into possession of salvation. Through the Gospel's teaching, they recognize that they are reconciled to God. Having received forgiveness of sins through Christ's righteousness, they are justified. And although they are regenerated by the Spirit of God, they find their continual righteousness not in the good works they pursue, but in the righteousness of Christ alone. When each of these points is carefully examined, they will give a perfect explanation of our position. They might have been better arranged in a different order. But it matters little, as long as they are connected in such a way that the whole matter is truly explained and firmly established.

Here it is worth recalling the connection we spoke of earlier between faith and the Gospel. Faith is said to justify because it receives and embraces the righteousness offered in the Gospel. And since righteousness is offered through the Gospel, all consideration of works is excluded. Paul makes this point many times elsewhere, but most clearly in two places. To the Romans, comparing the law and the Gospel, he says: the righteousness of the law is this -- that the person who does these things shall live by them. But the righteousness of faith offers salvation if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and that the Father raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:5). Do you see how he makes this the difference between law and Gospel? The law gives righteousness to works, while the Gospel gives it freely without the help of works. This is a remarkable passage, one that can deliver us from many hard questions -- if we understand that the righteousness given to us by the Gospel is free from all the conditions of the law. This is why he so often sets the promise in sharp contrast

against the law, as if they were opposites: if the inheritance comes from the law, then it does not come from the promise -- and all the rest in that same chapter to the same effect (Galatians 3:18). The law itself certainly has its own promises. Therefore, the Gospel's promises must contain something different and distinct from the law's promises, unless we want to say the comparison makes no sense. What is this difference? It is that the Gospel's promises are freely given and upheld by God's mercy alone, while the law's promises depend on the condition of works. Let no one object that what is rejected here is only the righteousness people try to force upon God by their own effort and free will. Paul teaches without any exception that the law is of no benefit when it commands, because there is no one -- not among the common people, nor among the most perfect -- who fulfills it. Love is undoubtedly the chief point of the law. When the Spirit of God shapes us to love, why is it still not a cause of righteousness for us? Because even in the saints it is imperfect, and therefore by itself deserves no reward (Romans 6:2).

The second passage is this. "It is clear that no one is justified by the law before God, because the righteous shall live by faith. But the law is not of faith; rather, the person who does these things shall live by them" (Galatians 3:12). How could this argument hold together unless we agree on this point: that works have no role in faith's righteousness, but must be completely separated from it? "The law," Paul says, "is different from faith." Why? Because works are required for the law's righteousness. Therefore, it follows that works are not required for the righteousness of faith. From this relationship it is clear that those who are justified by faith are justified apart from the merit of works -- indeed, without any merit of

works. Faith receives a righteousness that the Gospel gives. And the Gospel differs from the law in this: it does not bind righteousness to works but places it entirely in God's mercy. Paul makes a similar point in Romans: Abraham had nothing to boast about, because faith was credited to him as righteousness. He adds a confirmation: there is room for the righteousness of faith only where there are no works deserving reward (Romans 4:2). "Where works exist," he says, "the reward is paid as a debt. What is given to faith is given freely." The very words he uses in that passage support this point. Shortly after, he adds that we receive the inheritance by faith according to grace. From this he concludes that the inheritance is a free gift because it is received by faith. How does this work? Only because faith, without any help from works, rests entirely on God's mercy. In the same sense, he undoubtedly teaches in another place that the righteousness of God was revealed apart from the law, though the law and the prophets bear witness to it. By excluding the law, he says that righteousness is not helped by works. We do not earn it by working; we come to it empty-handed to receive it (Romans 3:21).

By now the reader can see how unfairly the Sophists of our day attack our teaching when we say that a person is justified by faith alone. They do not dare deny that a person is justified by faith, since Scripture says it so often. But because the word "alone" is never explicitly stated, they cannot accept the addition. Is that so? Then what will they do with Paul's statements, where he says that righteousness comes through faith only if it is freely given? How can "freely given" agree with works? And what clever evasion will they use to dismiss what Paul says elsewhere: that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel? If righteousness is revealed

in the Gospel, surely it is a complete and perfect righteousness, not a torn or half-righteousness. Therefore, the law has no place in it. And their objection to the exclusive word "alone" is not only false but also foolish. Does Paul not clearly enough give everything to faith alone when he takes everything away from works? What else do these statements mean: that righteousness was revealed apart from the law, and that a person is justified freely, without the works of the law? Here they have a clever dodge to escape with -- one they did not invent themselves but borrowed from Origen and some of the early writers. Yet it is very foolish. They claim that only the ceremonial works of the law are excluded, not the moral ones. Their constant arguing has left them so confused that they do not even know the basic rules of logic. Do they think the apostle was confused when he cited these passages to prove his point? "The person who does these things shall live by them." And: "Cursed is everyone who does not fulfill all things written in the book of the law." Unless they are insane, they will not say that life was promised to the keepers of ceremonies, or that the curse was threatened only against those who broke them. If these passages are about the moral law, then moral works are also clearly excluded from the power of justifying. Paul's other arguments serve the same purpose: since the knowledge of sin comes through the law, righteousness does not come through the law. Since the law produces wrath, it does not produce righteousness. Since the law cannot give the conscience assurance, it cannot give righteousness either. Since faith is credited as righteousness, righteousness is not a reward for works but is given as a gift that is not owed. Since we are justified by faith, all boasting is eliminated. If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would truly come

from the law. But God has shut everyone up under sin, so that the promise might be given to those who believe. Let them now foolishly claim, if they dare, that these things are said about ceremonies and not about morals. But even children would mock such obvious shamelessness. Therefore, let us hold this as certain: the entire law is meant when the power of justifying is taken away from the law.

But if anyone wonders why the apostle specifically mentions "works of the law" rather than simply "works," the reason is easy to explain. Although works are highly valued, they get that value from God's approval, not from their own worth. Who can boast of any righteousness before God except what He has approved? Who can claim any reward as owed except what He has promised? Works therefore have their value by God's generosity: they are counted worthy of both the name and reward of righteousness. And they have value only when the person performing them intends to show obedience to God through them. That is why the apostle, in another place, when trying to prove that Abraham could not have been justified by works, points out that the law was given almost 430 years after the covenant was made. Uneducated people would laugh at such an argument, since righteous works could have existed before the law was published. But Paul knew that works had no such value except by God's testimony and approval. So he took it as an established fact that before the law, works had no power to justify. We understand why he specifically mentions "works of the law" when he wants to deny that works can justify: because disputes can only arise about those works, and no others. Yet sometimes he excludes all works without qualification, as when he says that according to David's testimony, blessedness belongs to the

person to whom the Lord credits righteousness without works. Therefore, no amount of clever arguing can prevent us from holding to this general exclusion: faith alone. Their attempt to find a subtle way around this -- that we are justified by a faith that works through love, so that righteousness depends on love -- also fails. We do indeed agree with Paul that the only faith that justifies is the kind that is actively working through love. But faith does not get its power to justify from that working of love. It justifies only because it brings us into communion with Christ's righteousness. Otherwise, everything the apostle argues so earnestly would fall apart. "To the one who works," he says, "the reward is not credited as grace but as debt." "But to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." Could he have spoken more clearly? There is no righteousness of faith except where there are no works deserving any reward. Faith is only credited as righteousness when righteousness is given by grace -- when it is not owed.

Now let us examine whether it is true, as stated in our definition, that the righteousness of faith is reconciliation with God, which consists entirely in the forgiveness of sins. We must always return to this principle: the wrath of God rests on all people as long as they continue to be sinners. Isaiah has expressed this excellently: "The hand of the Lord is not shortened so that He cannot save, nor His ear dull so that He cannot hear. But your sins have caused a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2). We hear that sin creates a division between humanity and God, and that it turns God's face away from the sinner. It cannot be otherwise, since it is incompatible with His righteousness to have any

fellowship with sin. Therefore, the apostle teaches that people are enemies of God until they are restored to favor through Christ. When the Lord receives someone into union with Himself, He is said to justify that person, because He cannot accept them into favor or join them to Himself without turning a sinner into a righteous person. We further say that this is accomplished through the forgiveness of sins. If those whom the Lord has reconciled to Himself were judged by their works, they would indeed still be sinners -- yet they must be free and clean from sin. It is therefore certain that those whom God embraces are made righteous in no other way than by being cleansed through the forgiveness that wipes away the stains of their sins. Such righteousness may, in a word, be called the forgiveness of sins.

Both of these points are most clearly seen in Paul's words, which I have already quoted: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them, and He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation." Then he adds the summary of his message: "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Here he names righteousness and reconciliation interchangeably, so we may understand that each is mutually contained in the other. He teaches that the way to achieve this righteousness is when our sins are not counted against us. Therefore, do not wonder any longer how God justifies us, since you hear that He reconciles us to Himself by not counting our sins. Paul proves this from the testimony of David in Romans: righteousness is credited to a person apart from works, because David declares blessed the one whose sins are forgiven, whose transgressions are covered, and to whom the Lord does not count their offenses. Without

question, David is speaking of righteousness when he uses the word blessedness. Since he says this blessedness consists in the forgiveness of sins, there is no reason to define righteousness any differently. Therefore, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, sings that the knowledge of salvation is found in the forgiveness of sins. Paul followed this same principle in his sermon to the people of Antioch about the sum of salvation, as Luke reports. He concluded this way: "Through Him, forgiveness of sins is preached to you, and everyone who believes in Him is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." The apostle ties forgiveness of sins so closely to righteousness that he shows they are one and the same thing. Therefore, he rightly argues that the righteousness given to us freely is obtained through the mercy of God. It should not seem strange or unusual that believers are righteous before God not by works but by free acceptance. Both Scripture says this often, and the early church fathers sometimes spoke the same way. Augustine says in one place: "The righteousness of the saints in this world stands in the forgiveness of sins rather than in the perfection of virtues." Bernard's notable statements agree: "Not to sin is God's righteousness; but the righteousness of humanity is the merciful kindness of God." He had earlier affirmed that Christ is our righteousness through absolution, and that therefore only those are righteous who have received pardon through mercy.

From this also follows that we are justified before God solely through Christ's righteousness. This is the same as saying that a person is not righteous in themselves, but because Christ's righteousness is shared with them through imputation -- a point well worth careful attention. The trivial error vanishes that says a per-

son is justified by faith because faith receives a portion of God's Spirit that makes them righteous. This is so contrary to the teaching explained above that the two can never be reconciled. Whoever is taught to seek righteousness outside themselves must certainly be devoid of their own righteousness. The apostle says this most plainly when he writes that the One who knew no sin was made a propitiatory sacrifice for us to cleanse our sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). You see that our righteousness is not in us but in Christ. It belongs to us only because we share in Christ, possessing all His riches along with Him. It does not contradict this that Paul teaches in another place that sin was condemned in the flesh of Christ (Romans 8:3) so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. He means no other fulfillment than what we obtain through imputation. The Lord Christ shares His righteousness with us in such a way that He pours its power into us, insofar as it pertains to God's judgment. The other statement Paul made a little earlier clearly means the same thing: "As by the disobedience of one man we were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man we are justified" (Romans 5:19). What else does it mean to ground our righteousness in Christ's obedience, than to affirm that we are counted righteous only because Christ's obedience is credited to us as if it were our own? I think Ambrose has given an excellent illustration of this righteousness in the story of Jacob's blessing. Jacob did not deserve the right of the firstborn son on his own merit. But dressed in his brother's garments and wearing his brother's coat -- which gave off a sweet fragrance -- he found favor with his father and received the blessing for his own benefit while wearing another's identity. In the same way, we hide under the precious purity of

Christ our elder brother, so that we may receive a testimony of righteousness in God's sight. Ambrose's words are these: "Isaac smelled the fragrance of the garments. Perhaps this means we are justified not by works but by faith, because the weakness of the flesh hinders works. But the brightness of faith, which earns the forgiveness of sins, overshadows the failure of deeds." And truly it is so. In order for us to appear before God's face for salvation, we must carry the sweet fragrance of Christ, and our faults must be covered and hidden by His perfection.

THE .XII. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT, TO THE
END WE MAY BE FULLY PERSWADED
OF THE FREE IUSTIFICATION, WE
MUSTE LIFT VP OUR MINDES TO THE
IUDGEMENT SCARE OF GOD.



Although the most clear testimonies prove all these things to be true, we will not fully understand how necessary they are until we set before our eyes the foundations on which this entire discussion rests. First, let us remember that we are not speaking of the righteousness of a human court of law but of the heavenly judgment seat — and that we must not measure by our own small standard what degree of upright conduct can satisfy God's judgment. But it is astonishing to see how carelessly and boldly people ordinarily discuss this subject. Indeed, it can be observed that none speak more boldly or more confidently about the righteousness of works than those who are either openly riddled with outward vices or about to burst with hidden ones. This happens because they are not thinking about the righteousness of God — of which, if they had even the smallest sense, they would never make such light of it. And truly, righteousness is treated far too lightly when it is not recognized as so perfect that nothing less

than what is wholly complete and absolute — untainted by any impurity — can meet its standard. Such righteousness never has existed and never will be found in any human being. It is easy enough for anyone to hold forth in classrooms about the worthiness of works to justify people. But when they come before God, all such games must stop — because there, serious business is done, and there is no room for verbal sparring. To this — to this, I say — we must direct our minds if we want to truly inquire into real righteousness: how we will be able to answer the heavenly Judge when He calls us to account. Let us think of Him as a judge not as our own imagination pictures Him, but as He is portrayed in Scripture: by whose brightness the stars go dark, before whose power the mountains melt, by whose wrath the earth trembles, by whose wisdom the wise are caught in their own cunning, by whose purity all things are proved impure — whose righteousness even the angels cannot bear, before whom the innocent are found guilty, and whose vengeance, once kindled, reaches to the depths of hell. If He, I say, sits to examine human conduct, who will appear assured before His throne? 'Who among us can live with the devouring fire?' asks the prophet. 'Who among us can live with continual burning?' 'He who walks righteously and speaks truth,' and so on. Let such a person step forward, whoever he may be. But that answer means no one steps forward. For this terrifying word speaks to the contrary: 'Lord, if You should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?' All must immediately perish, as it is written elsewhere: 'Can a man be righteous before God? Can a mortal be pure before his Maker? Behold, He puts no trust in His servants, and He charges His angels with error — how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust? They are

crushed before the moth. From morning to evening they are broken to pieces.' 'Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in His sight — how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, man, who drinks iniquity like water?' I acknowledge that the book of Job mentions a righteousness that goes even beyond the keeping of the law. And it is useful to understand this distinction: even if a person were to satisfy the law, he still could not stand the test of that righteousness which surpasses all human comprehension. Therefore, though Job was clear in his own conscience, he was struck silent and overwhelmed — because he saw that even angelic holiness cannot satisfy God when He examines works with strict exactness. But I will set aside that incomprehensible righteousness for now and say only this: if our life is examined by the standard of the written law, we are more than senseless if the many curses by which the Lord intends to awaken us do not fill us with dread — especially this general curse: 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in this book.' In the end, all of this discussion will be cold and hollow unless every person acknowledges himself guilty before the heavenly Judge, willingly humbles and lowers himself, and is earnestly concerned about how he may be acquitted.

To this — to this, I say — we should have lifted our eyes, to learn to tremble with fear rather than to rejoice in vain confidence. So long as the comparison extends no further than other people, it is easy for everyone to think they have something others should not despise. But the moment we look upward to God, that confidence instantly collapses and comes to nothing. Our soul's condition before God is altogether like the human eye's condition before the sun. The eye, as long as it is looking at nearby things, shows its

sharpness and power. But when it is turned toward the sun, it is dazzled and dimmed by the overwhelming brightness and feels its own weakness in looking at the sun just as keenly as it felt its strength in looking at lesser things. Therefore let us not deceive ourselves with empty confidence just because we consider ourselves equal to or better than other people — that counts for nothing before God, whose standard alone matters. But if our stubbornness cannot be tamed by these warnings, He will say to us what He said to the Pharisees: 'You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.' Go ahead, then, and boast proudly of your righteousness before people — while God in heaven abhors it. But what do the servants of God who are truly taught by His Spirit say? 'Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no living man is righteous.' Another says, in somewhat different terms: 'A man cannot be in the right before God. If he contends with Him, he cannot answer Him once out of a thousand times.' Here we plainly hear what the righteousness of God is: a standard that no human works can satisfy, and before which, when it charges us with a thousand offenses, we cannot clear ourselves of even one. Such a righteousness was what God's chosen instrument Paul had grasped, when he declared that he was aware of nothing against himself — and yet acknowledged that this did not justify him.

Not only do such examples appear throughout holy Scripture, but all godly writers show that they were always of the same mind. So Augustine says: 'All the godly who groan under the burden of this corruptible flesh and in the weakness of this life have only this hope — that we have one Mediator, Jesus Christ the righteous, and

He is the appeasement for our sins.' What does he say? If this is their only hope, where is confidence in works? By calling it the only hope, he leaves no room for any other. Bernard says: 'Where is safe and firm rest and assurance for the weak, except in the wounds of the Savior? I dwell there all the more securely because He is mightier to save. The world rages, the body burdens, the devil lies in wait — I do not fall, because I am built upon the sure rock. I have committed a grievous sin, and my conscience is troubled — but it will not be overwhelmed, for I will remember the wounds of the Lord.' And he then concludes: 'Therefore my merit is the Lord's mercy. I am not entirely without merit, so long as He is not without mercies. But if the mercies of the Lord are many, then I too have many merits. Shall I sing of my own righteousness? Lord, I will remember only Your righteousness — for that is also my righteousness, since He was made righteousness for me from God.' Again, in another place: 'This is the whole merit of man — to place his whole hope in Him who saves the whole man.' Likewise, reserving peace for himself and ascribing glory to God, he says: 'To You let glory remain untouched. It will be well with me if I have peace. I renounce all glory altogether, lest by wrongly claiming what is not mine, I also lose what is offered me.' And more plainly in another place: 'Why should the church concern itself with merits, when it has a surer and safer road to glory in the purpose of God? There is no reason to ask by what merits we hope for good things — especially when you hear the prophet declare: I will do it not for your sakes but for My own sake, says the Lord. It is enough for merit to know that merits are not enough. And as it is enough for merit not to presume on merits, so to have no merits is enough under judgment.' When Bernard freely uses the word 'merits' in

place of 'good works,' we should allow for that customary usage. His ultimate purpose was to put fear into hypocrites who carelessly abuse the grace of God with a license to sin. He explains himself afterward by saying: 'Happy is the church that lacks neither merits without presumption nor presumption without merits. She has grounds for confidence, but not merits. She has merits, but deserves not to presume. Is not the very refusal to presume itself a kind of deserving? Therefore she presumes all the more boldly precisely because she does not presume, having great cause for glory in the abundant mercies of the Lord.'

This is the truth. Consciences that have been truly exercised perceive that this is the only safe refuge in which they may rest when they have to do with God's judgment. For if the stars that seem brightest in the night lose their brightness at the sight of the sun, what will become even of the rarest human innocence when it is compared with the purity of God? That examination will be most severe — piercing into the most hidden thoughts of the heart, revealing the secrets of darkness, and exposing the hidden things of the heart, as Paul says, compelling even the reluctant and unwilling conscience to bring forth everything now fallen from memory. The devil, our accuser, who has intimate knowledge of every wicked deed he has moved us to commit, will press hard against us. There, the outward show of good works that people currently prize will be of no use. Only purity of will shall be required. All hypocrisy — not only that by which a person who knows himself guilty before God seeks to boast before others, but also that by which every person deceives himself before God, as we are all inclined to flatter ourselves — will collapse in confusion, however proudly it now struts about with more than drunken boldness.

Those who do not bend their minds to such a view may indeed for a short time pleasantly fashion a righteousness for themselves — but it is a righteousness that will be instantly swept away at God's judgment, like great riches accumulated in a dream that vanish when the dreamer wakes. But those who honestly inquire, as though standing before God, into the true standard of righteousness, will find that all human works, judged by their own worthiness, are nothing but defilements and filth; that what the common people call righteousness is before God mere wickedness; that what is counted purity is uncleanness; and that what is reckoned glory is nothing but shame.

From this view of God's perfection, let us not hesitate to look at ourselves without flattery or blind self-love. It is no surprise that we are all so blind in this area, since none of us recognizes the dangerous self-indulgence that -- as Scripture declares -- naturally clings to all of us. Solomon says: "Every person's way is right in their own eyes." Again: "All a person's ways seem clean to them." But what of it? Are they acquitted by this blindness? No. As Solomon goes on to say: "But the Lord weighs the hearts." In other words, while a person flatters themselves because of the outward mask of righteousness they present, the Lord meanwhile examines the hidden filthiness of the heart with His own scales. Therefore, since such self-flattery does us no good, let us not willfully deceive ourselves to our own destruction. To examine ourselves properly, we must bring our conscience before God's judgment seat. We absolutely need His light to expose the hidden folds of our perverseness, which otherwise lie too deeply concealed. Then, and only then, will we clearly understand what it means: that human beings, being corruption and worms, are abominable and worthless,

drinking in wickedness like water, and are far from being justified before God. For who could make clean what is conceived from an unclean source? Not one. Then we will also discover by experience what Job said about himself: "If I tried to prove myself innocent, my own mouth would condemn me. If I tried to show myself righteous, it would prove me guilty." The prophet's complaint about Israel was not limited to one era but applies to all generations: that everyone went astray like sheep, each turning to their own way. He includes in this all those to whom the grace of redemption would come. This rigorous self-examination should continue until it humbles us, bringing us so low that we are completely cast down -- and by that means prepared to receive the grace of Christ. Anyone who thinks they can receive the enjoyment of this grace without first laying aside all pride of mind is deceived. This is a well-known saying: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

But what way is there to humble ourselves except that we, being completely needy and empty, give place to God's mercy? I do not call it humility if we think we still have something left. Until now, teachers have promoted a very harmful hypocrisy by combining two things that do not belong together: that we should think humbly of ourselves before God while also giving some weight to our own righteousness. If we confess to God something we do not actually believe, we wickedly lie to Him. But we cannot think as we ought without immediately trampling underfoot everything that seems glorious about us. So when you hear in the prophet that salvation is prepared for the humble and that the eyes of the proud will be brought low, first understand that there is no entrance to salvation until you have laid aside all pride and embraced genuine humility. Then understand that this humility is not a token gesture

where you give up a small fraction of your claim -- like those who are considered humble among people because they do not arrogantly promote themselves or scornfully triumph over others, yet still maintain a high opinion of their own worth. True humility is the sincere submission of a mind that is struck down by a real sense of its own misery and neediness. This is how Scripture consistently describes it. When the Lord says through Zephaniah: "I will remove from you those who rejoice proudly, and I will leave in your midst a humble and poor people, and they will trust in the Lord" -- does He not clearly show who the humble are? They are those who lie crushed under the knowledge of their own poverty. On the other hand, He calls the proud "those who rejoice arrogantly," because people who prosper tend to celebrate beyond measure. But to the humble whom He purposes to save, He leaves nothing except trusting in the Lord. Isaiah says the same: "Whom will I look to? To the poor and contrite in spirit, to the one who trembles at My word." Again: "The High and Exalted One, who inhabits eternity and whose name is Holy, who dwells on high and in the holy place, also dwells with the contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and the heart of the contrite." When you hear the word "contrite" so often, understand it as a wound of the heart that will not let a person who is thrown down on the ground get back up. Your heart must be wounded with this kind of contrition if you want to be lifted up with the humble, as God promises. If that does not happen, you will be brought low by God's mighty hand -- to your shame and disgrace.

Our best Teacher, not content to show this with words, also presented in a parable the image of true humility, like a picture on display. He brings forward a tax collector who stands far off, not

daring to lift his eyes to heaven, beating his breast with much grief, and praying: "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." Let us not think these are signs of pretended modesty -- that he did not dare to look up to heaven, that he would not come closer, that he confessed himself a sinner while beating his breast. Rather, we should recognize them as testimonies of genuine inward conviction. On the other side, He sets the Pharisee, who thanks God that he is not like other people -- not an oppressor, not unrighteous, not an adulterer -- because he fasted twice a week and gave tithes of everything he owned. Through open confession, he acknowledges that the righteousness he has is God's gift. But because he stands in confidence of his own righteousness, he leaves God's presence unfavored and despised. The tax collector, by acknowledging his own wickedness, is justified. We can see from this how highly God values our humbling ourselves before Him. The heart cannot be opened to receive His mercy unless it is first emptied of all opinion of its own worthiness. When such an opinion occupies the heart, it blocks the way for God's mercy to enter. To ensure no one would doubt this, Christ was sent by His Father to earth with this commission: to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives and release to the imprisoned, to comfort those who mourn, to give them beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and the garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. In keeping with this commission, He invites only those who labor and are burdened to share in His generosity. And in another place He says: "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Therefore, if we want to respond to Christ's invitation, all arrogance and complacency must be put far away from us. Arrogance grows from a foolish confidence in our own righteousness, when a person thinks they have something that earns commendation before God. Complacency can exist even without any confidence in works. Many sinners, drunk on the sweetness of their vices and giving no thought to God's judgment, lie in a kind of senseless stupor, like a disease of drowsiness. They make no effort toward the mercy offered to them. We must shake off this dull sluggishness just as much as we must cast away all vain self-confidence, so that without hindrance we may hurry to Christ. Being empty and hungry, we may be filled with His good things. We will never sufficiently trust in Him unless we utterly distrust ourselves. We will never sufficiently lift our hearts in Him unless they are first brought low in ourselves. We will never find sufficient comfort in Him unless we are first stripped of comfort in ourselves. We are therefore ready to take hold of God's favor and obtain it when we cast away all trust in ourselves and trust only in the assurance of His goodness. As Augustine says: forgetting our own merits, we embrace the gifts of Christ. Because if He sought merits in us, we would not come to His gifts. Bernard agrees perfectly, comparing proud people to unfaithful servants who arrogantly claim credit for any blessing that merely passes through their hands. They wrongly keep for themselves the praise of grace that flows through them, like a wall that would claim it produces the sunbeam it receives through a window. But rather than linger on this point, let us take a short but sure rule: the person who is ready to share in the fruits of God's mercy is the one who has utterly emptied themselves -- I

will not say of righteousness, which is nonexistent, but of the empty, inflated image of righteousness. Every person hinders God's generosity to the extent that they rest in themselves.

THE .XIII. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT THERE ARE TWO THYNGES TO BE MARKED IN FREE IUSTIFICATION.



There are always two things to be kept in view above all others: that God's glory should remain undimmed and fully preserved, and that our consciences should have undisturbed quietness and calm before His judgment. We see how often and how earnestly Scripture calls us to give God alone the confession of praise when we are dealing with righteousness. The apostle testifies that this was the Lord's chief purpose in giving us righteousness in Christ — to display His own righteousness. And what that display consists of, he immediately explains: that God alone is known to be righteous, and justifies the one who is of the faith of Jesus Christ. You see that the righteousness of God is not fully displayed unless He alone is counted righteous, and He communicates the grace of righteousness to those who do not deserve it. In this way He intends every mouth to be stopped and the whole world to stand accountable before Him. For as long as a person has anything to say in his own defense, something is taken away from God's glory. So in Ezekiel, God shows how much we glorify His name by acknowledging our own wickedness: 'You shall remember

your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves. You shall loathe yourselves in your own sight in all the evils you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways or your corrupt deeds.' If true knowledge of God involves being humbled by awareness of our own iniquity and recognizing that He does good to us when we are unworthy of it — why then do we, to our own great harm, attempt to steal from the Lord even the smallest part of the praise due to His free goodness? Likewise, when Jeremiah cries out, 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches, but let the one who boasts boast in this, that he knows and understands the Lord' — does he not declare that something is taken from God's glory whenever a person boasts in himself? This is exactly the purpose to which Paul applies those words when he teaches that all the parts of our salvation are placed in Christ, so that we should 'boast in the Lord.' His meaning is that whoever thinks he possesses anything — however small — of his own rises up against God and darkens His glory.

This is the truth: we never truly glory in God unless we are completely stripped of our own glory. Conversely, this must be held as a universal principle: all who glory in themselves glory against God. Paul judges that the world is made subject to God only when every ground of boasting is completely taken away from people. Therefore Isaiah, when he declares that Israel will find their justification in God, also says they will find their praise there — as though to say that the Lord justifies the elect in order that they might glory in Him and in nothing else. But how we are to glory in the Lord he had taught in the verse just before: that we

should declare our righteousness and strength to be in the Lord. Note that a bare confession is not enough — it must be confirmed with an oath, so that a person does not think he is discharged by some vague show of feigned humility. Let no one excuse himself by saying that he is not boasting when he acknowledges his own righteousness without arrogance — for any such self-assessment produces confidence, and confidence produces boasting. Therefore let us remember that in all discussion of righteousness we must keep this goal in view: that all praise of righteousness belongs fully and perfectly to the Lord. For in declaring His righteousness, as the apostle testifies, He has poured out His grace upon us so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Therefore in another place, after teaching that the Lord gave us salvation to display the glory of His name, Paul as if repeating the same point adds: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God — not of works, so that no one may boast.' And when Peter says that we are called to a living hope of salvation in order that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light, his meaning is surely to sound out the praises of God alone in the ears of the faithful, so that all arrogance of the flesh is buried in silence. In short, a person cannot claim for himself even the smallest crumb of righteousness without robbing God — for even that much would be taken and removed from the glory of God's righteousness.

Now if we ask by what means the conscience may find peace before God, we will find no other way than by receiving righteousness as a free gift from God. Let us always keep in mind this word of Solomon: 'Who can say, I have cleansed my heart, I am pure

from my sin?' There is no person who will not be overwhelmed with endless filthiness. Therefore let even the most upright person descend into his own conscience and examine his deeds — where will it end? Will he rest peacefully as though everything between him and God were in good order? Will he not rather be tormented with terrible anguish when he finds within himself grounds for condemnation if he is judged according to his works? The conscience, when it stands before God, must of necessity either have firm peace with His judgment or be besieged by the terrors of hell. We therefore accomplish nothing in any discussion of righteousness unless we establish a righteousness firm enough to sustain the soul before God's judgment. Only when our soul has a foundation from which it can stand without fear before God's face and receive His verdict unshaken — only then may we know that we have found genuine righteousness. This is why the apostle dwells so insistently on this point, and I prefer to express it in his words rather than my own. 'If the inheritance is based on law, faith is made void and the promise is nullified.' He first concludes that faith is annulled and voided if the promise of righteousness depends on the merits of our works or on keeping the law. For then no one could ever rest in it with assurance — since no one could ever determine with certainty that he had fully satisfied the law, and indeed no one ever does fully satisfy it through works. We do not need to look far for proof of this. Every person can be a witness to himself, if he will honestly examine himself. This also reveals how deeply and darkly hypocrisy buries people's minds — that they deal so carelessly with themselves, not hesitating to set their own flattering self-assessments against God's judgment, as if they could bring His judicial proceedings to a halt. But the faithful who honestly examine them-

selves are afflicted and tormented by a very different kind of concern. Doubt, and ultimately despair, would overtake every mind if each person were to honestly reckon how great a burden of debt still presses down on him and how far short he falls of what is required. This is how faith is already suppressed and extinguished by such a system. To waver, to fluctuate, to be tossed back and forth, to be stuck in doubt, held in suspense, staggering, and finally despairing — that is not trust. Trust is strengthening your mind with constant certainty and firm assurance, having something solid on which to stand and anchor your foot.

Paul also adds a second point: that the promise is thereby made void and of no effect. For if its fulfillment depends on what we deserve, when will we ever rise to the point of deserving God's bounty? This second point also follows from the first: the promise will only be fulfilled to those who believe it. Therefore if faith has fallen, the force of the promise falls with it. 'The inheritance is of faith, so that it may be according to grace, to confirm the promise' — for it is firmly established when it rests on God's mercy alone. His mercy and His truth are joined together in an unbreakable bond: whatever God mercifully promises, He also faithfully performs. So David, before asking for salvation by God's word, first grounded the cause of it in God's mercy: 'Let Your mercies come to me, Your salvation according to Your word.' Rightly so — for God is moved to make His promise by nothing other than His own mercy. Therefore we must rest here, anchoring our entire hope firmly in this, and not look to our own works for any help. Lest you think this is something new I am saying, Augustine teaches the same: 'Christ shall reign forever in His servants — God has promised it, God has said it, and if that is not enough, God has

sworn it. Therefore, since the promise is established not according to our deserving but according to His mercy, no one should speak fearfully about what he cannot doubt.' Bernard also says: 'The disciples of Christ say, Who then can be saved? He answered: with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. This is all our confidence, this is our only comfort, this is the whole ground of our hope.' But being assured that salvation is possible — what do we say about God's will? 'Who knows whether he is worthy of love or hatred? Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?' 'Here faith must help us. Here His truth must come to our aid, so that what is hidden in the Father's heart may be revealed by the Spirit, and His Spirit, bearing witness, may persuade our hearts that we are sons of God. He persuades us by calling us and justifying us freely by faith — through which there is as it were a middle passage from eternal predestination to the glory that is to come.' To conclude briefly: Scripture declares that God's promises are not confirmed unless they are grasped with the firm confidence of conscience, and wherever there is doubt or uncertainty it pronounces them void. It also declares that they do nothing but waver and stagger when they rest on our own works. Therefore we must either abandon righteousness entirely, or we must cease to look to our own works — faith alone must take the place, and faith by its very nature listens intently and shuts its eyes: that is, it focuses entirely on the promise and turns away from all consideration of human worthiness or deserving. So is fulfilled the notable prophecy of Zechariah, that when the wickedness of the land is removed, a man will call his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree — where the prophet declares that the faithful enjoy true peace only after ob-

taining forgiveness of sins. This caution must be remembered about the prophets: when they speak of the kingdom of Christ they describe outward blessings as figures of spiritual realities. Therefore Christ is called both the King of peace and our peace, because He calms all the troubled motions of conscience. If we ask how He does this, we are brought back to the sacrifice by which God is appeased. For the person who does not settle in his heart that God is appeased by the one satisfactory atonement in which Christ bore His wrath will never cease to tremble. Peace is nowhere else to be found but in the merits of Christ our Redeemer.

But why do I use such obscure testimony? Paul everywhere denies that peace or quiet joy remains for consciences unless it is settled that we are justified by faith. He also declares from where that assurance comes — namely, when the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is as if he were saying that our consciences can be quieted in no other way than by being firmly persuaded that we please God. Therefore in another place he cries out on behalf of all the godly: 'Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ?' For we will tremble at every small breath until we have arrived in that harbor — but we can be without fear even in the shadow of death, so long as the Lord shows Himself our shepherd. Therefore those who chatter that we are justified by faith because, being regenerate, we live spiritually and thus are just — they have never tasted the sweetness of grace, of considering that God will be merciful to them. It follows also that they do not know how to pray rightly any more than Turks or any other unbelieving people. For as Paul testifies, it is not true faith unless it teaches us and puts on our lips the tender name of Father — indeed, unless it opens our mouth to cry freely, 'Abba, Father.' He

expresses this more plainly in another place, where he says that in Christ we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him. This does not come through the gift of regeneration — for regeneration, being always imperfect in this flesh, contains within itself abundant material for doubt. We must therefore come to this remedy: that the faithful settle in their hearts that they may hope for the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom by no other right than this — that being grafted into the body of Christ, they are freely counted righteous. For in justification, faith is entirely passive, bringing nothing of our own to the recovery of God's favor but receiving from Christ what we lack.

THE .XIIII. CHAPTER. ¶WHAT IS THE
BEGINNING OF IUSTIFICATION, AND
THE CONTINUALL PROCEEDINGES
THEROF.



To make the matter clearer, let us examine what human righteousness looks like throughout the whole course of life, and consider four categories of people. People are either: drowned in idolatry because they have no knowledge of God; or they have entered the church through the sacraments but deny God by their corrupt lives while confessing Him with their mouths, making them Christians in name only; or they are hypocrites who cover the wickedness of their hearts with a show of outward appearance; or they are regenerated by the Spirit of God and strive for true holiness. When people in the first category are judged according to their natural endowments, from head to toe there will not be found one spark of goodness — unless we are willing to call Scripture false, which describes all the sons of Adam with these titles: that they have wayward and stubborn hearts, that every imagination of their heart is evil from youth, that their thoughts are vain, that they have no fear of God before their eyes, that none of them understands or seeks God — in short, that they are 'flesh,' by

which Paul means everything he lists: fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, wild living, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, factions, envy, murder, and every form of filthiness and abomination. This is the worthiness with which they come to be examined. But if among them some surpass others in such honest conduct as carries some appearance of holiness before people, still — because we know that God does not look at outward show — we must search the very root of their works if we want to know whether they count for anything toward righteousness. We must thoroughly examine the heart from which these works spring. Although this opens a wide field for discussion, I will follow as brief a course of teaching as I can.

First, I do not deny that whatever excellent gifts appear in unbelievers are gifts of God. Nor do I depart so far from common judgment as to say there is no difference between the justice, temperance, and fairness of Titus and Trajan on the one hand, and the fury, excess, and cruelty of Caligula, Nero, or Domitian on the other; between the filthy lusts of Tiberius and the self-restraint of Vespasian in this regard; or — to avoid dwelling on particular virtues and vices — between those who uphold the law and those who despise it. For there is such a great difference between right and wrong that it shows even in a lifeless image of virtue. What would remain well ordered in the world if we confused these things? Therefore the Lord has not only engraved in the minds of all people this distinction between honorable and dishonorable conduct, but also frequently confirms it through the working of His providence. For we see how He extends many blessings of this present life to those who practice virtue among people — not because the outward appearance of virtue deserves even the smallest

of His gifts, but because it pleases Him to show by this means how highly He values true righteousness, when He allows even an outward and feigned righteousness not to go unrewarded. From this follows what we have just acknowledged: that these virtues — such as they are, or rather these images of virtues — are gifts of God, since nothing worthy of any praise comes from anywhere but Him.

Nevertheless, what Augustine writes is also true: that all who are strangers to the true religion of the one God — however much they may be admired for apparent virtue — deserve not reward but punishment, because they defile with an impure heart the good things God has given them. For though they serve as instruments of God for preserving human society through justice, self-restraint, temperance, courage, and wisdom, they carry out these good works of God in a corrupt way — being held back from evil not by sincere love of goodness, but by ambition, self-love, or some other crooked motive. Since they are corrupted from the very beginning by the uncleanness of their hearts, what they do cannot be counted among virtues — any more than vices that deceive by their resemblance and closeness to virtue. And when we remember that the goal of what is right is always that God be served — whatever aims at any other end at once forfeits the name of right. Because they have no regard for the goal that God's wisdom appoints, even if what they do appears good in the doing, it becomes sin through a wrong aim. Augustine concludes therefore that all the Fabricii, Scipios, and Catos — in all their excellent deeds — sinned in this regard: lacking the light of faith, they did not apply their actions to the end to which they ought to have been applied, and therefore true righteousness was not in them, since deeds are not measured by what is done but by the end pursued.

Moreover, if what John says is true — that there is no life apart from the Son of God — then whoever has no share in Christ, whatever kind of people they are and whatever they do or attempt, they are running their whole course toward destruction and the judgment of eternal death. This is the reasoning behind Augustine's statement: 'Our religion distinguishes the righteous from the unrighteous not by the law of works but by the very law of faith — without which, works that appear good become sins.' So too, Augustine rightly compares the striving of such people to running off the path. The faster a person runs off the path, the further he gets from the destination — and so the more miserable he becomes. He therefore affirms that it is better to limp along on the right path than to run vigorously off it. In the end, it is certain that they are bad trees, since without union with Christ there is no sanctification. They may bear fruit that looks beautiful and even tastes sweet, but it is in no way good fruit. From this we easily see that whatever a person thinks, plans, or does before being reconciled to God through faith is cursed — not only worthless for righteousness but actually deserving of condemnation. And why would we debate this as if it were uncertain, when it is already proven by the apostle's testimony that it is impossible for anyone to please God without faith.

An even clearer proof will appear when God's grace is set in direct contrast to humanity's natural condition. For Scripture cries out everywhere that God finds nothing in human beings to move Him to do good to them — He comes to them first with His own free goodness. For what can a dead person do to attain life? Yet when He enlightens us with the knowledge of Himself, He is said to raise us from death and make us new creatures. For we see often

— especially in the apostle — that God's goodness is described in these terms: 'God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together with Christ,' and so on. In another place, using Abraham as a figure of the general calling of the faithful, Paul says: 'God, who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.' If we are nothing, I ask — what can we contribute? Therefore the Lord strongly rebukes this arrogance in the account of Job with these words: 'Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.' Paul applies this verse to mean that we should not think we bring anything to the Lord except the shame of neediness and emptiness. Therefore in the passage already cited, to prove that we have come to salvation by His grace alone and not by works, Paul argues that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which He prepared beforehand that we should walk in them — as if to say: who among us can boast of having moved God by his own righteousness, when our very first capacity for good comes from regeneration? For as we are by nature, oil would sooner be wrung from a stone than a good work from us. It is astonishing that a person condemned by such deep shame would dare to claim that anything good remains in him. Therefore let us confess with this noble instrument of God that we are called with a holy calling not according to our works but according to God's purpose and grace; and that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward us appeared, because He saved us not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His own mercy — that being justified by His grace we might become heirs of eternal life. By this confession we strip away every last fragment of righteousness from

human beings, until by mercy alone they are regenerated into hope of eternal life — for if the righteousness of works contributes anything to our justification, it is false to say that we are justified by grace. The apostle had not lost his train of thought when he affirmed that justification is by free gift, and elsewhere argued that grace is no longer grace if works contribute anything. And what else does the Lord mean when He says He came not to call the righteous but sinners? If only sinners are welcomed, why would we try to gain entry through a show of false righteousness?

A thought does sometimes come to my mind that I may be doing wrong to the mercies of God by laboring so carefully to prove something that ought to be clear and beyond doubt. But because human pride is such that unless it is firmly pushed aside, it will never yield to God what belongs to Him, I am compelled to dwell on this a little longer. Yet since Scripture is clear enough on this matter, I will use its own words as weapons rather than my own. Isaiah, after describing the universal ruin of mankind, immediately and fittingly shows the order of restoration: 'The Lord saw, and it was displeasing in His eyes. He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was none to intercede. So His own arm brought salvation, and His own righteousness sustained Him.' Where are our own righteousnesses, if what the prophet says is true — that there is no man who aids the Lord in accomplishing salvation? So another prophet, depicting the Lord discoursing about His reconciliation of sinners to Himself, says: 'I will betroth you to Me forever, in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and compassion.' 'I will say to her who had not obtained mercy, You have obtained mercy.' If this covenant — which is certainly the first bond we have with God — rests upon God's mercy, then there

is no foundation left for any righteousness of our own. I would gladly ask those who claim that man meets God with some righteousness of works whether they think there is any righteousness at all except what is acceptable to God. If to think otherwise is madness, then what can God's enemies — whom He utterly abhors along with all their deeds — bring forth that is acceptable to Him? That we are all, without exception, the deadly and declared enemies of our God — until, being justified, we are received into His friendship — is testified by truth itself. If justification is the beginning of love, what righteousness of works can precede it? John, to cut off that poisonous arrogance, diligently reminds us that we did not first love Him. And the Lord Himself had long before taught the same through His prophet: 'I will love you freely,' He says, 'for My anger has turned away.' Certainly His love is not provoked by works, if it inclines toward us of its own accord. But the common crowd of people thinks the matter amounts to no more than this: that no one deserved for Christ to accomplish our redemption, but that in actually entering into the possession of that redemption, our own works help us along. However, until we are by the calling of the Father grafted into union with Christ, we are heirs of darkness and death and enemies of God — however great the redemption Christ has accomplished. For Paul teaches that we are not cleansed and washed from our defilements by Christ's blood until the Holy Spirit works that cleansing within us. Peter likewise, meaning to teach the same thing, declares that the sanctifying of the Spirit serves for obedience and for sprinkling with the blood of Christ. If we are sprinkled by the Spirit with the blood of Christ for cleansing, let us not suppose that before such cleansing we are anything other than what a sinner without Christ is. Let this there-

fore remain settled: that the beginning of our salvation is a kind of resurrection from death to life — for when it is given to us through Christ to believe in Him, we first begin to pass from death into life.

Under this category fall those described in the second and third groups of people in the division above. The uncleanness of their conscience proves that neither group has yet been regenerated by the Spirit of God. And the absence of regeneration in them proves the absence of faith. From this it is clear that they have not yet been reconciled to God or justified in His sight — since these blessings are attained only through faith. What can sinners estranged from God bring forth except what is condemned in His judgment? With such foolish boldness all wicked people are inflated, and especially hypocrites. Though they know that their whole hearts are full of filthiness, if they perform works that have a good appearance they think God is bound to hold them in some regard. From this grows the dangerous error that, though convicted of a wicked and corrupt mind, they cannot be brought to admit they lack all righteousness. Even when they acknowledge they are unrighteous — because they cannot deny it — they still arrogantly claim some righteousness for themselves. The Lord refutes this vanity well through the prophet: 'Ask the priests: if someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment and touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any other food with that fold — does it become holy?' The priests answered, 'No.' Then Haggai said: 'If one who is unclean by contact with a corpse touches any of these, does it become unclean?' The priests answered, 'It becomes unclean.' Haggai then said: 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' declares the Lord, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.' Would to God that this word

might fully persuade us and be fixed firmly in our memory. For there is no one, however great a sinner in all the rest of his life, who can bear to be told what the Lord here plainly declares. The worst person, as soon as he has performed one or two outwardly lawful deeds, does not hesitate to count it as righteousness. But the Lord cries out the opposite: no sanctification is gained by this, unless the heart is first well cleansed. And not content with that, He declares that all works, whatever they are, that proceed from sinners are defiled by the impurity of the heart. Therefore let the name of righteousness depart from these works, which the Lord's own mouth has condemned as filthy. And how fitting is the illustration He uses to show this? One might have objected that whatever the Lord had commanded was inviolably holy. But He counters that it is no surprise if things hallowed by God's law are defiled by the filthiness of corrupt people — since an unclean hand defiles a holy thing by touching it.

The Lord handles the same matter excellently in Isaiah: 'Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts My soul hates. They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you. Even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening, for your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.' What does it mean that the Lord so loathes what is on the surface obedience to His own law? He is refusing nothing that properly belongs to the observing of the law — the beginning of which He everywhere teaches to be the sincere fear of His name. When that is removed, whatever is offered to Him is not merely worthless but stinking

and abominable. Let the hypocrites go ahead, then — concealing their perverseness in their hearts while trying to earn God's favor through works. By doing so, they only provoke Him to greater wrath. For to Him the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination, but the prayer of the upright pleases Him. We therefore hold as beyond doubt — something that ought to be well known to anyone even moderately familiar with Scripture — that works which shine most gloriously in people who have not yet been truly sanctified are, in the Lord's sight, so far from righteousness that they are counted as sins. It has therefore been rightly taught that God's favor toward any person is not obtained through works; rather, works please God — and only then — when the person has first found grace in God's sight. This is the order that Scripture leads us to by the hand and that must be carefully maintained. Moses writes that the Lord had regard for Abel and then for his offering. Do you not see how he first declares God's favor toward the person, and only then toward the works? The cleansing of the heart must therefore come first, so that the works that come from us may be received by God with favor — for the word of Jeremiah always stands true, that God's works have regard to truth. And that faith alone is what cleanses the hearts of people, the Holy Spirit declared through the mouth of Peter — by which it is certain that the first and only foundation is in true and living faith.

Now let us look at the righteousness of those in the fourth category. We grant that when God, through the righteousness of Christ, reconciles us to Himself and accounts us as righteous by freely forgiving our sins, He also joins to this gracious act another benefit: by His Holy Spirit He dwells in us, and through His power the desires of the flesh are daily put to death more and more. We

are sanctified — that is, set apart to the Lord for true purity of life — when our hearts are shaped to obey the law, so that our chief desire is to serve His will and in all things to advance His glory alone. But even while we walk in the ways of the Lord under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, certain remnants of imperfection are left in us, lest we forget ourselves and grow proud — giving us material for humility. 'There is no righteous person,' says Scripture, 'who does good and never sins.' What kind of righteousness, then, can they still obtain through their works? First I say this: the best work anyone can bring forth is always stained and corrupted with some uncleanness of the flesh and has, as it were, a residue mixed into it. Let a holy servant of God select from all his life the most excellent act he thinks he has done — and let him carefully examine all its parts. He will certainly find somewhere something that smacks of the corruption of the flesh. Our eagerness to do good is never what it should be, while our weakness in falling short is considerable. Even if we overlook the clear and obvious blemishes that mark the works of the saints and grant that these are nothing more than tiny spots — will they cause no offense to the eyes of God, before whom even the stars are not pure? We have thus shown that not one good work comes from holy people that, if judged on its own merits, does not deserve its fair reward of shame.

Second, I say this: even if it were possible to have some wholly pure and perfect works, one sin would be enough to blot out and extinguish all memory of the righteousness that came before, as the prophet says. James agrees: 'Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of all' (James 2:10). Since this mortal life is never pure or free from sin, whatever righteousness we might acquire would be from time to time corrupted,

overwhelmed, and destroyed by subsequent sins — and so it would never come before God's sight or be counted as righteousness. Furthermore, when the righteousness of works is in view, it is not any one work of the law that matters but the whole commandment. Therefore if we seek righteousness through the law, it is futile to bring forward one or two works. A perfect and continuous obedience to the whole law is required. Therefore the Lord does not — as many foolishly imagine — impute righteousness to us only once, by forgiving our past sins, and then expect us to seek righteousness afterward through the law. If that were the case, He would be doing nothing but leading us into false hope and ultimately mocking us. For since no perfection can come to us as long as we are clothed with this flesh, and since the law threatens death and condemnation to all who do not render complete obedience in their works — the law will always have grounds to accuse and condemn us, unless God's mercy stands against it on the other side and continually acquits us through the ongoing forgiveness of sins. Therefore what we said at the beginning stands firm: that if we are weighed by our own worthiness, whatever we purpose or attempt, we — with all our efforts and strivings — are deserving of death and destruction.

We must stand firm on these two points: first, that there was never a work done by any godly person that, if examined by the strict judgment of God, would not be condemned. Second, if such a work were somehow produced — which is impossible for any human being — it would still lose its acceptability because it is corrupted and defiled by the sins with which its doer is certainly burdened. This is the central point of our argument. On the beginning of justification there is no real dispute between us and the better

sort of Scholastic theologians — that a sinner, freely delivered from condemnation, obtains righteousness through the forgiveness of sins. But they include within the word 'justification' the renewal by which we are reshaped by the Spirit of God to obey the law. They therefore describe the righteousness of the regenerate person this way: that once a person is reconciled to God by faith in Christ, he is judged righteous before God on the basis of good works and accepted because of their merit. But the Lord, by contrast, declares that He credited faith to Abraham as righteousness — not at the time when Abraham was still serving idols, but after he had already excelled in holiness of life for many years. Abraham had long worshiped God with a pure heart and had rendered the obedience to the law that is possible for a mortal person — and yet his righteousness was placed in faith. From this, following Paul's reasoning, we conclude it was not from works. Likewise, when the prophet says 'the righteous shall live by faith,' he is not speaking of wicked and profane people whom the Lord justifies by converting them to faith. He is speaking to the faithful and promising them life through faith. Paul also removes all doubt when, to confirm that statement, he cites these words of David: 'Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven.' It is certain that David is not speaking of the wicked but of the faithful — of people like himself — since he spoke from the feeling of his own conscience. Therefore this blessedness is not something to be had once in our lives but to be held onto throughout all of life. Finally, Paul testifies that the message of free reconciliation with God is not proclaimed for one or two days but is perpetual in the church. Therefore the faithful have, even to the end of their lives, no righteousness other than what is there set forth. For Christ eternally remains the Mediator

who reconciles the Father to us, and the effectiveness of His death is eternal — His washing, His satisfaction, His expiation, and finally His perfect obedience, by which all our iniquities are covered. Nor does Paul say to the Ephesians that we have the beginning of salvation from grace, but that 'by grace you have been saved, not of works, so that no one may boast.'

The escape routes the Scholastic theologians seek here do not help them. They say that good works are not by their own intrinsic merit sufficient to purchase righteousness, but that they acquire such value through God's accepting grace. Then, being forced to admit that the righteousness of works in this life is always imperfect, they grant that as long as we live we need forgiveness of sins to make up what is lacking in our works — but that the faults committed are compensated by works of supererogation. My answer is this: what they call accepting grace is nothing other than God's free goodness by which the Father embraces us in Christ — clothing us with Christ's innocence, counting it as ours, and thereby receiving us as holy, pure, and innocent. For the righteousness of Christ — which, as it alone is perfect, so it alone can stand before God's sight — must be placed in our stead and presented at the bar as our guarantee. Armed with it, we obtain continual forgiveness of sins through faith. Through its purity our filthiness and the uncleanness of our imperfections are covered and not counted against us. They are hidden as if buried, so that they do not come before God's judgment — until the hour comes when the old man has been put to death and wholly destroyed in us, and God's goodness will receive us into the blessed peace of the new Adam. There let us look for the day of the Lord, when, receiving imperishable bodies, we will be taken up into the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

If these things are true, then none of our works can by themselves make us acceptable and pleasing to God. The works themselves can only please God when the person, covered with Christ's righteousness, already pleases God and has received forgiveness of sins. God has not promised the reward of eternal life for any particular works. He only promises that whoever does all these things will live. He sets a notable curse against everyone who does not continue in everything the law commands. This thoroughly refutes the idea of partial righteousness, since no righteousness is accepted in heaven except the complete observance of the law. The idea of making up the difference through works of supererogation is equally unsound. Why? Because they keep returning to the same point from which they have already been excluded: that whoever keeps the law in part is partially righteous through works. They shamelessly treat as settled something no reasonable person would grant them. The Lord repeatedly testifies that He acknowledges no righteousness of works except in the perfect keeping of His law. How stubborn it is for us, when we lack that perfect obedience, to refuse to acknowledge that we are stripped of all glory -- that we have completely yielded to God -- and instead boast about some scraps of a few works, and try to make up for the rest through so-called satisfactions! Satisfactions have already been sufficiently demolished above, so we should not even dream about them now. I will only say this: those who play such foolish games do not realize how detestable sin is before God. If they did, they would understand that all of human righteousness piled together would not be enough to compensate for a single sin. We see that one offense was enough for God to cast humanity away and abandon them, cutting off all means of recovering salvation. Therefore, the power of satis-

faction is taken from those who flatter themselves with it. They will surely never satisfy God, who finds nothing pleasing or acceptable from His enemies. And all those to whom He intends to count their sins are His enemies. Therefore, our sins must be covered and forgiven before God pays any attention to our works. From this it follows that the forgiveness of sins is by free grace, and those who push satisfactions into the picture blaspheme against it. Let us then, following the apostle's example, forget what lies behind and press forward to what lies ahead, running our race toward the prize of the upward call.

But how does the boast of works beyond what is required agree with the rule Christ teaches us: that when we have done everything commanded, we should say we are unprofitable servants who have done nothing more than what we ought? To say this before God is not to pretend or to lie, but to settle in your own mind what you are convinced is true. The Lord therefore commands us to sincerely think and acknowledge that we are not performing any generous favor for Him, but only rendering the service that is owed. And rightly so. We are servants indebted to so many duties that we could not discharge them all, even if all our thoughts and every part of our bodies were turned into dutiful obedience to the law. Therefore, when He says, "When you have done everything that was commanded you," etc., it is as if one person's righteousness were more than all of humanity's combined. How then dare we -- who are all immeasurably far from that standard -- boast that we have added any surplus? Let no one object that a person's effort may go beyond their required duties, which in some way frees them from obligations in other areas. We must firmly hold that we cannot imagine anything that serves either the worship or the love

of God that is not already included in God's law. If it is part of the law, let us not boast about voluntary generosity when we are actually bound by obligation.

Paul's boasting that among the Corinthians he voluntarily gave up a right he could have used, and that he gave them his free labor beyond his required duties, is brought up here at the wrong time. But they should have noticed the reason he states: he did this so he would not cause offense to the weak. False and deceitful workers were using this show of generosity to win favor for their poisonous teachings and stir up hatred against the Gospel. Paul was therefore forced either to put Christ's teaching at risk or to counter their schemes. If it is truly a matter of indifference for a Christian to cause offense when they could avoid it, then I grant the apostle did something beyond what was required. But if this was rightfully demanded of a wise steward of the Gospel, then I say he did what was his duty. Finally, even if no such reason existed, Chrysostom's saying remains true: everything we have is in the same situation as the personal possessions of slaves, which legally belong to their master. Christ made this same point in His parable. He asked what thanks we would give to a servant who, after being employed with various tasks all day, comes home in the evening. Perhaps he worked harder than we dared to demand. Even so, he has done nothing beyond what his status as a servant requires, because his entire ability belongs to us. I am not talking about the kind of works these people want to boast about before God. They are trivial things that God has never commanded, does not approve, and will not accept when the accounts are settled. The only sense in which we would call them works beyond what is required is the one spoken of by the prophet: "Who asked these things from your

hands?" But let them also remember what is said about such works in another place: "Why do you spend your money on what is not bread? Why do you work hard for what does not satisfy?" It is indeed easy for these armchair scholars to debate such things in the comfort of a study. But when the supreme Judge sits on His throne, such empty theories will evaporate. This is what matters: what defense can we bring to His judgment seat? Not what we can debate in schools and private conversations.

In this regard, there are two destructive errors that must be driven from our minds: that we place no trust in the righteousness of works, and that we claim no share of the glory for them. The Scriptures everywhere strip us of all such trust, teaching that our righteousnesses stink in God's sight unless they receive a good fragrance from the innocence of Christ. They can do nothing but provoke God's vengeance unless they are sustained by the gentleness of His mercy. Moreover, Scripture leaves us with nothing except to seek our Judge's mercy with David's confession: that no one will be justified before Him if He calls His servants to account. When Job says, "If I have done wickedly, woe to me; but even if I am righteous, I still will not lift up my head" -- though he speaks of God's supreme righteousness, to which not even the angels measure up -- he still shows that when anyone comes before God's judgment, all mortals have nothing left but to remain speechless. His point is not merely that he would rather voluntarily yield than dangerously fight against God's strictness. He means that he felt no righteousness in himself except the kind that would collapse at the first moment before God's gaze. When trust is driven away, all boasting must also necessarily depart. Who can give the praise of righteousness to works whose trustworthiness trembles before God's sight?

We must therefore come to where Isaiah calls us: that all the offspring of Israel may be praised and may glory in God. For it is perfectly true what he says elsewhere: that we are the planting of the glory of God. Our minds will be rightly cleansed when they neither rest in any way on the confidence of works nor rejoice in their glory. But the foolish error of establishing the cause of salvation in works is what encourages people to puff themselves up with this false and lying confidence.

But if we look at the four kinds of causes that philosophers teach us to consider in explaining effects, we will find that none of them assigns any role to works in establishing our salvation. Scripture everywhere reports that the efficient cause of our eternal life is the mercy of the heavenly Father and His free love toward us. The material cause is Christ with His obedience, by which He purchased righteousness for us. What shall we call the formal or instrumental cause, except faith? John brings these three together in a single statement: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Now the apostle testifies that the final cause is both the display of God's righteousness and the praise of His goodness. He also rehearses the other three causes in clear words. He says to the Romans: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but are justified freely by His grace" (Romans 3:23). Here you have the head and first fountain: God embraced us with His free mercy. Then follows: "Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Here you have the material substance from which righteousness is made for us: "Through faith in His blood." Here the instrumental cause is shown: the means by which Christ's righteousness is applied to us. Last, he joins the

purpose: "To demonstrate His righteousness, so that He may be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ." And (noting in passing that this righteousness consists of reconciliation) he expressly states that Christ was set forth for us as a propitiation. Similarly, in the first chapter of Ephesians, he teaches that we are received into God's favor by pure mercy, that this is accomplished through Christ's intercession, that it is received by faith, and that everything aims at this end: that the glory of God's goodness may shine brightly. When we see that every part of our salvation exists outside of us, what reason do we have to place confidence or glory in works? Not even the fiercest enemies of God's grace can raise any real objection about the efficient or final cause, unless they reject all of Scripture. They try to create a false impression about the material and formal cause, as if our works share the stage with faith and Christ's righteousness. But Scripture cries out against this too, simply declaring that Christ alone is our righteousness and life, and that this gift of righteousness is received by faith alone.

When the saints strengthen and comfort themselves by recalling their own innocence and integrity, and sometimes even mention it with praise, this happens in two ways. Either they compare their good cause with the wicked cause of their enemies, drawing from this comparison an assured confidence of victory -- not so much to commend their own righteousness as to justly condemn their opponents. Or they review themselves before God without comparing themselves to others, and the purity of their own conscience brings them both some comfort and confidence. The first of these two ways we will examine later. For now, let us briefly explain how the second agrees with what we said above. The agree-

ment is this: when the salvation of the saints is at stake, they look to the goodness of God alone without any regard for works. They do not merely look to it as the starting point of blessedness but rest in it as its complete fulfillment. A conscience founded, raised, and established in this way is also strengthened by the consideration of works -- namely, insofar as they serve as evidence that God dwells and reigns in us. Since this confidence in works has no place unless you have first cast your whole confidence on God's mercy, it should not seem contradictory to the mercy on which it depends. Therefore, when we exclude confidence in works, we mean only this: a Christian mind must not look to the merit of works as a support for salvation, but should rest entirely in the free promise of righteousness. But we do not forbid it from supporting and strengthening this faith with signs of God's goodwill toward itself. If all the good gifts God has given us, when remembered, serve as beams of light from His face that illuminate us to behold His supreme goodness, then how much more does the grace of good works show that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us!

So when the saints confirm their faith through the innocence of their conscience and find reason to rejoice, they are doing nothing other than recalling the fruits of their calling as evidence that they have been adopted by the Lord as His children. What Solomon teaches -- that there is firm confidence in the fear of the Lord -- and what the saints sometimes declare -- that they have walked before God in integrity and simplicity, to the end that God may hear them -- have no place in laying the foundation of conscience. They are valuable only when understood as the outward effects of God's grace, because neither the kind of fear that would establish full confidence, nor the kind of integrity that is untainted by the rem-

nants of the flesh, can be found in any of the saints. But since from the fruits of regeneration they draw evidence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, they are considerably strengthened to look for God's help in all their needs. Through experience in such a great matter, they find Him to be their Father. Even this they cannot do unless they have first laid hold of God's goodness, sealed by no other assurance than His promise. If they begin to evaluate themselves by their good works, nothing will be more uncertain or weaker. Works, when examined by themselves, will prove God's wrath no less by their imperfection than they demonstrate His goodwill by their imperfect purity. In short, they proclaim God's blessings in a way that never turns aside from His free favor. Paul testifies that it contains the length, breadth, depth, and height of all blessings. It is as if he said: wherever the minds of the godly turn, however high they climb, however far and wide they reach, they must never go beyond the love of Christ but keep themselves entirely in the meditation of it, because it comprehends every kind of dimension within itself. This is why he says Christ's love surpasses all knowledge. When we understand how much Christ has loved us, we are filled with all the fullness of God. As in another place, when he glories that the godly are victors in every battle, he immediately adds the reason: because of Him who loved us.

We see now that in the saints there is no trust in works that gives any credit to their merit (since they regard works only as gifts of God, by which they recognize His goodness, and as signs of their calling by which they may think upon their election). Nor does this trust take anything away from the free righteousness we obtain in Christ, since it depends on that righteousness and cannot stand without it. Augustine makes the same point briefly but very well

when he writes: "I do not say to the Lord: Do not despise the works of my hands. I have sought the Lord with my hands and have not been deceived." "But I do not commend the works of my hands, for I fear that when You look at them, You will find more sins than merits." "Only this I say, this I ask, this I desire: Do not despise the works of Your hands. See in me Your work, not mine." "For if You look at mine, You condemn me. If You look at Yours, You crown me." "For whatever good works I have, they are from You." He gives two reasons why he dare not boast of his works before God: first, if he has any good works, he sees nothing in them that is truly his own; second, even those works are overwhelmed by a multitude of sins. The result is that his conscience feels more fear and dismay from them than assurance. Therefore, he wants God to look at his good deeds only in this way: recognizing in them the grace of His calling, God would complete the work He has begun.

Furthermore, when Scripture shows that the good works of the faithful are reasons why the Lord blesses them, this should be understood in a way that keeps what we said before firmly in place: the efficient cause of our salvation consists in God the Father's love; the material cause in the Son's obedience; the instrumental cause in the Holy Spirit's illumination (that is, in faith); and the final cause is the glory of God's great kindness. These truths do not prevent the Lord from also embracing works as secondary causes. But where does this come from? It comes from this: those whom the Lord in His mercy has appointed to inherit eternal life, He brings into possession of it through good works in His ordinary plan of action. What comes first in this sequence of events, He calls the cause of what follows. In this way, He sometimes derives eternal life from works. This does not mean eternal life should be cred-

ited to works, but because He justifies those He has chosen so that He may ultimately glorify them, He makes the preceding grace -- which is a step toward the following one -- a kind of cause of it. But whenever He needs to assign the true cause, He does not direct us to flee to works. Instead, He holds us in the sole contemplation of His mercy. Consider what the apostle teaches: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." Why doesn't he set righteousness as the counterpart to sin, just as he sets life against death? Why doesn't he make righteousness the cause of life, just as he makes sin the cause of death? That would have made the contrast of opposites work neatly. But it would have been wrong. The apostle wanted to express what is actually true: death is owed to human merit, but life rests entirely in God's mercy alone. In short, in these patterns of speaking, what is expressed is the order of events rather than their cause. God, in heaping grace upon grace, takes the first gift as the occasion for adding the second, leaving nothing undone to enrich His servants. He continually extends His generosity, yet He would have us always look back to the free election that is the fountain and source of it all. Although He loves the gifts He daily gives -- since they spring from that fountain -- it is our duty to hold fast to the free acceptance that alone can sustain our souls. As for the gifts of His Spirit that He gives afterward, we should connect them to the first cause in such a way that they never diminish it.

THE .XV. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT THOSE
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OF WORKES, DO OUERTHROW AS
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We have now stated the central point of this matter: because righteousness, if upheld by works, must inevitably collapse before God's sight, it is contained in God's mercy alone, in union with Christ alone, and therefore in faith alone. But let us mark this carefully as the chief pillar of the discussion, so that we are not drawn into the common error shared by ordinary people and learned men alike. As soon as the question of justification by faith versus works is raised, they rush to passages that seem to credit works with some merit before God — as if the case for justification by works were settled the moment it is proved that works have any value before Him. But we have already shown plainly that the righteousness of works consists only in perfect and complete obedience to the law. It follows that no one is justified by

works except the person who has climbed to the very summit of perfection and cannot be found guilty of even the smallest offense. So this is a separate and distinct question: even if works do not suffice to justify a person, do they not nevertheless deserve some favor from God?

On the word 'merit' I must first say this: whoever first applied it to human works as they are compared to God's judgment did a great disservice to the purity of faith. I willingly avoid quarrels over words, but I could wish that Christian writers had always exercised the restraint of not reaching for terms foreign to Scripture — terms that generate much offense and no fruit. For why was it necessary to introduce the word 'merit' when the value of good works could have been properly expressed by another word without causing offense? How much offense the word carries is evident from the great harm it has done in the world. Being an expression of pride, it can do nothing but obscure the grace of God and fill people with wrongheaded arrogance. The early church fathers, I grant, commonly used it — and I wish they had not given later generations material for error by misusing one small word. However, they themselves testify in many places that they never intended to prejudice the truth by it. So Augustine says in one place: 'Let the merits of men be silent here — merits that perished in Adam — and let the grace of God reign through Jesus Christ.' And again: 'The saints attribute nothing to their own merits. They will give all credit to nothing but Your mercy, O God.' And in another place: 'When a person sees that whatever good he has he does not have from himself but from his God, he sees that whatever is praised in him comes not from his own merits but from the mercy of God.' You see how, in taking away from people the power of doing good,

he also overturns the dignity of merit. Chrysostom says: 'Our works, if there are any, which follow God's free calling, are repayment of a debt. But God's gifts are grace and bounty and the greatness of generosity.' But setting aside the word, let us look at the substance. I have already cited a statement from Bernard: 'As it is enough for merit not to presume on merits, so to lack merits is enough under judgment.' But he immediately adds an explanation that softens the sharpness of the word: 'Therefore be concerned to have merits; but when you have them, know that they were given; hope for fruit in the mercy of God — and so you have escaped all danger of poverty, ingratitude, and presumption. Happy is the church that lacks neither merits without presumption, nor presumption without merits.' A little before this he had shown at length his godly intention: 'Why should the church be concerned about merits, when she has a firmer and surer ground for glory in the purpose of God? God cannot deny Himself; He will do what He has promised. There is no reason to ask by what merits we may hope for good things — especially when you hear it said: Not for your sake, but for My own sake. It is enough for merit to know that merits are not enough.'

What our works deserve, Scripture shows when it says they cannot stand before God's sight because they are full of impurity. Then it shows what perfect observance of the law — if any such thing could be found — would deserve, when it teaches us to consider ourselves unprofitable servants even after doing everything commanded, because we will have given the Lord nothing freely but only performed what was already owed — and for that, no thanks are due. But those good works which God Himself has given us, the Lord both calls ours and testifies that they are not

only acceptable to Him but will also receive a reward. It is our duty in response to be encouraged by so great a promise, to take heart so that we do not grow weary of doing good, and to give genuine thanks for so great a generosity from God. It is without question that whatever in our works deserves praise is the grace of God — there is not one drop that we ought properly to claim as our own. If we truly and earnestly acknowledge this, then not only all confidence but every notion of merit vanishes. We — unlike the Sophists — do not divide the praise of good works between God and humanity. We reserve it whole, complete, and undivided for the Lord. To humanity we assign only this: that even the same works that were good, a person corrupts and defiles by his impurity. For nothing comes out of any person, however upright, that is not stained with some spot. Therefore let the Lord call into judgment even the best of human works — He will indeed find in them His own righteousness, but also humanity's dishonesty and shame. Good works therefore do please God and are not profitless to those who do them — they receive in return the richest gifts of God. Not because they deserve as much, but because God's goodness has of itself appointed this value to them. But what insolence this is — that people, not content with that generosity of God which gives undeserved rewards to works that merit nothing of the kind, go further and presumptuously and sacrilegiously try to make what belongs wholly to God's generosity appear to be rendered as payment to human merit. Here I appeal to every person's common sense. If someone who enjoys the use of a piece of land through another's generous grant then also claims ownership of the property — does he not by such ingratitude deserve to lose even the use he had? And if a slave who has been freed by his master then con-

ceals the humble status of a freed person and boasts of being free-born — is he not worthy to be brought back into his former bondage? For the proper way to enjoy a benefit is neither to claim for yourself more than was given, nor to rob the benefactor of his due praise — but so to conduct yourself that what he gave you from himself may in a sense seem to remain with him. If this moderation is to be observed toward people, let everyone consider what kind of moderation is owed to God.

I know that the Sophists misuse certain passages to try to prove that the word 'merit' toward God is found in Scripture. They cite a sentence from Ecclesiasticus: 'Mercy shall make room for every man according to the merit of his works.' And from the letter to the Hebrews: 'Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices people merit from God.' I set aside for now my right to challenge the authority of Ecclesiasticus. But I deny that they faithfully represent what Ecclesiasticus — whoever the author was — actually wrote. For the Greek text reads: 'He makes room for every mercy, and every man will find according to his works' — showing that it is God who makes room for mercy, not works that earn it. That this is the true text, which was corrupted in the Latin translation, is evident both from the structure of these words and from a broader reading of what comes before. As for the passage in Hebrews, there is no reason they should trap us on one word, since the Greek text of the apostle says nothing more than that such sacrifices please God and are acceptable to Him. This alone should be abundantly enough to humble and silence the pride that would assign to works a worthiness beyond what Scripture allows. Now Scripture's teaching is that all our good works are constantly stained with many filthy spots by which God could justly be of-

fended and angry with us — so far are they from being able to win Him over or move His generosity toward us. Yet because in His tender kindness He does not examine them by the strict rigor of the law, He accepts them as if they were pure — and therefore, though without merit, He rewards them with countless benefits both in this life and in the life to come. For I do not accept the distinction made by otherwise learned and godly people: that good works deserve the graces given in this life, while eternal life is the reward of faith alone. The Lord regularly and consistently places the reward of labors and the crown of battle in heaven. And to assign the bestowal of grace upon grace to the merit of works, taking it away from grace, contradicts the teaching of Scripture. For though Christ says that to the one who has, more will be given, and that the faithful and wise servant who proved faithful in little things will be put in charge of many — He also shows in another place that the growth of the faithful is the gift of His free goodness: 'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.' Therefore whatever is now given to the faithful — help for salvation, salvation itself, and blessedness — is the pure generosity of God. Yet in both earthly gifts and eternal ones He testifies that He has regard for works — because to demonstrate the greatness of His love toward us, He deigns to confer such honor not only on us but on the gifts He has given us.

If these things had been properly handled and arranged as they should have been in past ages, so many troubles and disagreements would never have arisen. Paul says that in building Christian doctrine, we must keep the foundation he had laid among the Corinthians, beside which no other can be laid: and

that foundation is Jesus Christ. What kind of foundation do we have in Christ? Is it that He gave us the starting point of salvation, and we must complete it ourselves? Did He only open the way for us to move forward by our own strength? Not at all. As he said a little earlier, when we acknowledge Christ, He is given to us as our righteousness. No one is properly grounded in Christ unless they find their complete righteousness in Him, since the apostle does not say Christ was sent to help us obtain righteousness, but that He Himself is our righteousness. Specifically: we are chosen in Him from eternity before the creation of the world, not by any merit of our own, but according to the purpose of His good pleasure. By His death we are redeemed from the condemnation of death and delivered from destruction. In Him we are adopted by the heavenly Father as children and heirs. By His blood we are reconciled to the Father. Given to Him for safekeeping, we are delivered from the danger of perishing and being lost. Being grafted into Him, we are already in a certain sense partakers of eternal life, having entered the kingdom of God by hope. And even more: having received such a share in Him, although we are still foolish in ourselves, He is wisdom for us before God. Although we are sinners, He is righteousness for us. Although we are unclean, He is purity for us. Although we are weak, unarmed, and exposed to Satan's attacks, ours is the power given to Him in heaven and on earth, by which He crushes Satan for us and breaks the gates of hell. Although we still carry the body of death, He is life for us. In short, all His things are ours, and we have all things in Him -- in ourselves, nothing. On this foundation, I say, we must be built if

we are to grow into a holy temple for the Lord. (1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:14, 20; John 10:28; Matthew 28:17)

But the world has long been taught otherwise. People have invented certain moral good works by which they can make themselves acceptable to God before being grafted into Christ. As though Scripture lies when it says that all who do not possess the Son are in death. If they are in death, how can they produce the substance of life? As though it means nothing that whatever is done without faith is sin -- as though a bad tree could bear good fruit. But what have these most destructive Sophists left for Christ in which to demonstrate His power? They say He earned for us the first grace -- namely, the opportunity to earn further merit -- and that it is now our job not to fail the opportunity offered. What desperate shamelessness! Who would have thought that people claiming the name of Christ would dare to strip Him of His power and practically trample Him underfoot? This testimony is spoken of Him everywhere: that all who believe in Him are justified. These people teach that He provides no other benefit than opening the way for everyone to justify themselves. I wish they could truly taste the meaning of these statements: that all who have the Son of God have life; that whoever believes has already passed from death to life; that we are justified by His grace so we might become heirs of eternal life; that the faithful have Christ dwelling in them, through whom they cling to God; that those who share in His life sit with Him in heavenly places; that they are transported into the kingdom of God and have obtained salvation -- and countless other such statements. These do not declare that Christ merely brings the ability to obtain righteousness or salvation, but that both are

given to us through Him. Therefore, the moment you are grafted into Christ by faith, you are already made a child of God, an heir of heaven, a partaker of righteousness, a possessor of life. And to better refute their lies: you have not obtained the potential to earn merit, but all of Christ's merits themselves, for they are shared with you. (1 John 5:12; Romans 14:23; 1 John 5:11; John 5:24; Romans 3:24; 1 John 3:23; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 1:13)

This is how the Sorbonne schools -- the mothers of all errors -- have taken from us the justification of faith, which is the sum of all godliness. They do grant in words that a person is justified by a faith that is "formed." But they then explain this to mean that good works get their value from faith. So they seem to mention faith almost mockingly, since it could not decently be passed over in silence given how often Scripture repeats it. Not yet satisfied, they secretly steal from God some of the praise for good works in order to give it to human beings. Since they see that good works do little to promote a person's standing, and cannot properly be called merits if they are recognized as fruits of God's grace, they trace them back to the power of free will -- drawing oil from a stone, so to speak. They do not deny that the principal cause of good works is grace. But they insist that free will is not thereby excluded, and that free will is the source of all merit. Not only the later Sophists teach this, but even their master, Lombard. If you compare him with these others, you might actually call him sensible and sober. It was truly remarkable blindness that, while they constantly quoted Augustine, they failed to see how carefully that man ensured that not even the tiniest piece of the glory of good works would be transferred to human beings. Earlier, when we discussed free will, we cited some of his statements on this point. Similar

ones appear throughout his writings. For example, he forbids us to boast of our merits anywhere, since even they are gifts of God. He writes that all our merit comes only from grace, not from our own ability, and is entirely made by grace. It is no surprise that Lombard was blind to the light of Scripture, since he was clearly not well trained in it. Yet nothing could be more plainly against him and his followers than the apostle's words. When Paul forbids Christians from all boasting, he adds a reason: because we are God's workmanship, created for good works that we should walk in them. Since nothing good comes from us except insofar as we are regenerated, and our regeneration is entirely of God without exception, there is no right for us to claim even an ounce of credit for good works. Finally, while they constantly talk about good works, they instruct consciences in a way that never allows them to feel confident that they have God well pleased and favorable toward their works. But we, on the contrary, without ever mentioning merit, by our teaching raise the spirits of the faithful with extraordinary comfort. We teach them that in their works they please God and are undoubtedly accepted by Him. Indeed, we also require here that no one attempt or undertake any work without faith -- that is, unless they first determine with assured confidence of heart that they will please God.

Therefore, let us not allow ourselves to be led even a hair's breadth from this single foundation. Once it is laid, wise builders then build well and orderly upon it. If teaching and encouragement are needed, they remind people that the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil, that those who belong to God should not sin, that the past is enough time for fulfilling the desires of the Gentiles, and that God's chosen people are vessels of

mercy selected for honor who should be cleansed from all impurity. But everything is said at once when it is shown that Christ wants disciples who deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. Whoever has denied themselves has cut off the root of all evils, seeking nothing for their own benefit. Whoever has taken up their cross has prepared themselves for all patience and gentleness. But the example of Christ contains both of these and every other duty of godliness and holiness. He showed Himself obedient to His Father even to death. He was entirely devoted to doing God's works. He breathed out the glory of His Father with His whole heart. He gave His life for His brothers. He both did good to and wished good upon His enemies. If comfort is needed, these will bring wonderful comfort: that we are afflicted but not crushed; that we struggle but are not abandoned; we are brought low but not destroyed; we are thrown down but we do not perish -- always carrying in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in us. If we died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we suffer with Him, we will also reign with Him. We are conformed to His sufferings until we reach the likeness of His resurrection. The Father has predestined these to be conformed to the image of His Son, whom He chose in Christ so that Christ might be the firstborn among many brothers. Therefore, neither death, nor things present, nor things to come will separate us from God's love in Christ. Rather, all things will work together for our good and salvation. We do not justify a person before God by works. But we say that all who belong to God are regenerated and made a new creation, so that they may pass from the kingdom of sin into the kingdom of righteousness. By this testimony they confirm their calling, and they are judged as trees by their fruits.

THE .XVI. CHAPTER. ¶A CONFUTATION OF THE SCLAUNDERS, WHEREBY THE PAPISTES GOE ABOUT TO BRYNG THIS DOCTRINE IN HATRED.



This single argument is enough to refute the shameless charges of certain ungodly people who slander us by saying that we destroy good works and draw people away from pursuing them, simply because we say they are not justified by works and do not deserve salvation by them. They also charge that we make the path to righteousness too easy when we teach that it lies in the free forgiveness of sins, and that by this we entice people — already too inclined toward sin — to sin all the more. These slanders, I say, are sufficiently answered by that single argument — yet I will briefly respond to both. They allege that justification by faith destroys good works. I will leave unspoken what kind of people these enthusiastic defenders of good works are, who attack us so bitterly. Let them slander as freely as they licentiously infect the whole world with the filthiness of their own lives. They pretend to be grieved that when faith is so gloriously elevated, works are pushed out of their place. But what if works are actually more ele-

vated and established by our teaching? For we dream neither of a faith empty of good works, nor of a justification that stands without them. This is the only difference: though we confess that faith and good works necessarily belong together, we locate justification in faith, not in works. We can easily explain our reason for this if we turn to Christ, to whom our faith is directed and from whom it receives all its power. Why then are we justified by faith? Because through faith we lay hold of the righteousness of Christ, by which alone we are reconciled to God. But you cannot lay hold of Christ without also laying hold of sanctification. For He was given to us as righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption. Therefore Christ justifies no one whom He does not also sanctify. For these gifts are joined together in a permanent and inseparable bond: those whom He enlightens with His wisdom, He redeems; those whom He redeems, He justifies; those whom He justifies, He sanctifies. But since our question is only about righteousness and sanctification, let us stay with those two. We may distinguish them, yet Christ holds them both inseparably within Himself. Do you want to obtain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ — and you cannot possess Him without being made a partaker of His sanctification, because He cannot be divided. Since therefore the Lord grants us these gifts only in giving Himself, He gives both together, never one without the other. So it becomes clear how true it is that we are justified not without works, and yet not by works — because in our union with Christ, through which we are justified, sanctification is no less included than righteousness.

It is also completely false that people's motivation for doing good is weakened when we remove the idea of meriting from them. Readers should be warned here that opponents reason foolishly from reward to merit — as I will explain more clearly later. They fail to understand this principle: God is no less generous when He assigns rewards to works than when He gives the power to do good. But I would rather leave that for its proper place. For now it is enough to show how weak their objection is, which I will do in two ways. First, they claim there will be no concern for living well unless hope of reward is set before people — but they are completely wrong. If the only reason people serve God is to look for a reward, or if they are renting out their labor to Him in exchange for payment, they will make little progress. For God wills to be worshiped freely and loved freely. He prizes the worshiper who, even when every hope of reward is cut off, still does not stop worshipping Him. Moreover, if people need to be spurred on, no sharper motivations can be found than those drawn from the purpose and goal of our redemption and calling — the very ones God's Word uses to urge us forward: that it is wicked ingratitude not to love in return the One who first loved us; that by Christ's blood our consciences are cleansed from dead works to serve the living God; that it is a gross sacrilege, once cleansed, to defile ourselves again with new filthiness and to profane that holy blood; that we have been delivered from the hands of our enemies so that we might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life; that we have been set free from sin so that with a free spirit we might pursue righteousness; that our old self has been crucified so that we might rise to newness of life; that if we have died with Christ, as befits His members, we should seek

the things that are above and live as pilgrims in this world, longing for heaven where our treasure is; that the grace of God has appeared for this purpose — that, renouncing ungodliness and worldly desires, we may live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior; that we are not appointed to stir up wrath but to obtain salvation through Christ; that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, which must not be defiled; that we are not darkness but light in the Lord and must walk as children of light; that we are called not to impurity but to holiness — for this is the will of God, our sanctification, that we abstain from unlawful desires; that our calling is holy and can only be fulfilled by a pure life; and that we are delivered from sin precisely so that we should obey righteousness. Can we be stirred to love with any more compelling argument than John's — that we should love one another as God has loved us; that the children of God are distinguished from the children of the devil, and the children of light from the children of darkness, by this: that they remain in love? Or than Paul's argument that if we are joined to Christ we are members of one body, which it is fitting for us to support one another with mutual service? Can we be more powerfully provoked to holiness than when we hear John say that all who have this hope purify themselves, because their God is holy? Or when Paul says that having the promise of adoption we should cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit? Or when we hear Christ setting Himself before us as an example for us to follow in His steps?

These I have set out as a sample. If I intended to go through them all, I would need to write a large volume. The apostles are full of encouragements, exhortations, and reproofs by which they in-

struct the person of God for every good work — and without any mention of merit. In fact, they draw their chief motivations from precisely this: that our salvation rests on God's mercy alone and on no merit of ours. So Paul, after spending an entire letter showing that there is no hope of life for us except in the righteousness of Christ, when he comes to moral exhortations, beseeches them by that mercy of God which He has graciously extended to us. And truly this one reason alone should have been sufficient — that God may be glorified in us. But if someone is not strongly moved by the glory of God, the memory of His benefits ought to be more than enough to stir such a person toward doing good. These men, who perhaps squeeze out some slave-like, forced obedience to the law by inserting the idea of merits, falsely claim that we have nothing with which to motivate people toward good works because we do not use their method. As though God were pleased with such obedience — He who declares that He loves a cheerful giver and forbids anything given as if it were from reluctance or compulsion. Nor am I saying this because I refuse or despise the kind of motivation that Scripture itself often uses, leaving no means untried to stir up our minds. For Scripture does rehearse the reward God will render to every person according to his works. But I deny that this is the only motivation, or even the chief one. I also deny that it should be where we begin. Furthermore, I affirm that it does nothing to establish the kind of merits these men boast of, as we shall see later. Finally, I say it is of no practical use unless this doctrine has first been established — that we are justified by the merit of Christ alone, received through faith and not through any merits of our works. For no one can be fit for the pursuit of holiness until they have first taken in this teaching. The prophet points to this

clearly when he says to God: 'With You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared.' He shows that there is no true worship of God except when His mercy is acknowledged — upon which alone worship is both founded and established. This is very much worth noting: not only does it show that the beginning of true worship is trust in God's mercy, but also that the fear of God — which the papists claim is meritorious — cannot bear the name of merit, because it is grounded on the pardon and forgiveness of sins.

But it is a completely empty slander that people are enticed to sin when we affirm the free forgiveness of sins, in which we say righteousness consists. For we say that it is of such great value that it cannot be repaid by anything good we can do — and therefore it would never be obtained unless it were freely given. Moreover, it is freely given to us but was not free to Christ, who purchased it at a tremendous price — namely His own most holy blood, beyond which there was no payment sufficient to satisfy the judgment of God. When people are taught these things, they are reminded that it is no credit to them that the same most holy blood is not shed again every time they sin. Furthermore, we learn that our filthiness is such that it can never be washed away except by the fountain of that most pure blood. Should not those who hear these things conceive a far greater horror of sin than if they were told it is wiped away by a sprinkling of good works? And if they have received anything from God, how can they help dreading — once having been cleansed — to wallow in the mire again and, as far as it depends on them, to trouble and pollute the purity of that fountain? 'I have washed my feet,' says the faithful soul in Solomon, 'how shall I de-file them again?' Now it is clear which group more thoroughly de-means the forgiveness of sins and more thoroughly cheapens the

dignity of righteousness. They babble that God is appeased by their own worthless satisfactions — that is, their refuse. We affirm that the guilt of sin is too grievous to be purged by such trivial things; that God's displeasure is too weighty to be released by these worthless satisfactions; and that therefore this honor belongs solely to the blood of Christ. They say that righteousness, if it fails at any point, is restored and repaired by works of satisfaction. We believe it to be too precious to be matched by any repayment of works, and therefore for its restoration we must flee to the mercy of God alone. As for the remaining matters pertaining to forgiveness of sins, let them be sought in the next chapter.

THE .XVII. CHAPTER. ¶ THE AGREE- MENT OF THE PROMISES OF THE LAWE AND THE GOSPELL.



Now let us also work through the other arguments Satan uses through his agents to either overthrow or undermine justification by faith. I think we have already stripped the slanderers of the charge that we are enemies of good works. For justification is taken away from good works not so that no good works should be done, nor to deny that the ones being done are good — but so that we should not place our confidence in them, glory in them, or attribute salvation to them. For this is our confidence, our glory, and the sole author of our salvation: that Christ the Son of God is ours, and we likewise are in Him the sons of God, heirs of the heavenly kingdom — called by the goodness of God, not by our own worthiness, into the hope of eternal blessedness. But since, as we have said, they attack us with other weapons as well, let us press on and beat those aside too. First they return to the promises of the law — those which the Lord set forth for those who keep His law — and they ask whether we consider those promises to be utterly void or effective. Since it would be absurd and ridiculous to say they are void, they assume they must have

some effect. From this they reason that we are not justified by faith alone. For the Lord says: 'And it shall come to pass, if you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers. He will love you and bless you and multiply you' (Deuteronomy 7:12-13). Again: 'If you will indeed direct your ways and your deeds, if you will practice justice between a man and his neighbor, then I will let you dwell in this place' (Jeremiah 7:3, 5-7). I will not cite a thousand passages of the same sort, which since they all carry the same meaning, will be answered by the solution to these. In short, Moses testifies that in the law are set before us blessing and curse, life and death (Deuteronomy 11:26). They therefore reason: either this blessing is made idle and fruitless, or justification is not by faith alone. We have already shown how, if we remain within the law, nothing hangs over us but the curse threatened to all transgressors — for God promises nothing except to perfect keepers of His law, and none such can be found. What remains, then, is that all humanity stands accused by the law and subject to its curse and to God's wrath. To be freed from this, people must be brought out from under the power of the law and brought, as it were, into freedom from its bondage — not the carnal freedom that would withdraw us from keeping the law and tempt us to think all things lawful, letting our desires run unchecked with the reins broken loose; but the spiritual freedom that comforts and lifts up a conscience that has been crushed and overthrown, showing it to be free from the curse and condemnation by which the law had bound and held it fast. This deliverance from subjection to the law — this liberation, as I might call it — we

obtain when through faith we lay hold of God's mercy in Christ, by which we are certified and assured of the forgiveness of sins, whose sting the law had been pressing into us.

For this reason even the promises offered to us in the law would all be ineffective and void, unless the goodness of God came to help us through the Gospel. For the condition on which those promises depend — keeping the whole law — is the only means by which they could be fulfilled, and that condition is never met. The Lord helps not by leaving part of righteousness to our works and supplying the remainder with His merciful indulgence, but by setting Christ alone as the fulfillment of righteousness. For the apostle, after saying that he and other Jews had believed in Jesus Christ, knowing that a person is not justified by the works of the law, gives this reason: not that they might have the remaining portion of righteousness topped up by faith in Christ, but that they might be entirely justified by faith rather than by the works of the law. If the faithful turn away from the law to faith in order to find in faith the righteousness they see to be absent from the law, then truly they are abandoning the righteousness of the law. So let anyone who wishes amplify the rewards said to be prepared for the keeper of the law — but let him also consider that it is precisely our own perversity that prevents us from experiencing any fruit of them, until we have obtained another righteousness through faith. So David, when he spoke of the reward the Lord has prepared for His servants, immediately descended to an acknowledgment of sins by which that same reward is rendered void. So too in Psalm 19 he gloriously sets forth the benefits of the law — and then immediately cries out: 'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from hidden faults.' This corresponds exactly to another passage,

where after saying that all the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant, he adds: 'For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.' So we also ought to acknowledge: that the good will of God is indeed set forth to us in the law — if we could deserve it by works — but that it never actually comes to us through the deserving of works.

How then — are those promises given only to vanish away without effect? I have already protested that this is not my meaning. What I say is that they do not produce their effect toward us so long as they look to the merit of works — and therefore if considered in themselves, they are in a certain sense abolished. The apostle teaches that the great promise — 'Keep My statutes and My judgments, by which, if a man observes them, he will live' — is of no value if we remain standing in it as it is. It will profit us no more than if it had never been given, because it belongs only to perfect keepers of the law, and none such exist. Even the most holy servants of God fall far short of fulfilling the law and are surrounded by many transgressions. But when the promises of the Gospel are placed before us instead — offering free forgiveness of sins — they bring it about that not only we ourselves become acceptable to God, but our works also receive His approval. And not only does the Lord accept them, but He also extends to them the blessings that were by covenant due to the keeping of the law. I grant, therefore, that the things the Lord promised in His law to those who pursue righteousness and holiness are rendered to the works of the faithful — but in that rendering, the cause that pours grace upon those works must always be recognized. There are three such causes. The first: God, turning His eyes away from the works of His servants — which always deserve reproach rather than praise

— embraces them in Christ and by faith alone reconciles them to Himself without any contribution from works. The second: out of His fatherly kindness and tender mercy, He lifts works to such great honor — not weighing their worthiness — that He counts them as valuable. The third: He receives those same works with pardon, not imputing the imperfection by which they are all defiled, which would otherwise cause them to be reckoned as sins rather than virtues. This reveals how greatly the Sophists were mistaken when they thought they had cleverly avoided all difficulties by saying that works do not merit salvation by their own intrinsic goodness, but do so by the form of the covenant — because the Lord in His generosity has chosen to value them so highly. But they failed to see how far the works they wanted to call meritorious were from meeting the conditions of those promises, unless there first went ahead both a justification grounded in faith alone and the forgiveness of sins — by which even good works themselves need to be cleansed of their spots. Of the three causes of God's generosity by which the works of the faithful are made acceptable, they recognized only one and suppressed two — and those the principal ones.

They also cite Peter's statement recorded by Luke in Acts: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.' From this they conclude — and consider it beyond question — that if a person, through right effort, obtains God's favor, then salvation is not entirely God's gift; or that God, out of His mercy, so helps the sinner that He is moved to mercy by works. But you cannot make Scripture agree with itself on this point unless you recognize a double acceptance of humanity by

God. For as people are by nature, God finds in them nothing that might incline Him to mercy — only misery. If it is certain that when God first receives people they are naked and destitute of every good and on the other hand filled and loaded with all manner of evil — by what quality, I ask, shall we say they are worthy of the heavenly calling? Away, then, with the vain imagining of merits, when God so plainly sets forth His free mercy. As for what the angel said to Cornelius in the same passage — that his prayers and alms had come up as a memorial before God — these people most wrongly twist it to mean that a person prepares himself to receive God's grace through good works. For Cornelius must already have been enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom, since he possessed true wisdom — namely the fear of God. And he must have been sanctified by the same Spirit, since he was pursuing righteousness, which the apostle teaches is a sure fruit of that Spirit. All those things in him that are said to have pleased God he had from God's grace — so far was he from having prepared himself to receive it by his own effort. Truly not one syllable of Scripture can be found that disagrees with this teaching: that there is no other reason for God to receive a person than that He sees the person would be entirely lost if left to himself — and because He is unwilling to see that person lost, He exercises His own mercy in delivering him. We see, then, how this acceptance has no regard to the righteousness of the person but is a pure expression of God's goodness toward those who are miserable and most unworthy of so great a benefit.

But after the Lord has drawn a person up out of the deep pit of destruction and separated him for Himself by the grace of adoption — having now begotten him and reshaped him into new life — He now embraces him as a new creature with the gifts of His

Spirit. This is the acceptance Peter speaks of, by which the faithful — after their calling — are welcomed by God even with respect to their works. For the Lord cannot help but love and cherish the good things He works in them by His Spirit. But this must always be remembered: they are acceptable to God with respect to their works only in this sense — that for their sake, and on their account, He graciously chooses to accept what good works He has given them, as a further expression of His generosity. For where do they have good works, except that the Lord, having chosen them as vessels of honor, also adorns them with true godliness? And how are those works counted as good, as though nothing were lacking in them, except that the kind Father tenderly pardons the deformities and spots that cling to them? In short, what Peter means in that passage is simply this: that to God, His children are acceptable and beloved in whom He sees the marks and features of His own face. For we have taught elsewhere that regeneration is a restoring of God's image in us. Therefore, wherever the Lord beholds His own face, He rightly loves it and holds it in honor. It is not without reason that the life of the faithful, shaped toward holiness and righteousness, is said to please Him. But because the godly, being clothed in mortal flesh, are still sinners and their good works are only begun and tainted by the weakness of the flesh — He cannot be favorable to either the people or their works unless He embraces them more in Christ than in themselves. In this way are we to understand all the passages that testify to God's kindness and mercy toward those who pursue righteousness. Moses said to the Israelites: 'Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation' — a sentence that afterward became a

common expression among the people. So Solomon in his solemn prayer says: 'O Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart.' The same words are also repeated by Nehemiah. For in all the covenants of His mercy, the Lord requires uprightness and holiness of life from His servants — so that His goodness would not be mocked, and so that no one would swell with self-congratulation and bless his own soul while walking in the perverseness of his own heart. By this means He keeps in duty those admitted into the fellowship of the covenant. Yet the covenant itself is both made freely at the beginning and remains free perpetually. So also David, when he glories that reward was rendered to him for the cleanness of his hands, does not omit the fountain I have spoken of — that he was drawn out from the womb because God loved him. In this way he sets forth the goodness of his cause while taking nothing away from the free mercy that precedes all gifts and is the source of them all.

It will be useful here to touch briefly on how these ways of speaking differ from the promises of the law. By 'promises of the law' I mean not all the promises scattered throughout the books of Moses — for many Gospel promises are found there as well — but those promises that belong specifically to the ministry of the law. Such promises, by whatever name you call them, declare that a reward is ready on the condition that you do what is commanded. But when it is said that the Lord keeps His covenant of mercy to those who love Him, what is being shown is what kind of people His servants are who have faithfully received His covenant — not the reason why the Lord should do good to them. This is how it

works: as the Lord deigns to give us the grace of eternal life so that He might be loved, feared, and honored by us, so all the promises of His mercy in Scripture are rightly directed toward this purpose — that we should revere and worship the author of these benefits. Therefore, as often as we hear that He does good to those who keep His law, let us remember that the children of God are there being described by the duty that should be constant in them — that we are adopted for this purpose, that we might honor Him as our Father. Therefore, lest we disinherit ourselves from the right of adoption, we must always strive toward the goal to which our calling directs us. But let us also keep this in mind: the fulfillment of God's mercy does not depend on the works of the faithful. Rather, He fulfills His promise of salvation to those who answer their calling with uprightness of life because in them He recognizes the natural marks of His children, who are governed by His Spirit toward what is good. Here belongs what is said in Psalm 15 about the citizens of God's kingdom: 'Lord, who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,' and so on. And again in Isaiah: 'Who among us can live with the consuming fire? He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity,' and so on. For there is not being described the ground on which the faithful stand before the Lord, but the manner in which the most merciful Father brings them into His fellowship and there defends and strengthens them. For because He hates sin, He loves righteousness. Those whom He joins to Himself He cleanses with His Spirit, in order to conform them to Himself and His kingdom. Therefore if the question is about the first cause by which the way into God's kingdom is opened to the saints — what enables them to stand firm and remain in it — the answer is ready: the Lord has both

once adopted them by His mercy and perpetually defends them. But if the question is about the manner of their life in that kingdom, then we must come to regeneration and its fruits, which are described in that Psalm.

But there appears to be much greater difficulty in certain passages that both describe good works with the title of righteousness and affirm that a person is justified by them. In the first category there are many passages where the observances of the commandments are called 'justifications' or 'righteousnesses.' In the second category, this is an example from Moses: 'It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God' (Deuteronomy 6:25). And if you respond that this is a promise of the law bound to an impossible condition — and therefore proves nothing — there are other texts to which you cannot give the same answer: 'It will be righteousness for you before the Lord your God, if you return the pledge to the poor man at sunset' (Deuteronomy 24:13). Again, what the prophet says: that Phinehas's zeal in avenging the dishonor done to Israel was counted to him as righteousness (Psalm 106:31). The Pharisees of our day therefore think they have great grounds for triumph here. For when we say that the righteousness of faith puts the justification of works in its place — they make this argument by the same logic: if righteousness belongs to works, then it is false that we are justified by faith alone. I grant that the commandments of the law are called righteousnesses — for indeed they are. However, readers should be warned that the Greek translators did not render the Hebrew word *hukkim* accurately when they translated it as *dikaionmata*, meaning righteousnesses, instead of commandments. But I willingly drop that verbal dispute. For we do not deny to

God's law that it contains perfect righteousness. Even though, because we owe everything the law commands, even full obedience to it would make us only unprofitable servants — still, because the Lord has seen fit to honor the law with the title of righteousness, we do not take away what He has given it. We therefore readily confess that full obedience to the law is righteousness, and that keeping each commandment is a part of righteousness — if the whole sum of righteousness were present in every other part as well. But we deny that any such righteousness is found anywhere. And therefore we deny the righteousness of the law not because it is defective or imperfect in itself, but because it is nowhere seen due to the weakness of our flesh. But Scripture not only calls the commandments of God righteousnesses; it also gives this name to the works of holy people — as when it says that Zechariah and his wife walked in all the righteousnesses of the Lord (Luke 1:6). When it speaks this way, it is measuring works by the nature of the law rather than by their actual state. However, the same caution applies here that I mentioned just now: the translator's imprecision is not a binding rule. But since Luke did not alter the received translation, I will not argue the point further. For God has given the commandments in the law to people as righteousness — but this righteousness is only fulfilled by keeping the whole law, and every transgression breaks it. Therefore since the law prescribes nothing but righteousness: when we look at the law itself, each commandment is righteousness; but when we look at the people who do those things, they do not gain the praise of righteousness from one act while being transgressors in many others, and even in that one act there is always partial failure due to imperfection.

Now I come to the second type, which is where the chief difficulty lies. Paul has nothing stronger to prove the righteousness of faith than what is written of Abraham — that his faith was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Since then it is said that the act done by Phinehas was credited to him as righteousness (Psalm 106:31), what Paul concludes about faith, our opponents say we may equally conclude about works. Our adversaries therefore, as though they had won the day, conclude that we are indeed not justified without faith, but that we are also not justified by faith alone — and that works complete our righteousness. I therefore ask the godly, if they know that the true rule of righteousness must be drawn from Scripture alone, to weigh carefully with me how Scripture can be made to agree with itself without distorting it. Since Paul knew that justification by faith is the refuge of those who have no righteousness of their own, he boldly concludes that all who are justified by faith are excluded from justification by works. And since it is certain that justification by faith is common to all the faithful, he concludes with equal boldness that no one is justified by works — but rather that people are justified entirely apart from any contribution from works. But there is a difference between disputing what works are worth in themselves and determining what account is to be made of them after the righteousness of faith has been established. If we assess works according to their own worthiness, we say they are unworthy to come before God's sight — and therefore a person has no works to boast of before God. Stripped of all help from works, he is justified by faith alone. We define righteousness this way: a sinner, received into union with Christ, is reconciled to God by His grace — his sins forgiven through the cleansing of Christ's blood, and clothed with Christ's

righteousness as his own, he stands secure before the heavenly judgment seat. When forgiveness of sins goes before, the good works that follow are now evaluated differently from what they deserve on their own — because whatever is imperfect in them is covered by the perfection of Christ, and whatever spots or filthiness they carry is washed away by His purity, so it does not come before the examination of God's judgment. Therefore, when the guilt of all transgressions — which prevents people from bringing anything acceptable to God — is blotted out, and when the fault of imperfection — which also tends to defile even good works — is buried, the good works of the faithful are counted as righteous, or, which amounts to the same thing, are credited as righteousness.

Now if anyone uses this against me to undermine the righteousness of faith, I will first ask: is a person counted righteous for one or two holy acts, while being a transgressor of the law in everything else he does? That would be more than absurd. Then I will ask: is he counted righteous for many good works, if he is found guilty in any single point? No one will dare to affirm that, when the penalty the law declares cries out against it and pronounces all those accursed who have not fulfilled every commandment to the last detail. Furthermore, I will press further and ask: is there any work that can be charged with no impurity or imperfection? How could there be any such work before eyes before which even the stars are not pure enough and the angels not righteous enough? So opponents will be forced to grant that there is no good work that is not so tainted — both by accompanying transgressions and by its own corruption — that it cannot claim the honor of righteousness. Now, if it is certain that it is the righteousness of faith that enables works — which are otherwise impure, unclean, half-done, unwor-

thy of God's sight, and far less worthy of His love — to be credited as righteousness, why do they boast of the righteousness of works in a way that destroys justification by faith, when without that justification their boasting of righteousness would be completely empty? Would they produce a viper's brood? That is what such statements from ungodly people amount to. They cannot deny that justification by faith is the beginning, foundation, cause, material, and substance of the righteousness of works — and yet they conclude that a person is not justified by faith because good works are also credited as righteousness. Therefore let us leave these follies aside and confess what is true: that if the righteousness of works — of whatever kind it may be — depends on justification by faith, it is by no means diminished by faith but actually confirmed — because through faith its power appears more clearly. Nor should we think that works are so commended after free justification that they then take over the role of justifying a person, or share that office with faith. For unless justification remains always complete, the impurity of works will be exposed. And there is no absurdity in saying that a person is so justified by faith that not only he himself is righteous but also his works are esteemed as righteous beyond what they actually deserve.

In this way we grant to works not only a partial righteousness — as our adversaries themselves would have it — but also that it is accepted by God as though it were a perfect and complete righteousness. But if we remember on what foundation this rests, all difficulty dissolves. For a work only then begins to be acceptable when it is received with pardon. And from where does pardon come, except that God beholds both us and all that is ours in Christ? Therefore, just as we — being grafted into Christ — appear

righteous before God because our wickedness is covered by His innocence, so our works are also accepted as righteous because whatever fault is otherwise in them is buried in the purity of Christ and not counted against them. So we may rightly say that by faith alone not only we but also our works are justified. Now if the righteousness of works — of whatever kind — depends on faith and free justification and is produced by it, then it ought to be included under justification and stand below it as an effect under its cause. It is far from the case that it should be elevated to destroy or overshadow justification. So Paul, to drive people to acknowledge that our blessedness consists in God's mercy and not in works, presses especially on David's words: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.' If anyone pushes back with the countless sayings in which blessedness seems to be attributed to works — such as: 'Blessed is the man who fears the Lord'; 'who has compassion on the poor'; 'who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked'; 'who endures temptation'; 'Blessed are those who keep justice'; 'the blameless'; 'the poor in spirit'; 'the meek'; 'the merciful,' and so on — they will not succeed in overturning what Paul says. For because the things commended in those passages are never found in a person in such a way that God accepts him on their account, it follows that a person is always miserable unless delivered from misery by the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, since all the kinds of blessedness praised in Scripture collapse and come to nothing — so that a person benefits from none of them until he has obtained blessedness through the forgiveness of sins, which then makes room for everything else — it follows that this is not only the highest and chief but

the only blessedness. Unless you want it to be weakened by those who say it consists in faith alone. Now there is even less reason why the description of people as 'righteous' — which is commonly given to the faithful — should trouble us. I grant that they are called righteous because of their holy lives. But since they are striving toward righteousness rather than actually fulfilling righteousness itself, it is fitting that this righteousness — such as it is — yield to justification by faith, from which it derives whatever it is.

But they say we still have a problem with James, who openly fights against us. He teaches both that Abraham was justified by works and that we are all justified by works, not by faith alone. What then? Will they pit Paul against James? If they consider James a minister of Christ, his words must be understood in a way that does not contradict Christ speaking through Paul. The Holy Spirit declares through Paul that Abraham obtained righteousness by faith, not by works, and we also teach that all are justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Yet the same Holy Spirit teaches through James that both Abraham's righteousness and ours consist of works, not of faith alone. The Holy Spirit certainly does not contradict Himself. What agreement can there be between these two? It is enough for our opponents if they uproot the righteousness of faith that we insist must be deeply rooted. But they have no concern for giving consciences their peace. From this you can see that they attack the justification of faith but in the meantime set up no standard of righteousness where consciences can rest. So let them celebrate as they please, as long as their only victory is the destruction of all certainty of righteousness. They will achieve this miserable victory only where the light of truth is extinguished and the Lord lets the darkness of lies spread. But wherever

God's truth stands, they will accomplish nothing. I therefore deny that the passage from James they constantly hold up against us -- like the shield of Achilles -- does anything at all for their case. To make this clear, first we must look at what the apostle is aiming at, and then we must note where our opponents go wrong. Since there were then many (as there always are in the church) who openly revealed their unbelief by neglecting all the proper works of the faithful, yet still boasted of the false name of faith, James mocks the foolish boldness of such people. His purpose is not to diminish the power of true faith in any way, but to show how foolishly those pretenders claimed the empty image of faith for themselves. Content with it, they ran carelessly into all kinds of sinful behavior. Once this foundation is understood, it will be easy to see where our opponents go wrong. They fall into two errors: one about the word "faith" and the other about the word "justify." When the apostle calls it a vain opinion far removed from true faith, he speaks by way of concession, without weakening the truth. He shows this at the beginning when he says: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no works?" He does not say: if anyone has faith without works. He says: if anyone boasts of having it. He speaks even more plainly a little later, when he mockingly makes this supposed faith worse than what the devils know. And finally, he calls it dead. But you can understand clearly enough what he means from his definition. "You believe that there is one God." If this faith contains nothing more than believing God exists, then of course it will not justify. When this is removed from genuine faith, let us not think anything has been taken away from Christian faith, whose nature is far different. How does true faith justify us? By uniting us to Christ, so that being made one with

Him we may share in His righteousness. Faith does not justify because it grasps the knowledge that God exists, but because it rests on the assurance of God's mercy.

We are not yet finished with the matter until we also examine the other error in the word "justify," since James places part of justification in works. If you want to make James agree both with the rest of Scripture and with himself, you must understand the word "justify" differently than Paul uses it. Paul says we are justified when the memory of our unrighteousness is wiped away and we are counted righteous. If James had meant the same thing, he would have been wrong to cite Moses' statement that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. For he puts it together this way: Abraham achieved righteousness by works because he did not hesitate at God's command to offer up his son. And so the Scripture was fulfilled that says he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. If it is absurd for the effect to come before its cause, then either Moses falsely testified that faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness, or Abraham did not earn righteousness by the obedience he showed in offering Isaac. Abraham was justified by his faith when Ishmael had not yet been conceived, and Ishmael was already grown before Isaac was born. Shall we then say Abraham earned righteousness by an act of obedience that came long afterward? Either James wrongly reversed the order (which would be wicked to think), or he did not mean to say Abraham was justified in the sense of deserving to be counted righteous. How then? It is clear that he is speaking about the demonstration of righteousness, not its imputation. It is as if he said: whoever is truly righteous by genuine faith proves their righteousness through obedience and good works, not by a bare and

image-like mask of faith. In short, he does not debate how we are justified, but he requires a working righteousness from the faithful. Paul declares that people are justified without the help of works; James does not allow them to be considered righteous if they lack good works. Keeping this purpose in mind will free us from all difficulty. Our opponents are mainly deceived because they think James is defining the method of justification, when he is actually doing nothing more than tearing down the careless attitude of those who falsely used faith as an excuse for despising good works. No matter how many ways they twist James' words, they will squeeze out nothing but two conclusions: a vain, empty show of faith does not justify; and a faithful person, not content with such a pretense, demonstrates their righteousness through good works.

What they cite from Paul -- that the doers of the law, not the hearers, are justified -- does not help them at all. I will not use Ambrose's solution that Paul said this because the fulfillment of the law is faith in Christ. I see that it is merely an evasion, and one that is not needed when there is a broad, open road. In that passage, the apostle strikes down the Jews' foolish pride. They boasted in their mere knowledge of the law while being its greatest violators. To keep them from being so self-satisfied about their bare knowledge of the law, he warns them that if righteousness is sought from the law, not the knowledge of it but the practice of it is required. We certainly have no doubt that the righteousness of the law consists in works. Nor do we doubt that righteousness comes from the value and merits of works. But it is not yet proven that we are justified by works, unless someone can produce a person who has actually fulfilled the law. That Paul meant nothing different is

shown clearly by the flow of the text. After condemning both Gentiles and Jews for unrighteousness in general, he descends to the specifics. He says those who sinned without the law will perish without the law (referring to the Gentiles), and those who sinned under the law will be judged by the law (referring to the Jews). Since the Jews proudly gloried in the law alone while overlooking their own transgressions, he adds what perfectly fits: the law was not made so that people could be made righteous by merely hearing it. Only when they obeyed it could it serve them. It is as if he said: "Do you seek righteousness in the law?" "Then do not boast about hearing it, which counts for little. Bring works by which you can prove the law was not given to you in vain." Since they were all destitute of such works, it followed that they were stripped of any right to glory in the law. We should therefore draw the opposite conclusion from Paul's argument. The righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works. No one can boast that they have satisfied the law through works. Therefore, there is no righteousness through the law.

They also cite passages where the faithful boldly present their righteousness for God's examination and ask that judgment be given according to it. Examples include: "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to my integrity." Again: "Hear my righteousness, O God." "You have tested my heart and visited it in the night, and no wickedness was found in me." Again: "The Lord will reward me according to my righteousness and repay me according to the cleanness of my hands." "Because I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God." "I shall be blameless and shall keep myself from my sin." Again: "Judge me, Lord, for I have walked in my integrity." "I have

not sat with lying men; I will not associate with those who do wicked things." "Do not destroy my soul with the ungodly, my life with men of bloodshed, in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hand is full of bribes." "But I have walked in my integrity." I have already discussed the confidence the saints seem to draw simply from their works. These passages will not cause us much difficulty if they are understood according to their context. Now, that context is twofold. The saints did not want their entire lives examined so they could be condemned or acquitted based on their overall record. Instead, they bring a specific case before God for judgment. Nor do they claim righteousness measured against God's perfection, but only in comparison with wicked and evil people. First, when a person's justification before God is at issue, what is required is not a good record in one particular matter, but a consistent pattern of righteousness throughout their whole life. But when the saints call upon God to approve their innocence, they do not present themselves as completely guiltless and faultless in every respect. Rather, having placed their confidence of salvation in God's goodness alone, they still trust that He is the avenger of the poor who are unjustly oppressed. They commend to Him the cause in which innocent people are being wronged. When they appear alongside their adversaries before God's judgment seat, they do not boast of an innocence that could withstand God's pure scrutiny. But since they know that their integrity, righteousness, simplicity, and cleanness -- compared to the malice, stubbornness, cunning, and wickedness of their adversaries -- is known to and pleasing to God, they do not hesitate to call upon Him as judge between themselves and their enemies. So when David said to Saul, "The Lord reward each person according to his righteousness and

truth," he did not mean that the Lord should examine everyone by His own standard and reward them by their merits. He was calling the Lord as witness of how great his innocence was compared with Saul's wickedness. When Paul boasts of having a good conscience - - that he served in the church with simplicity and integrity -- he does not mean he stands on such boasting before God. Compelled by the slanders of the wicked, he defends his faithful and honest dealing, which he knew was pleasing to the merciful kindness of God, against all malicious talk. We see what he says elsewhere: he knows nothing against himself, yet he is not thereby justified. He understood that God's judgment far surpasses the dim sight of human beings. However the godly may defend their innocence against the hypocrisy of the ungodly by calling upon God as witness and judge, when they have to do with God alone they all cry out with one voice: "If You, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?" "Do not bring Your servant into judgment, for no living person will be justified in Your sight." Distrusting their own works, they gladly sing: "Your lovingkindness is better than life."

There are also other similar passages that may still detain us. Solomon says that whoever walks in integrity is righteous. Again: in the path of righteousness there is life, and in that path there is no death. In the same way, Ezekiel reports that whoever practices justice and righteousness will live. We neither deny nor obscure any of these. But let one of the sons of Adam come forward with such integrity. If there is none, then they must either perish before God's sight or flee to the sanctuary of mercy. We do not deny that for the faithful, their integrity, though only partial and imperfect, is a step toward immortality. But where does this come from? Only because God, having taken them into the covenant of grace, does

not judge their works according to their merits but instead embraces them with fatherly kindness. By this we do not merely mean what the Scholastics teach: that works get their value from God's "accepting grace." They mean that works which by themselves fall short of earning righteousness under the law's standard are, through God's acceptance, raised to an equal value. But I say that these works, being stained both by other transgressions and by their own imperfections, have no value at all except insofar as the Lord tenderly grants pardon for both. In other words, He gives people free righteousness. The apostle's prayers for believers to have great perfection -- to be faultless and blameless on the day of the Lord -- should not be inappropriately brought in here. The Celestines of old used these words to claim that perfection of righteousness is possible in this life. But, like Augustine, we think a brief answer is sufficient: all the godly should certainly strive toward this goal -- to one day appear spotless and faultless before God. But since the best and most excellent life in this world is nothing more than a journey forward, we will not reach this goal until we have been freed from this sinful flesh and fully united with the Lord. Yet I will not stubbornly argue with anyone who wants to give the saints the title of perfection, as long as they also limit it with Augustine's own words. "When we call the virtue of the saints perfect," he says, "part of that very perfection is acknowledging imperfection, both in truth and in humility."

CHAPTER 18: THAT FROM THE REWARD, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF WORKS IS ILL GATHERED



Now let us move on to those passages that affirm God will render to every person according to his works. These include: 'Each person will receive back what he has done in the body, whether good or bad.' 'Glory and honor to the one who does good; trouble and distress to every soul who does evil.' 'Those who have done good will go into the resurrection of life; those who have done evil, into the resurrection of judgment.' 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father: I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink,' and so on. To these let us also add the sayings that call eternal life the reward of works: 'The work of a man's hands will be repaid to him.' 'He who keeps the commandment will receive a reward.' 'Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.' 'Each person will receive his own reward according to his own labor.' Where it is said that God will render to every person according to his works, this is easily resolved. That way of speaking describes the order in which God works, not the cause of it. It is beyond question that the Lord accomplishes our salvation through these degrees of His mercy: those whom He has

chosen He calls; those whom He has called He justifies; those whom He has justified He glorifies. Therefore, though He receives His own into life by His mercy alone, yet because He brings them to possess it through the course of good works — fulfilling His work in them by the order He has appointed — it is no surprise if it is said they are crowned according to their works, by which they are made ready to receive the crown of immortality. Indeed, in this sense it is fitting to say they work out their own salvation when, by applying themselves to good works, they press on toward eternal life — just as in another place they are commanded to work for the food that does not perish, by believing in Christ and so obtaining life for themselves. And yet it is immediately added: 'which the Son of Man will give you' — showing that the word 'working' is not set against grace but refers to effort. It does not follow that the faithful are themselves the authors of their salvation, or that their salvation comes from their works. How then does it work? As soon as they are brought into union with Christ through the knowledge of the Gospel and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, eternal life is begun in them. And the same good work that God has begun in them must be made complete until the day of the Lord Jesus. It is made complete when, resembling their heavenly Father in righteousness and holiness, they show themselves to be His children who have not turned from their nature.

There is no reason to conclude from the word 'reward' that our works are the cause of salvation. First, let this be settled in our hearts: the kingdom of heaven is not a reward given to servants but an inheritance of children — and only those adopted by the Lord as His children will enjoy it, for no other reason than that adoption itself. For 'the son of the slave woman shall not be an

heir, but the son of the free woman.' And in those very same passages where the Holy Spirit promises eternal glory as a reward for works, He also — by using the word 'inheritance' — shows that it comes from somewhere else entirely. So Christ rehearses the works for which He repays with the reward of heaven, when He calls the elect into its possession — and yet He also states that it must be possessed by right of inheritance. So Paul tells servants who carry out their duties faithfully to hope for a reward from the Lord — but he adds: 'of the inheritance.' We see how, as if by express declaration, it is shown that we do not attribute eternal blessedness to works but to the adoption of God. Why then are works mentioned alongside inheritance? A single example from Scripture makes this plain. Before the birth of Isaac, God promised Abraham a seed through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and a multiplication of his offspring like the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea, and other similar promises. Many years later, Abraham, acting on God's command, prepared to offer his son as a sacrifice. When he had performed this act of obedience, he received a promise: 'By Myself I have sworn,' declares the Lord, 'because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.' What do we hear here? Did Abraham's obedience earn the blessing, the promise of which he had already received before the commandment was even given? Here we see plainly and without any complications that the

Lord rewards the works of the faithful with benefits He had already given them before those works were even thought of — having had no reason to do good to them except His own mercy.

Yet the Lord is not deceiving or mocking us when He calls something a reward for works that He had freely given before any works were done. For because He wills us to be exercised through good works, thinking on the receiving and enjoying — if I may call it that — of the things He has promised, and running through them toward the blessed hope set before us in heaven, the fruit of the promises is also rightly credited to those works, even though the works do not bring us to maturity in those promises. The apostle expressed both of these points well when he said that the Colossians were applying themselves to deeds of love because of the hope laid up for them in heaven, of which they had already heard through the word of the true-speaking Gospel (Colossians 1:4-5). For when he says they learned from the Gospel that hope was laid up for them in heaven, he declares that this is through Christ alone and not propped up by any works. This agrees with Peter's statement, that the godly are kept by the power of God through faith to a salvation ready to be revealed at the appointed time (1 Peter 1:5). When Paul says they labor for it, he means that the faithful must run throughout their whole life in order to reach it. But lest we should think that the Lord's promised reward is strictly proportioned to merit, He set forth a parable in which He likened Himself to a householder who sent all those he met into his vineyard to work — some at the first hour of the day, some at the third, some at the sixth, and some even at the eleventh hour (Matthew 20). At evening he paid each of them the same wages. The explanation of this parable has been briefly and truthfully

given by that ancient writer — whoever he was — whose book circulates under the name of Ambrose, 'On the Calling of the Gentiles.' I will use his words rather than my own: 'The Lord, by this comparison, has established the diversity of the many callings that all belong to one grace. Without doubt those who were brought into the vineyard at the eleventh hour and made equal with those who had worked the whole day represent the situation of those whom the tender kindness of the Lord has rewarded at the close of day and the end of life — for the praise of the excellence of grace. He paid them not wages for their labor, but poured out the riches of His goodness on those whom He chose without works, so that even those who had sweated through great labor and received no more than the last workers might understand that they received a gift of grace, not a reward of works.' Finally, something else is worth noting in those passages where eternal life is called the reward of works: the word there does not refer simply to communion with God in blessed immortality, in which He embraces us with fatherly goodwill in Christ. Rather, it refers to the possessing or enjoying — as they call it — of blessedness, as the very words of Christ indicate: 'in the age to come, eternal life' (Mark 10:30; Matthew 25:34). And in another place: 'Come, inherit the kingdom,' and so on. In the same way Paul calls the full revealing of adoption — to take place at the resurrection (Romans 8:19) — and then explains it as the redemption of our bodies. Otherwise, just as estrangement from God is eternal death, so when God receives a person into favor so that he may enjoy communion with Him and be made one with Him, he is brought from death to life — and this is accomplished by the gift of adoption alone. And if, as they usu-

ally do, our opponents press hard on the reward of works, we can turn against them Peter's statement that eternal life is the outcome of faith (1 Peter 1:9).

Therefore let us not think that the Holy Spirit uses such promises to set forth the worthiness of our works as if they deserved such a reward. For Scripture leaves nothing to us upon which we might advance ourselves in God's sight. Rather, its whole endeavor is to beat down our arrogance, to humble us, to cast us down, and to break us to pieces entirely. But our weakness is also helped by these promises — weakness that would otherwise slip and fall, unless it sustained itself with this expectation and soothed its weary griefs with comfort. How hard it is for a person to forsake and deny not only all that is his, but also himself — let every person consider on his own. And yet this is precisely the training with which Christ schools His disciples, that is, all the godly. Then throughout their whole lives He instructs them under the discipline of the cross, so they do not fix their hearts on the desire for or confidence in present good things. In short, He deals with them in such a way that whatever direction they turn their eyes across the whole breadth of the world, they see on every side nothing but despair — so that Paul says we are most miserable of all people if our hope is only in this world (1 Corinthians 15:19). So that they should not give up in the face of such great distress, the Lord comes to them and calls them to lift their heads higher and to look further — that they may find with Him the blessedness they cannot find in the world. This blessedness He calls a reward, wages, and recompense — not to weigh the merit of works, but to signify that it is a repayment for their troubles, sufferings, and slanders. Therefore there is nothing to prevent us from calling eternal life a

reward after the manner of Scripture — since in it the Lord receives His own from labors into rest, from affliction into a prosperous and happy state, from sorrow into gladness, from poverty into abundant wealth, from shame into glory, exchanging all the evils they have suffered for greater blessings. So too there is no inconvenience in thinking of holiness of life as a path — not one that opens the entrance into the glory of the heavenly kingdom, but one by which the elect are led by their God to its revealing — since it is His will to glorify those whom He has sanctified. Only let us not imagine the sophists' quibbling over merit and reward, in which they foolishly get stuck because they do not consider the goal we are setting forth. But how disorderly is it when the Lord calls us to one end and we look toward another? Nothing is better suited to soothe the weakness of our flesh with some comfort, and nothing should puff up our minds with arrogance. Whoever draws from this a conclusion about the merit of works, or places work and reward in the same balance as equals, has gone far astray from God's purpose (Romans 8:30).

Therefore when Scripture says that God the just judge will one day render to His own a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), I do not only take exception with Augustine, who says: 'To whom would a just judge render a crown, if a merciful Father had not first given grace? How could there be righteousness, unless grace went before to justify the unrighteous? How could what is owed be rendered, unless what was unowed was first given?' I also add another point: how could He credit righteousness to our works, unless His tender mercy hid the unrighteousness in them? How could He judge them worthy of reward, unless He had by immeasurable generosity removed what is worthy of punishment? For he is ac-

customed to call eternal life grace — because it is given in response to the free gifts of God when it is repaid to works. But Scripture also humbles us further, and at the same time lifts us up. For beyond forbidding us to glory in works because they are free gifts of God, it also teaches that they are always stained with some residue and cannot satisfy God if examined by the standard of His judgment — yet lest our courage should fail, it teaches that they are accepted through pardon alone. Although Augustine speaks somewhat differently than we do, the following words from his third book to Boniface show that he does not disagree with us on the substance. After comparing two men — one whose life was miraculously holy and nearly perfect, the other honest and of upright character but far from perfect — he concludes this way: 'Even this man who in his conduct appears far inferior, because of his true faith in God by which he lives, and according to which he accuses himself in all his offenses and praises God in all his good works — giving to himself the shame and to God the glory, and receiving from God both pardon for sins and love for doing good — when he is to be taken from this life, he passes into the fellowship of Christ.' 'Why? Because of faith — which, though it saves no one without works (for it is the faith that works through love, not a reprobate faith), yet through it sins are forgiven, because the righteous man lives by faith. But without it, even those works that appear good are turned into sins.' Here he plainly confesses what we labor so hard to prove: that the righteousness of good works rests on this — that they are received by God through pardon.

Very similar in meaning to the passages discussed above are these: "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal

dwellings." "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant or to set their hope on uncertain riches, but on the living God; to do good, to be rich in good works, and to store up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, so that they may take hold of eternal life." Good works are compared to riches that we may enjoy in the blessedness of eternal life. I answer that we will never understand these passages unless we keep our eyes on the goal the Holy Spirit is aiming at. If Christ's saying is true -- that our heart stays where our treasure is -- then just as the children of this world eagerly work to acquire things that bring pleasure in this present life, the faithful must look elsewhere. Since they have learned that this life will vanish like a dream, they must send ahead to where they will have perfect life the things they want to enjoy. We must do what people do who plan to move to a place where they have chosen to settle permanently. They send their goods ahead and do not mind going without them for a while, because they consider themselves richer the more goods they have at their final destination. If we believe that heaven is our homeland, we should rather send our riches there than keep them here, where we will lose them when we suddenly move on. But how do we send them there? By sharing with the needy. Whatever is given to the poor, the Lord counts as given to Himself. This leads to that notable promise: "Whoever gives to the poor lends to the Lord." Again: "Whoever sows generously will also reap generously." The things entrusted to our brothers through charitable giving are placed in the Lord's hand for safekeeping. He, as a faithful keeper of what is entrusted to Him, will one day return it with generous interest. Are our acts of service really so valuable to God that they are like riches stored up for us in His hand? Who would hesitate to

say so, when Scripture so often and so plainly testifies to it? But if anyone tries to leap from God's pure goodness to the worthiness of works, these testimonies will not help them establish that error. From these passages you can rightly conclude nothing except God's pure tenderness toward us. To encourage us to do good -- even though the services we render to Him are not worthy of even a glance from Him -- He allows none of them to be lost.

But they press harder with the apostle's words. When he comforts the Thessalonians in their troubles, he teaches that their sufferings are sent so that they may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which they suffer. He says: "It is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, but to give you rest along with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven." The author of Hebrews says: "God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love you have shown in His name, since you have ministered to the saints." To the first passage I answer that this is not about meritorious worthiness. Rather, because God the Father wills that we whom He has chosen as His children should be conformed to Christ His firstborn Son -- just as Christ first had to suffer and then enter His appointed glory -- so we too must enter the kingdom of heaven through many tribulations. When we suffer tribulations for the name of Christ, they serve as marks printed on us, the kind God uses to mark the sheep of His flock. In this way, then, we are counted worthy of the kingdom of God: because we bear in our bodies the marks of our Lord and Master, which are the signs of God's children. These statements serve this purpose: "We carry in our body the death of Jesus, so that His life may be revealed in us." "We are conformed to His sufferings, so that we may reach the likeness of His resurrection from the dead." The reason Paul adds

does not prove any worthiness or merit, but confirms the hope of the kingdom. It is as if he said: "Just as it fits God's just judgment to take vengeance on your enemies for the harm they have done to you, so it also fits to give you relief and rest from those troubles." The other passage -- teaching that it fits God's righteousness not to forget the obedience of His people, making it almost seem unjust if He did forget -- means this: God has given us assurance, to stir us from our laziness, that the effort we put in for His glory will not be wasted. Let us always remember that this promise, like all others, would bring us no benefit unless the free covenant of mercy came first -- the covenant on which the entire assurance of our salvation must rest. But resting on that covenant, we should confidently trust that God's generosity will also provide a reward for our works, however unworthy they may be. The apostle, to confirm us in this expectation, says that God is not unjust and will stand by His promise. Therefore, this righteousness refers more to the truthfulness of God's promise than to the justice of rendering what is owed. Augustine has a notable saying on this subject that he frequently repeats, and that I think is worth continually remembering: "The Lord is faithful," he says, "who has made Himself our debtor -- not by receiving anything from us, but by promising all things to us."

They also cite Paul's statements: "If I have all faith so as to move mountains but have not love, I am nothing." Again: "Now these three remain: hope, faith, and love. But the greatest of these is love." Again: "Above all, put on love, which is the bond of perfection." From the first two passages, our Pharisees argue that we are justified by love rather than by faith, since love is supposedly the greater virtue. But this foolish argument is easily refuted. We have

already shown elsewhere that the things said in the first passage have nothing to do with genuine faith. We also explain the second passage as referring to true faith, which Paul says is exceeded by love -- not because love is more meritorious, but because it is more fruitful, extends further, serves more people, and endures forever, while the use of faith is only for a limited time. If we consider true excellence, the love of God would rightly hold the first place -- but Paul is not speaking about that here. He is emphasizing only that we should build up one another in mutual love in the Lord. But let us suppose that love surpasses faith in every way. What person of sound judgment -- or even sound mind -- would conclude from this that love is more effective in justifying? The power of justifying that faith has does not rest in the worthiness of the act itself. Our justification rests entirely on God's mercy and Christ's merit. When faith lays hold of this justification, it is said to justify. Now if you ask our opponents why they credit justification to love, they will answer that because love is an act pleasing to God, righteousness is credited to us through its merit and God's acceptance of it. See how well this argument works. We say that faith justifies not because it deserves righteousness by its own worth, but because it is the instrument by which we freely receive the righteousness of Christ. These people, ignoring God's mercy and setting Christ aside (where the substance of righteousness lies), claim we are justified by the merit of love because it surpasses faith. This is like arguing that a king is better at making shoes than a shoemaker, simply because the king is a far more important person. This one argument alone proves that all the Sorbonne schools have not even tasted with the tip of their lips what the justification of faith actually is. But if a persistent debater asks why, in such a short space,

we interpret the word "faith" in Paul so differently, I have a strong reason for this interpretation. Since the gifts Paul lists are in a way subordinate to faith and hope (because they lead to the knowledge of God), he summarizes them all under the names faith and hope. It is as if he said: prophecy, tongues, and the gift of knowledge and interpretation all aim at leading us to know God. And we know God in this life only through hope and faith. So when I name faith and hope, I include all these gifts together. There remain, then, these three: hope, faith, and love. That is, however diverse the gifts may be, they are all gathered under these three. Among these, the greatest is love. From the third passage they argue: if love is the bond of perfection, then it is also the bond of righteousness, which is nothing other than perfection. First, even setting aside the fact that Paul is calling perfection the well-ordered unity of the church's members, and even granting that we are made perfect before God through love -- what is new about that? I will always object on the other side: we never reach this perfection unless we fulfill every part of love. From this I will conclude that since everyone is immeasurably far from fulfilling love, all hope of perfection based on it is cut off.

I will not go through every testimony that the foolish Sorbonne scholars rashly snatch from Scripture as it comes to hand and throw against us. Some of them are so ridiculous that I would rightly be considered foolish for even repeating them. So I will conclude after addressing Christ's statement that they find so delightful. When a lawyer asked Him what was necessary for salvation, He answered: "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." "What more do we need?" they say. "The author of grace Himself commands us to earn the kingdom of God by keep-

ing His commandments." But it is obviously true that Christ tailored His answers to the people He was speaking with. Here a teacher of the law was asking about the way to obtain blessedness, and specifically about what works a person must do to achieve it. Both the person asking and the nature of the question led the Lord to answer as He did. The lawyer, filled with confidence in the law's righteousness, was blind to the reality of his own works. He was seeking nothing other than what works of righteousness would earn salvation. He was therefore rightly sent to the law, in which there is a perfect mirror of righteousness. We too declare loudly that the commandments must be kept if anyone seeks life through works. Christians need to know this teaching. How would they flee to Christ if they did not recognize that they have fallen from the path of life into the headlong plunge of death? How would they understand how far they have strayed from the path of life unless they first understand what that path is? They are taught to seek refuge for salvation in Christ precisely when they see the enormous gap between their lives and the righteousness of God contained in keeping the law. The point is this: if salvation is sought through works, the commandments must be kept -- the commandments that teach us perfect righteousness. But we must not stop here, or we will faint along the way. None of us is able to keep the commandments. Since we are therefore shut out from the righteousness of the law, we must turn to another help: the faith of Christ. This is why the Lord here directs the lawyer -- whom He knew was swelling with vain confidence in works -- to the law, where he could learn that he was a sinner subject to the dreadful sentence of eternal death. In other places, without mentioning the law, He comforts those who are already humbled by such knowledge with

the promise of grace: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28).

When they finally grow weary of twisting Scripture, they resort to cleverness and hair-splitting arguments. They quibble that faith is called a "work" in some places, and from this they conclude that we are wrong to contrast faith with works. As if faith, insofar as it is obedience to God's will, earns us righteousness by its own merit -- rather than by embracing God's mercy and sealing in our hearts the righteousness of Christ offered to us in the preaching of the Gospel! Readers will forgive me for not lingering over the refutation of such nonsense, since they are weak enough to collapse on their own. But I will briefly address one objection that seems to have some plausibility, in case it troubles those less experienced. Since common sense teaches that the same rule applies to opposites, and since every particular sin is counted against us as unrighteousness, they say it is only fitting that every particular good work should receive the praise of righteousness. Those who respond by saying that damnation comes properly only from unbelief, not from particular sins, do not satisfy me. I do agree with them that unbelief is the fountain and root of all evil. It is the original departure from God, from which particular violations of the law then follow. But when they try to set the same standard for good and evil works in evaluating righteousness or unrighteousness, I am forced to disagree. The righteousness of works consists in perfect obedience to the law. Therefore, you cannot be righteous by works unless you follow the law as a straight line throughout the entire course of your life. The moment you deviate from it, you fall into unrighteousness. This makes clear that righteousness does

not come from one or a few works, but from an unwavering and tireless obedience to the will of God. But the rule for judging unrighteousness is the exact opposite. A person who commits adultery or steals is guilty of death by that one offense, because they have offended the majesty of God. Our clever debaters stumble here because they fail to notice James' statement: the person who breaks the law in one point is guilty of breaking it all, because the One who forbade murder also forbade theft, and so on. Therefore, it should not seem strange when we say that death is the just reward of every sin, because each one deserves God's righteous displeasure and vengeance. But you would reason foolishly if you concluded from this that a person can be reconciled to God by one good work, when they have earned His wrath through many sins.

CHAPTER 19: OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY



We must now treat of Christian liberty — something anyone who intends to summarize the essential teaching of the Gospel must not omit. For it is a matter of primary importance, and without knowledge of it consciences dare undertake almost nothing without doubt, stumble and draw back in many situations, and constantly stagger and tremble. Most importantly, it is closely connected to justification and contributes greatly to understanding its power. Indeed, those who genuinely fear God will receive immense benefit from this teaching — which ungodly and mocking people taunt with scorn, since in the spiritual darkness that has overtaken them, every irreverent jest seems permissible. It is fitting therefore to treat it now. It was useful to defer a fuller treatment to this point — for we have already touched on it briefly in various places — because as soon as Christian liberty is mentioned, shameful lusts boil up or wild arguments arise, unless these reckless minds are met in time. For they otherwise corrupt the best things most wickedly. Some people use the pretense of this liberty to shake off all obedience to God and break out into unchecked licentiousness. Others reject it entirely, thinking it removes all moderation, order, and distinction between things. What

are we to do, caught in such a narrow pass? Shall we say farewell to Christian liberty and cut off all opportunity for such dangers? But as we have said, unless this liberty is firmly held, neither Christ, nor the truth of the Gospel, nor the soul's inward peace is rightly understood. Rather we must strive to ensure that so necessary a part of doctrine is not suppressed — while at the same time meeting the foolish objections that commonly arise from it.

Christian liberty, as I understand it, consists of three parts. The first is this: when the faithful are seeking assurance of their justification before God, their consciences may rise above the law and forget the whole righteousness of the law entirely. For since the law — as we have already declared elsewhere — leaves no one righteous, we are either excluded from all hope of justification, or we must be released from the law so that works carry no weight whatsoever. For whoever thinks he must bring any amount of good works, however small, to obtain righteousness, has no end or limit to them — he has made himself a debtor to the whole law. Therefore, when treating of justification, we must set aside all mention of the law and all thinking about works, embrace God's mercy alone, and turn our eyes away from ourselves to behold Christ alone. For the question is not how we are righteous in ourselves, but how — though we are unrighteous and unworthy — we are accepted as worthy. If consciences will have any certainty of this, they must give no place to the law. No one should conclude from this that the law is therefore useless to the faithful. It does not cease to teach, exhort, and prod them toward goodness — it simply has no place before God's judgment seat in the matter of their consciences. For these two things, though very different, must be carefully distinguished. The whole life of Christians ought

to be a meditation on godliness, since they are called to sanctification. This is where the role of the law stands: by reminding them of their duty, it stirs them up to strive for holiness and innocence. But when consciences are anxious about how they may find God merciful, what answer they will give, and on what ground they may stand if called to His judgment — there the law has no place. Christ alone must be set forward as righteousness, which surpasses all the perfection of the law.

Almost the entire argument of the letter to the Galatians turns on this point. That those expositors are mistaken who teach that Paul is there contending only for freedom from ceremonies can be proved from the substance of his arguments. Among these are: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.' Again: 'Stand firm in the freedom by which Christ has set you free, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' 'Look, I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you.' 'And every man who becomes circumcised is obligated to keep the whole law.' 'You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.' These words plainly contain something higher than freedom from ceremonies. I grant that Paul is dealing with ceremonies, since he is contending with false apostles who sought to bring back into the Christian church the old shadows of the law that were abolished by Christ's coming. But in addressing that question, he had to press deeper points on which the whole controversy rested. First, because those Jewish shadows were obscuring the brightness of the Gospel, he shows that in Christ we have a full and certain gift of all the things those ceremonies of Moses foreshadowed. Second, because these deceivers had filled the people

with the wicked idea that this obedience merited the favor of God, he dwells at length on the point that the faithful must not think they can obtain righteousness before God by any works of the law — much less by those elementary rules. He also teaches that they are freed by Christ's cross from the condemnation of the law, which otherwise hangs over all people — so that they may rest with full assurance in Christ alone. This point belongs directly to our present subject. Finally, he defends the liberty of the consciences of the faithful so that they should not be bound by any obligation in things that are not necessary.

The second part of Christian liberty, which depends on the first, is this: consciences obey the law not as compelled by the law's necessity, but being free from the yoke of the law itself, they willingly obey the will of God. For because they live in constant fear as long as they remain under the law's dominion, they will never serve God with cheerful readiness unless this liberty is first granted to them. An example will make this clearer and more briefly to the point. The commandment of the law is that we love our God with all our heart, soul, and strength. For this to be accomplished, our soul must first be emptied of every other thought and desire, our heart cleansed of all cravings, and all our energies gathered and directed to this one purpose. Yet even those who have made the greatest progress in the Lord's way are still very far from this mark. Though they love God with their mind and with sincere affection of heart, they still have a large part of their heart and soul occupied by the desires of the flesh, which pull them back and prevent them from pressing forward to God with full speed. They do strive forward with great effort — but the flesh partly weakens their strength and partly pulls them toward itself. What

are they to do when they feel they are falling far short of fulfilling the law? They have the will, the desire, the effort — but none of it with the perfection that is required. If they look to the law, they see that every work they attempt or intend is accursed. And no one should deceive himself by reasoning that a work is not entirely evil just because it is imperfect, and that therefore God still accepts the good that is in it. For the law, requiring perfect love, condemns all imperfection unless its rigor is softened. So the works a person hoped might be partly good will collapse entirely — and he will find that even the imperfection itself makes them a transgression of the law (Deuteronomy 6:5).

You see how all our works fall under the curse of the law when measured by its standard. But how then can unhappy souls cheerfully apply themselves to work, when they cannot trust that anything will come of it but a curse? On the other hand, if being released from the law's harsh demands — or rather from its entire severity — they hear that God calls them with fatherly gentleness, they will answer His call cheerfully and with great joy, and follow His leading. In short, those who are bound under the yoke of the law are like hired workers to whom their masters have assigned specific tasks for each day. These workers think they have done nothing and dare not appear before their masters unless they have completed the full assignment. But children, who are treated more generously and freely by their fathers, do not hesitate to bring them their begun and half-finished works — even those with faults — trusting that their fathers will accept their obedience and willing spirit even when they have not done as well as they had hoped. In the same way, we must have firm confidence that our obedience will be accepted by our most kind Father, however small, rough,

and imperfect it may be. He assures us of this through the prophet: 'I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him' (Malachi 3:17). Here the word 'spare' means to bear with and gently overlook faults — especially since he also mentions service. This confidence is not a small thing. Without it we will undertake everything in vain. For God considers Himself worshiped by no work of ours unless it is truly offered to Him for the purpose of worshiping Him. But how can that happen amid these terrors, when there is doubt whether God is offended or worshiped by what we do?

This is why the author of the letter to the Hebrews connects all the good works recorded of the holy fathers to faith and evaluates them only in terms of faith. Regarding this liberty, there is an important passage in Romans where Paul reasons that sin should not have dominion over us because we are not under law but under grace. After exhorting the faithful not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies and not to yield their members as instruments of wickedness to sin, but instead to present themselves to God as those who are alive from the dead — their members as instruments of righteousness to God — he anticipates the objection that they still carry within them a flesh full of desires and that sin still dwells in them. He adds the comfort of freedom from the law, as if to say: though they do not yet feel sin completely destroyed, and righteousness does not yet fully live within them, there is no reason for them to fear and be discouraged as if God were always displeased with them because of the remnants of sin — since they have been freed from the law by grace, so that their works are no longer to be examined by the law's standard. As for those who conclude from

our not being under the law that we may therefore sin — let them know that this liberty has nothing to do with them, since its purpose is to draw us nearer to God.

The third part of Christian liberty is this: we are not bound in conscience before God in matters of outward things that are in themselves indifferent — we may freely use them or freely leave them unused. Knowledge of this liberty is also very necessary for us, for without it there will be no rest for our consciences and no end to superstitions. Many today think we are foolish to debate about freely eating meat, freely choosing holy days, clothing, and other such minor things as they consider them. But there is more weight in these questions than is commonly thought. For once consciences cast themselves into the snare of doubt, they enter a long and burdensome path from which they cannot easily find their way out. If a person begins to doubt whether he may use linen for sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, and napkins, he will also doubt about hemp — and in the end he will fall into doubt about even greater matters, wondering whether he can eat supper without napkins or do without a handkerchief. If someone thinks fine food is unlawful, in time he will not be able to eat plain bread or simple food before the Lord with a quiet mind, since he knows his body could be sustained on something even more basic. If he doubts about pleasant wine, he will afterward not drink flat wine with a clear conscience — and eventually he will not dare even to drink clean water that tastes a little sweeter than others. Finally he will reach the point of thinking it unlawful — as the proverb goes — to tread on a piece of straw lying across the path. For this is no trivial dispute. The question is whether God wills us to use these things or those things — whose will ought to direct all our thinking

and doing. Inevitably, some are driven by despair into a pit of confusion. Others, casting off the fear of God and despising Him, go to ruin when they find no easy resolution. For those trapped in such doubts, every direction they turn they find a fresh offense against their conscience.

'I know,' says Paul, 'that nothing is unclean in itself' — by 'unclean' meaning unholy — 'but to the one who thinks it is unclean, to him it is unclean.' In these words he subjects all outward things to our liberty, provided always that our minds are assured of that liberty before God. But if some superstitious idea casts doubt into us, things that were clean in their own nature become defiled for us. Therefore he adds: 'Happy is the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But the one who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.' Among such narrow straits, those who nevertheless recklessly throw themselves into everything without reservation — are they not turning away from God just as much? But those who are genuinely moved by the fear of God — when they also are forced to do many things against their conscience — are discouraged and fall down in fear. All such people receive none of God's gifts with thanksgiving — by which, as Paul testifies, they are all sanctified for our use. I mean the thanksgiving that comes from a heart that recognizes the generosity and goodness of God in His gifts. For many do recognize that the things they use are God's benefits and do praise God in His works — but since they are not persuaded that these things are given to them personally, how can they thank God as the giver? So we see in summary what this liberty aims at: that we should use God's gifts for the purposes He gave them to us — without scruple of conscience, without mental

distress — so that through this confidence our souls may both be at peace with Him and acknowledge His generosity toward us. Included here are all ceremonies that are at liberty to be observed: our consciences are not to be bound by any necessity to keep them, but should remember that the use of them is, by God's kindness, placed under our discretion for the purpose of building up.

It must be carefully noted that Christian liberty in all its parts is a spiritual matter, whose entire power consists in giving peace to troubled consciences before God — whether they are unsettled and anxious about the forgiveness of sins, or whether they are worried that our imperfect works, stained by the weakness of our flesh, might not please God, or whether they are troubled about the use of indifferent things. Therefore those who misuse it go wrong: either they treat it as a cover for their own desires, abusing God's gifts to feed their lusts, or they think there is no liberty except what is displayed before other people — and therefore, in exercising it, they pay no attention to the weak. The first kind of error is very common today. There is hardly a wealthy person who does not delight in extravagant display — in lavish banquets, costly clothing, ornate houses — who does not strive to outshine others in every form of grandeur, and who does not immensely flatter himself on his own refinement. All of this is defended under the pretense of Christian liberty. They say these things are indifferent — and I grant this, provided a person uses them as indifferent things. But when they are greedily coveted, proudly flaunted, and wastefully spent, it is clear that things otherwise lawful in themselves have been defiled by these faults. Paul's words draw this distinction well between things indifferent: 'To the pure, all things are pure; but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, for both their mind

and their conscience are defiled.' For why are the rich men condemned — those who have received their comfort, who are full of food, who laugh now, who sleep on beds of ivory, who add field to field, whose banquets resound with lute, harp, tambourine, and wine? Ivory, gold, and riches are indeed God's good creations, permitted — yes, appointed by His providence for human use. There is no prohibition against laughing, being well fed, adding to one's inherited property, delighting in music, or drinking wine. This is all true. But when, in the midst of abundance, people wallow in pleasures, gorge themselves, intoxicate their minds with present enjoyments and constantly crave more — these ways are completely at odds with the lawful use of God's gifts. Let them therefore put away excessive desire, excessive waste, vanity, and arrogance, so that they may use God's gifts with a clear conscience and in a clean way. When the mind is shaped to this sobriety, they will have a guide to lawful use. On the other hand, where this moderation is absent, even simple and ordinary pleasures are excessive. For this is truly said: that often a proud heart lives in rough, plain cloth, and sometimes beneath silk and purple there lies simple humility. Let every person at his own level — whether living poorly, moderately, or with plenty — remember that God sustains us to live, not to live riotously. And let him consider this to be the rule of Christian liberty: to have learned with Paul to be content in whatever state he finds himself; to know how to be humble and how to have abundance; to have been taught in every place and in every circumstance both to be full and to be hungry, to have plenty and to suffer need.

Many also err in this way: as though their liberty would not be genuine unless others witnessed it, they exercise it carelessly and without wisdom. By this untimely use they frequently offend the weak. You can see today some who think their liberty cannot stand unless they assert it by eating meat on Friday. I do not condemn their eating — but the false opinion behind it must be driven from their minds. They should understand that their liberty gains them nothing new in the sight of people but only before God, and that it stands equally well in abstaining as in using. If they understand that it makes no difference before God whether they eat meat or eggs, whether they wear red or black — that is enough. The conscience is now free, which is what this liberty was meant for. Therefore, even if they afterward abstain from meat their whole life long and always wear only one color, they are no less free. Indeed, precisely because they are free, they abstain with a free conscience. But they cause serious harm by showing no regard for the weakness of their brothers — the weak whom we ought to bear with so carefully that we do nothing rashly that might cause them offense. Sometimes, however, it is right that our liberty be made known before others. I grant this. But there is a measure to be kept most carefully, so that we do not abandon our concern for the weak, whom the Lord has charged us so earnestly to care for.

I will therefore say something here about offenses — how they are to be distinguished, which are to be avoided, and which may be disregarded — from which we can then determine what place liberty has among people. I approve the common distinction that teaches there are two kinds of offense: offense given and offense taken. It has clear scriptural support and expresses the meaning well. If you do something out of untimely thoughtlessness, reck-

lessness, or carelessness — not in the proper manner or place — and by this the ignorant and weak are offended, that can be called an offense given by you. The offense arose through your fault. An offense is always called 'given' when the fault for it lies with the person who did the thing. An offense is called 'taken' when something that has not been done wrongly or at the wrong time is twisted by ill will or malicious interpretation into grounds for offense. In this case, no offense was given — these ill-natured critics have taken one without just cause. The first kind of offense only harms the weak; the second kind offends those of bitter and Pharisaical temperament. We will therefore call one the offense of the weak, and the other the offense of the Pharisees. We should adjust the use of our liberty accordingly: it ought to yield to the ignorance of weak brothers, but in no way to the harshness of Pharisees. What is to be conceded to weakness, Paul shows in many places: 'Welcome those who are weak in faith.' 'Let us not judge one another anymore. Instead resolve never to put a stumbling block or an obstacle in your brother's way' — and many other statements to the same effect, which are better read in their own context than quoted here. The sum of it is this: we who are strong ought to bear with the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not please ourselves — but let each of us please his neighbor for his good and for building him up. In another place: 'But take care that this freedom of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.' Again: 'Eat everything that is sold in the meat market without raising any question of conscience' — your conscience, I say, not another person's. 'Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.' And again: 'For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportu-

nity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.' So it is: our liberty is not meant to harm our weak neighbors, to whom love makes us servants in all things. Rather, it is so that, having peace with God in our hearts, we may also live at peace with others. As for the offense of the Pharisees, how much it deserves to be regarded we learn from the Lord's own words, when He says to leave them alone, for they are blind guides of the blind. When the disciples warned Him that the Pharisees were offended by His words, He answered that they were to be disregarded and their offense not worried about.

But the matter remains uncertain unless we know who are to be considered weak and who are to be considered Pharisees. Without that distinction, I do not see what room for the exercise of liberty remains — it could never be used without great danger. But Paul has, it seems to me, set out most clearly both by teaching and by example how far our liberty is to be restrained or defended even at the cost of causing offense. When he received Timothy into his company, he circumcised him. But he could not be brought to circumcise Titus. Here were very different actions but no change of principle or purpose. In circumcising Timothy, while he was free from all men, he made himself a servant to all — becoming like a Jew to the Jews so that he might win Jews; like one under the law to those under the law, that he might win those under the law; all things to all people, that he might save many, as he writes elsewhere. There we see the proper use of liberty: it can freely be restrained when there is some benefit in doing so. What he had in view when he firmly refused to circumcise Titus, he explains in his own words: 'But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But it was because of the

false brothers secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage — to whom we did not yield in submission even for an hour, so that the truth of the Gospel would remain with you.' There is also a time when we must necessarily defend our liberty — especially when weak consciences are placed in danger by the unjust demands of false apostles. In everything we must aim to preserve love and have regard for the building up of our neighbor. 'All things are lawful for me,' Paul says, 'but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.' Nothing could be plainer from this rule: we should use our liberty when it can build up our neighbor, but when that is not the case, we should hold back. There are some who imitate the wisdom of Paul in restraining liberty, while actually applying it not at all to the duties of love. They simply want quiet for themselves and would have all mention of liberty buried. Yet it is just as necessary sometimes to exercise liberty for the benefit and building up of our neighbors as it is at other times to hold it back for their sake. But it is the mark of a godly person to understand that freedom in outward things is granted precisely so that he may be all the freer for the duties of love.

But everything I have said about avoiding offense is to be understood as applying to indifferent things. Necessary things must not be left undone for fear of any offense. For just as our liberty must be submitted to love, so love itself must be submitted to the purity of faith. Even here we ought to have regard for love — but only up to the point of serving others, not to the point of offending God for our neighbors' sake. I will not excuse the recklessness of

those who do nothing but cause disruptive turmoil and would rather tear everything apart rashly than carefully undo it one piece at a time. But neither should we listen to those who, while leading people into a thousand forms of ungodliness, pretend they must conduct themselves so as not to cause offense to their neighbors — as though they were not at the very same time building those neighbors' consciences up toward evil, especially while they themselves remain stuck in the same mire with no hope of getting out. These pleasant-sounding people say, whether speaking of instructing the neighbor through doctrine or through example of life, that he must be fed with milk — and then they fill him with the most corrupt and poisonous ideas. Paul says he fed the Corinthians with milk to drink — but if the papal Mass had existed among them, would he have celebrated it to give them milk to drink? Milk is not poison. Therefore they are lying when they say they are feeding those whom, under a pretense of flattering care, they are cruelly killing. But even granting that such accommodation could be allowed for a time — how long will they keep feeding their children with milk? If those children never grow to the point where they can bear even some light food, it is clear they were never really being fed with milk at all. Two reasons prevent me from pressing against them more sharply here: first, their foolishness hardly deserves refutation, since it appears obviously corrupt to all who have sound judgment; second, I have addressed it sufficiently in other writings and will not repeat what has already been done. Let readers simply remember this: no matter what offenses Satan and the world use to turn us from God's ordinances or to hold us back from what He commands, we must press earnestly forward. And then remember this: no matter what dangers hang over it, we do not

have the liberty to swerve a hair's breadth from God's commandment, and it is not lawful by any pretense to attempt anything He has not given us permission to do.

Now therefore, since faithful consciences — having received the prerogative of liberty as we have described above, through the benefit of Christ — have obtained this: that they are not entangled in any snares of observances in matters where the Lord willed them to be free. We conclude that they are exempt from all human authority in these things. For it is fitting neither that Christ should lose the credit of His great generosity, nor that consciences should lose their benefit. We should not think lightly of what we see cost Christ so dearly — something He purchased not with gold or silver but with His own blood — so that Paul does not hesitate to say that His death is made void if we submit ourselves to bondage under human authority. Paul labors at this throughout certain chapters of Galatians, to show that Christ is obscured — or rather, destroyed — for us unless our consciences stand firm in their liberty. And they lose that liberty if they can be ensnared at human will by the chains of laws and ordinances. But this is something so important to know that it calls for a longer and clearer explanation. For as soon as any mention is made of abolishing human ordinances, great troubles are immediately stirred up — partly by rebellious men, partly by slanderers — as if all human obedience were being swept away at once.

So that none of us stumbles on this point, let us first consider that there are two kinds of government in human life: one spiritual, by which the conscience is shaped toward godliness and the worship of God; the other civil, by which a person is trained in the duties of humanity and civility that are to be maintained among

people. These are commonly called, not unfitly, the Spiritual and the Temporal jurisdictions — by which it is indicated that the first of these two forms of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter deals with the concerns of this present life: not only with food and clothing, but with establishing laws by which a person may live among others in a holy, honest, and sober manner. For the first kind operates in the inward mind; the second only regulates outward behavior. We may call one the spiritual kingdom and the other the civil kingdom. These two, as I have distinguished them, must always be considered separately on their own terms — and when considering one, we must set aside all thought of the other. For there are in a person, as it were, two worlds, which may each be governed by different kings and different laws. By keeping this distinction in view, we will avoid the error of wrongly applying what the Gospel teaches about spiritual liberty to the civil order — as if Christians were, in terms of outward government, less subject to human laws because their consciences are free before God; or as if they were therefore exempt from all bodily constraints because they are free in Spirit. Again, because even in matters that appear to belong to the spiritual kingdom there can be error, we must also distinguish between those ordinances that are to be received as lawful — being agreeable to God's Word — and those that ought to have no place among the godly. I will speak elsewhere about civil government. I also omit the question of ecclesiastical laws for now, as it will be better treated more fully in Book Four, where I will speak of the power of the church. But let this serve as the conclusion of this discussion: the question, which as I have said is not in itself very obscure or complex, troubles many people because they do not carefully dis-

tinguish between what they call the external court and the court of conscience. This difficulty is increased by the fact that Paul teaches that the magistrate is to be obeyed not only for fear of punishment but also for conscience's sake (Romans 13:1, 5). It would seem to follow that consciences are also bound by civil laws. If that were the case, everything we have said and will say about spiritual government would come to nothing. To untangle this knot, it is good first to understand what conscience is. Its definition is best drawn from the word itself. Just as when people with mind and understanding come to know something, they are said to 'know' it — from which comes the word 'science' — so when they have a sense of God's judgment, as if a witness stood beside them that would not allow their sins to remain hidden but drew them forward to be accused before God's judgment seat, that inner sense is called 'conscience' (Romans 2:15). For it stands as a kind of intermediary between God and a person — it will not allow a person to suppress what he knows, but pursues him until it brings him to a reckoning of guilt. This is what Paul means when he says that conscience bears witness together with people, while their thoughts accuse or defend them before God's judgment. A mere piece of knowledge could remain shut up inside a person. But this inner sense, which brings a person before God's judgment, is like a watchman assigned to him — to observe and take note of all his secrets, so that nothing remains buried in darkness. Hence the old proverb: 'Conscience is a thousand witnesses.' For the same reason, Peter speaks of 'the answer of a good conscience toward God' as the ground of quiet assurance of mind — when, being persuaded of the grace of Christ, we stand before God without fear (1 Peter 3:21).

And the author of the letter to the Hebrews uses 'having no more consciousness of sin' to mean being delivered and acquitted, so that sin can no longer accuse us (Hebrews 10:2).

Therefore, just as works have regard for other people, conscience is directed toward God — so that a good conscience is nothing other than the inward purity of the heart. In this sense Paul writes that love springs from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5). Afterward in the same passage he shows how conscience differs from understanding, saying that some had made shipwreck of their faith because they had abandoned a good conscience — by which he means a living, sincere desire to worship God and a genuine striving to live in a holy and godly way. Sometimes conscience does extend to our dealings with other people, as when Paul in Luke declares that he always endeavored to keep a blameless conscience before God and before people (Acts 24:16). He said this because the fruits of a good conscience flow out and reach even to others. But strictly speaking, conscience has regard only to God, as I have said. From this it follows that the law is said to bind the conscience — it binds the person simply and absolutely, without respect to other people or consideration of them. For example: God commands not only that the mind be kept chaste and pure from all lust, but He also forbids every form of filthy speech and outward indecency whatever it may be. My conscience is bound to keep this law even if there were no other person alive in the world. So the person who behaves without self-control does not only sin by setting a bad example for others — he has his conscience bound in guilt before God. In things that are indifferent, there is a different consideration. We ought to abstain from them if they cause offense to others, but the conscience re-

mains free. So Paul speaks of meat offered to idols (1 Corinthians 10:28): 'If anyone tells you that this has been offered in sacrifice, do not eat it — for the sake of conscience.' For conscience, I say — not yours but the other person's. A faithful person would sin if, having been warned, he still ate such meat. But even though he must abstain for the sake of his brother, as God prescribes, he still retains his freedom of conscience. We see then how this law, which binds the outward action, leaves the conscience free.

THE .XX. CHAPTER. ¶ OF PRAYER,
WHICH IS THE CHIEFE EXERCISE OF
FAITH, AND WHEREBY WE DAYLY RE-
CEIUE THE BENEFITES OF GOD.



From everything discussed so far, we clearly perceive how needy and empty of all good human beings are and how they lack every resource of salvation. Therefore if a person seeks remedies for his need, he must go outside of himself and find them elsewhere. What follows is that the Lord freely and generously gives Himself to us in His Christ — in whom, in place of our misery, He offers us all blessedness; in place of our poverty, all riches; in whom He opens to us the heavenly treasures. Our whole faith is to look upon His beloved Son, our whole expectation to hang on Him, our whole hope to be fixed and resting in Him. This is truly the secret and hidden wisdom that cannot be extracted by logical argument — but those whose eyes God has opened learn it, because they see light in His light. But since we are taught by faith to recognize that whatever we need, whatever we lack, is found in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ — in whom the Lord willed the entire fullness of His abundance to rest, so that from Him we might all draw as from a most plentiful fountain — it remains that

we seek in Him and with prayers ask of Him what we have learned to be in Him. Otherwise, to know God as Lord and giver of all good things — which invites us to pray to Him — and yet not to go to Him and pray, would profit us no more than if a person were shown a treasure buried in the ground and then walked away without digging it up. Therefore the apostle, to show that true faith cannot be idle from calling upon God, has established this order: that just as faith springs from the Gospel, so through faith our hearts are formed to call upon the name of God. This is the same thing he had said just before — that the Spirit of adoption, who seals the testimony of the Gospel in our hearts, lifts our spirits so that they dare to bring their desires before God, stir up unutterable groans, and cry out with confidence, 'Abba, Father.' This final point, which was mentioned only briefly and in passing before, now deserves fuller treatment.

The benefit we gain from prayer is this: we obtain the riches that are stored up for us with the heavenly Father. For there is a certain communion between people and God, in which they enter the sanctuary of heaven and in His very presence appeal to Him concerning His promises — so that what they believed Him to declare in word may not prove empty, but may when need requires be found true in experience. Therefore we see that nothing is set before us to be expected from the Lord that we are not also commanded to seek through prayer — so true it is that prayer digs up the treasures that faith has seen revealed to it by the Lord's Gospel. How necessary and in how many ways profitable this exercise of prayer is cannot be fully expressed in words. Without question it is not without reason that the heavenly Father testifies that the only stronghold of salvation is in calling upon His name — by which we

draw to ourselves the presence of His providence, through which He watches over our affairs; the presence of His power, through which He sustains us when we are weak and nearly faint; and the presence of His goodness, through which He receives us into favor when we are miserably burdened with sins. In short, through prayer we call Him to give Himself fully present to us. From this grows a remarkable rest and quietness of conscience. For when we have laid before the Lord the need that was pressing us down, we rest greatly — if for no other reason than that none of our troubles is hidden from Him, who we are persuaded is both most well-disposed toward us and most able to provide well for us.

But someone may say: does God not already know, without anyone telling Him, both where we are distressed and what is good for us? Would it not seem somewhat superfluous for Him to be troubled with our prayers — as if He were asleep or looking the other way until we awakened Him with our voice? But those who reason this way miss the point of why the Lord instructed His people to pray. He ordained it not so much for His own sake as for ours. He does will, as is right, that what is due to Him be rendered — that His people acknowledge everything they need or find useful to come from Him, and express this in their requests to Him. But the profit of this act of worship also comes back to us. The more boldly the holy fathers spoke of God's benefits, both to themselves and to others, the more sharply they were moved to pray. The example of Elijah alone is sufficient. Being assured of God's purpose, he had promised rain to Ahab without hesitation — and yet he prayed earnestly, face to the ground, and sent his servant seven times to look for clouds. He did this not because he doubted God's word, but because he knew it was his duty — lest his faith grow

drowsy and sluggish — to commit his desires to God. Therefore, although when we lie senseless and dull — unable even to perceive our own miseries — He watches and is alert for us, and sometimes helps us even without being asked, it is still greatly fitting that He be continually called upon by us. In this way our hearts are kindled with earnest and fervent desire to seek, love, and worship Him, as we learn to run to Him as our anchor in every necessity. Again, that no desire or wish may enter our minds of which we would be ashamed to make Him a witness — as we learn to lay our desires before Him and pour out our whole heart before His eyes. Then, that we may be shaped to receive all His benefits with true gratitude of heart and outward thanksgiving — our prayer reminding us that they come to us from His hand. Moreover, that when we have received what we desired, being persuaded that He answered our prayer, we may thereby be carried all the more fervently to think on His kindness — and embrace with greater joy those things we know were obtained by prayer. Finally, that this very practice and experience may assure our minds of His providence, in proportion to our weakness — when we understand that He not only promises never to fail us and graciously opens to us in every moment of need the door of prayer, but also always has His hand stretched out to help His own and does not feed them with empty words but defends them with real help. For these reasons, the most kind Father — though He never sleeps or grows sluggish — often appears to sleep and be idle, in order to exercise us, who are otherwise slow and sluggish to come to Him, to ask of Him, to seek Him — to our own great benefit. Therefore those who babble that God's providence — which governs all things for their preservation — is vainly burdened by our prayers do so very foolishly. The Lord, on the

contrary, testifies in no uncertain terms that He is near to all who call upon His name in truth. Of the same sort is what others say — that it is superfluous to ask for things the Lord is already ready to give. For even those very things that flow to us from His own free generosity, He wills that we acknowledge as granted in answer to our prayers. This is what the notable verse from the Psalms testifies — and many similar verses agree: 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears toward their prayers.' This saying sets out God's providence, bent of its own accord to provide for the safety of the godly — and yet it does not skip over the exercise of faith, by which sluggishness is driven from our minds. God's eyes therefore watch to help the blind in their need — and yet He also wills to hear our groaning on our behalf, to show all the more fully His love toward us. Both are therefore true: that the guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers — and yet that He sits still, as if He had forgotten us, whenever He sees us dull and silent.

To pray rightly, let the first rule be this: that we be formed in mind and heart to the disposition that fits those who are entering into conversation with God. We will reach this as far as the mind is concerned when, freed from fleshly cares and thoughts that might pull it away from the sincere and pure beholding of God, the mind bends itself fully to prayer — and as much as possible is lifted up and carried above itself. I do not require a mind so undisturbed that it feels no concern at all. On the contrary, the earnestness of prayer must be kindled in us by deep concern — as we see in the holy servants of God, who at times expressed great anguish and even greater urgency when they poured out a lamenting voice before the Lord from the deepest depths, from the very midst of the jaws of death. What I am saying is that all foreign and unrelated

cares must be driven away — cares by which the mind, wandering in every direction, is pulled out of heaven and pressed down to the earth. More specifically, the mind must be lifted above itself, so that it brings nothing before God's sight that our blind and foolish reason is accustomed to imagine — and does not confine itself within the boundaries of its own vanity, but rises to a purity worthy of God.

Both of these things deserve special notice: that whoever prepares for prayer should apply all his senses and effort to it and not be distracted by wandering thoughts as people commonly are — for nothing is more contrary to the reverence owed to God than such carelessness, which betrays an untamed and fearless spirit. In this we must labor all the more earnestly the more difficult we find it. No one can be so intent on prayer that he does not feel many stray thoughts creeping in — either to break off the prayer or to bend and deflect its course. Here let us call to mind how deeply unworthy it is: when God receives us into familiar conversation with Him, to abuse His great gentleness by mixing holy and profane things together, so that reverence for Him does not hold our minds fixed on Him. Instead, as though speaking with some ordinary person, we abandon Him mid-prayer and leap here and there in our thoughts. Let us therefore know that none rightly and well prepare themselves for prayer except those whom the majesty of God pierces — so that they come to prayer unencumbered by earthly cares and desires. This is what the ceremony of lifting up the hands signifies: that people should remember they are far distant from God unless they raise their senses upward. As it is said in the Psalms: 'To You I have lifted up my soul.' And Scripture often uses the expression 'to lift up prayer' — meaning that those who

desire to be heard by God must not remain sitting in their own dregs. Let this be the sum: the more generously God deals with us, gently inviting us to unload our cares into His bosom, the more inexcusable we are if His excellent and incomparable kindness does not outweigh everything else for us and draw us to Himself — so that we apply ourselves earnestly and fully to prayer. This cannot happen unless our mind wrestles vigorously against the hindrances and rises above them. The second rule we have set forth is that we ask only what God permits. For though He bids us pour out our hearts, He does not therefore give free rein to all our foolish and wayward desires — and when He promises to do according to the will of the godly, He does not go so far in accommodating them as to submit Himself to their whims. In both these respects, people commonly sin greatly. Not only do most people shamelessly and irreverently speak to God about their follies, brazen enough to present to His throne whatever they have dreamed up — but such great foolishness or senseless dullness possesses them that they dare thrust into God's hearing even their most filthy desires, which they would be deeply ashamed to share with other people. Some ungodly men have mocked and even condemned this audacity — yet the vice itself has always persisted. Hence it came about that ambitious men chose Jupiter as their patron; greedy men, Mercury; those hungry for knowledge, Apollo and Minerva; soldiers, Mars; and the lustful, Venus. Just as today — as I have already touched on — people in prayer give more license to their unlawful desires than they would even in casual conversation with their equals. But God does not allow His gentleness to be mocked in this way. Asserting His own right, He subjects our prayers to His authority and holds them in check. We must therefore hold

fast this word of John: 'This is the confidence that we have toward Him: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.' But since our abilities fall far short of such perfection, we must seek help. Just as we ought to direct the sight of our mind toward God, so the affection of the heart ought also to follow to the same end. But both fall far short — indeed, they faint and fail, or are carried in the opposite direction. Therefore God, to help this weakness, gives us the Spirit as our instructor in prayer — to teach us what is right and to govern our desires. For because we do not know what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit comes to our aid and intercedes for us with unutterable groanings — not that He literally prays or groans, but that He stirs up in us confidence, desires, and sighs that the strength of nature could never produce on its own. Paul rightly calls them 'unutterable groanings' — those which the faithful send forth by the Spirit's guidance — for those truly exercised in prayer know from experience that they are so caught in the confusion of their blind concerns that they can barely find what to say. Indeed, in trying to utter even stumbling words, they find themselves stuck and tangled. From this it follows that the ability to pray rightly is a singular gift. This is not said to encourage us to favor our own laziness — handing over the work of prayer entirely to the Spirit of God while we lie passive in that carelessness to which we are already too much inclined. There are wicked sayings in circulation that we should wait idle for the Spirit to move our minds, which are occupied with other things. On the contrary, we should loathe our own sloth and sluggishness and earnestly seek the Spirit's help. And when Paul bids us to pray in the Spirit, he does not cease to urge us to watchfulness — meaning that the

Spirit's impulse so works to shape our prayers that it in no way hinders or weakens our own effort. For in this matter God will prove how powerfully faith moves our hearts.

Let there also be this law: that in prayer we always feel our own need, and that, earnestly thinking about how much we need the things we ask for, we join to our prayer an earnest — indeed fervent — desire to obtain them. For many go through prayers carelessly as a matter of form, reciting a set pattern of words, as if rendering a prescribed speech to God. And though they acknowledge prayer to be a necessary remedy for their ills — since to be without the help of God they seek would be their ruin — it is evident they treat it as a mere custom, since their hearts are cold and they do not weigh what they are asking for. A general and vague sense of their need does bring them to prayer, but it does not move them as those urgently seeking relief for a present necessity. Now what do we think is more hateful or detestable to God than this play-acting — when a person asks forgiveness of sins while either not considering himself a sinner, or not giving any thought to the fact that he is one? In this case God Himself is plainly mocked. But as I have said, humanity is so full of such perversity that people often ask God for things they are quite sure will come to them from somewhere else even without His generosity — or which they already have. The fault of some others seems lighter, yet is still intolerable: those who have only taken on the principle that they must offer God prayers, and then mumble through them without any engagement of the mind. But the godly must above all take care never to come before God to ask anything unless they are both burning with earnest desire of heart and genuinely longing to receive it from Him. Indeed, even in those things we ask purely for God's glory —

in which at first glance we seem to have no personal stake — these ought to be asked with no less fervor and vehemence of desire. For when we pray that His name be hallowed, we must — if I may say so — hungrily and thirstily long for that hallowing.

If someone objects that we are not always driven by equal urgency to pray, I grant this. And James usefully teaches us this distinction: 'Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises.' So even ordinary experience teaches us that because we are too sluggish, God — as the situation calls for — prods us more sharply to pray earnestly. David calls this 'the right time' — because, as he teaches in many other places, the harder troubles, difficulties, fears, and other kinds of trials press upon us, the more freely our access to God is opened, as if He were calling us to Himself. But equally true is Paul's word that we must pray at all times. For however well things go according to our heart's desire and occasions for rejoicing surround us on every side, there is not a minute in which our need does not call us to prayer. If a person has abundance of wine and grain, yet since he cannot enjoy a single bite of bread without the continued grace of God, full cellars and barns are no reason to stop asking for daily bread. Now if we consider how many dangers hang over us at every moment, that very awareness will teach us that no time is free from prayer. But we can see this even more clearly in spiritual matters. For when will our many known sins allow us to sit at ease without humbly seeking pardon for both the guilt and its consequences? When do temptations grant us such a truce that we have no need to run for help? Moreover, the desire for the kingdom and glory of God ought to draw us so continuously — not just occasionally — that it should always be the right time. Therefore it is not

without reason that we are so often commanded to pray continually. I am not yet speaking of perseverance in prayer, which will be mentioned later. What I mean is that when Scripture warns us to pray without ceasing, it exposes our laziness — because we do not see how necessary this care and diligence is for us. By this rule all hypocrisy and scheming deception in prayer is excluded — indeed, driven far away. God promises that He will be near to all who call upon Him in truth, and He declares that those who seek Him with their whole heart will find Him. But those who take pleasure in their own filthiness do not reach that point. Therefore right prayer requires repentance. This is why Scripture commonly says that God does not hear wicked people and that their prayers are accursed, as are their sacrifices — for it is fitting that those who lock up their own hearts should find God's ears closed to them, and that those who harden themselves against God should not find Him easily approached. In Isaiah He threatens this way: 'When you multiply your prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood.' And in Jeremiah: 'They cried out, but there was none to save; even to the Lord, but He did not answer them' — because He treats it as a great dishonor when wicked people boast of His covenant while throughout their lives defiling His holy name. So in Isaiah He complains that when the Jews draw near to Him with their lips, their hearts are far from Him. He speaks not of prayers alone, but declares that He despises all pretense in every part of worship. To this point belongs James's word: 'You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.' It is true, as we will show again shortly, that the prayers of the godly do not rest on their own worthiness — yet John's warning is not superfluous: 'Whatever we ask

we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments.' An evil conscience shuts the gate against us. From this it follows that none pray rightly or are heard except the pure worshipers of God. Therefore whoever prepares to pray, let him be grieved over his own sins — and, which cannot be done without repentance, let him take on the posture and mind of a beggar.

Here let the third rule be added: whoever comes before God in prayer must forsake all thought of his own glory, put away all sense of worthiness, and completely abandon all trust in himself — giving all glory wholly to God as he approaches. For if we take even the smallest credit to ourselves, we will fall away from His presence through our own pride. Of this humility that casts down all self-exaltation, we have frequent examples among the servants of God. And the holier each one is, the more he is brought low when he comes into the Lord's presence. So Daniel, whom the Lord Himself praised with the highest commendation, said: 'We are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.' And he does not merely include himself with the people by a rhetorical figure, as people sometimes do — rather, he confesses his personal guilt and humbly flees to the sanctuary of forgiveness, as he explicitly says: 'While I was confessing my sin and the sin of my people.' David also expresses this humility by his own example when he says: 'Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous.' Isaiah prays in this manner: 'Behold, You were angry, for we sinned. We continued in them a long time; and shall we be saved? For all of us

have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment. And all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever. Look, all of us who are Your people.' See how they rest on no confidence at all, but only on the fact that, thinking of themselves as God's people, they do not despair that He will care for them. Likewise Jeremiah: 'Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for Your name's sake.' And it is most truly and most godly written — by whoever it was, since this anonymous text is attributed to the prophet Baruch — 'The soul that is weary and desolate, and the spirit that is troubled and sad, and the eyes that fail, and the hungry soul, gives glory to You, O Lord God. Not the righteousnesses of our fathers do we pour before You, O our God, to take mercy; but because You have sent out Your wrath upon us: for we have sinned before You.'

The beginning and foundation of praying rightly is the seeking of pardon, accompanied by humble and sincere confession of fault. For not even the holiest person can expect to receive anything from God until he is freely reconciled to Him — nor is it possible for God to be favorable to any except those whom He pardons. It is no surprise therefore that the faithful use this key to open the door of prayer for themselves. We learn this from many places in the Psalms. David, when asking for something else, says: 'Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; remember me

according to Your lovingkindness, for Your goodness' sake, O Lord.' And again: 'Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.' Here we also see that it is not enough to call ourselves to account each day for our recent sins, unless we also remember those that may seem long forgotten. The same prophet in another place, having confessed one serious offense, uses that as an occasion to go back even to the womb in which he contracted his corruption — not to make his guilt seem less by appealing to corrupt nature, but by gathering up the sins of his whole life. The more rigorously he condemns himself, the more readily he finds God open to approach. But even where the holy ones do not explicitly request forgiveness of sins, if we carefully examine the prayers Scripture records, we will easily find that they gathered the courage to pray from God's mercy alone — and always began by appealing Him. For when any person honestly examines his own conscience, so far is he from boldly opening his concerns to God that he trembles at every approach to Him — except where he rests on trust in mercy and pardon. There is also a specific kind of confession where, when people ask for relief from suffering, they also pray to have their sins forgiven — since it would be absurd to want the effect removed while the cause remains. For we must make sure God is favorable to us before He shows that favor through outward signs. He Himself will keep this order — and it would profit us little for Him to be kind to us outwardly unless our conscience, sensing that He is appeased, truly found Him approachable. Christ also teaches us this by His response. When He had decided to heal the man paralyzed, He said: 'Your sins are forgiven you' — lifting our minds thereby to what is most to be desired: that God first receive us into His favor, and then show the fruit of rec-

conciliation by helping us. But beyond the specific confession of present guilt by which the faithful seek pardon for particular offenses and their consequences, the general foundation that secures favor for prayers must never be omitted. Unless prayers rest on the free mercy of God, they will obtain nothing from Him. To this belongs John's word: 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' For this reason, in the time of the law, prayers had to be consecrated with the blood of atonement to be acceptable — so that the people would be reminded of their unworthiness of so great a privilege, until, cleansed from their defilements, they might draw confidence to pray from God's mercy alone.

But when the holy ones sometimes seem to appeal to their own righteousness in order to move God — as when David says: 'Preserve my soul, for I am godly'; or Hezekiah: 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight' — by such expressions they mean nothing other than to testify through their very regeneration that they are the servants and children of God, to whom He Himself declares He will be merciful. He teaches through the prophet, as we have already seen, that His eyes are upon the righteous and His ears toward their prayers. And through the apostle: that we will receive whatever we ask if we keep His commandments. In these sayings He does not weigh prayer by the worthiness of works — His purpose is rather to establish the confidence of those whose conscience assures them of a genuine uprightness and sincerity, which all the faithful ought to have. This is taken from the very truth of God, as the man born blind whose sight was restored says in John: God does not hear sinners — if we

understand 'sinners' in the common scriptural sense, meaning those who without any desire for righteousness rest completely content in their sins. For no heart can ever break out in genuine calling upon God that is not also striving after godliness. Therefore the prayers of the holy ones in which they mention their own purity or innocence are in agreement with such promises — they are claiming what may rightly be looked for by all God's servants. Moreover, this kind of prayer is commonly used when they compare themselves before the Lord with their enemies, from whose unjust treatment they seek deliverance by His hand. In such a comparison it is no surprise that they present their own righteousness and integrity to move Him all the more by the justice of their cause. We do not therefore take from the godly heart the right to bring the purity of his conscience before the Lord, in order to strengthen himself in the promises by which the Lord comforts and upholds His true worshipers — but our point is that the confidence of obtaining must rest on God's mercy alone, setting aside all thought of personal deserving.

The fourth rule is that, though cast down and humbled by true self-abasement, we should still approach prayer with a sure hope of receiving. These may seem contrary — joining to the awareness of God's just condemnation a confident expectation of His favor — and yet they agree perfectly if it is God's goodness alone that lifts us up when we are crushed by our own failures. Just as we taught earlier that repentance and faith are inseparably linked — the one bringing fear, the other bringing comfort — so in prayer the two must come together. David expresses this agreement in few words: 'But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house; at Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You.' Under

'the abundance of God's goodness' he includes faith, while not excluding fear — for not only does His majesty inspire reverence but our own unworthiness holds us back from all pride and presumption. But I do not mean a confidence that soothes the mind into a calm, untroubled ease free from all anxiety. That kind of peaceful rest belongs to those who have everything they want, are untouched by any care, stirred by no desire, swollen with no fear. What spurs the holy ones effectively to call upon God is being pressed hard by their own need, shaken by great unrest, nearly overwhelmed in themselves — until faith comes in time to help. For in such distress, God's goodness shines upon them so that even while they groan under the weight of present troubles, and suffer pain and anxiety from the fear of greater ones to come, they are so upheld by it that they find relief and comfort in bearing what must be borne — and hope for escape and deliverance. Therefore the prayer of a godly person must arise from both of these feelings and express them both: to groan over present troubles and to be anxiously afraid of new ones, and yet at the same time to flee to God, in no doubt that He is ready to stretch out His helping hand. For God is powerfully provoked to anger by our distrust if we ask for benefits we do not expect to receive. Therefore nothing is more in keeping with the nature of prayer than that it be ruled by this law: not to break out rashly but to follow faith as its guide. To this principle Christ calls us with His words: 'Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.' He confirms the same in another place: 'And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.' With this agrees James's word: 'But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and

without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting.' By setting doubting in opposition to faith, he most fittingly expresses faith's nature. Equally worth noting is his addition that those who call upon God in wavering doubt — unable to determine in their hearts whether they will be heard — obtain nothing. He compares such people to waves tossed and driven about by the wind. For this reason he calls a right prayer in another place 'the prayer of faith.' Again, when God so often declares that He will give to each according to his faith, He signifies that nothing is obtained without faith. In the end, it is faith that obtains whatever is granted through prayer. This is the meaning of Paul's notable statement, which careless people overlook: 'How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.' For in tracing the origin of prayer step by step back to faith, he plainly affirms that God cannot be sincerely called upon by any except those to whom His mercy and kindness have been made known and made familiar through the preaching of the Gospel.

Our adversaries do not think about this necessity. So when we tell the faithful to hold with assured confidence that God is favorable to them and bears them goodwill, they consider us to be saying something deeply absurd. But if they had any real practice of true prayer, they would understand that God cannot be rightly called upon without a firm sense of His goodwill. Since no one can truly grasp the power of faith except through personal experience of it in the heart, what can be gained by arguing with those who openly show they have never had anything more than an empty

idea of it? For how powerful and how necessary the assurance we require actually is, is learned above all through the practice of prayer. Anyone who does not see this reveals that his conscience is very dull. Let us then, leaving aside these blind people, hold firmly to Paul's statement that God cannot be called upon by any other than those who know His mercy through the Gospel and are firmly persuaded that it is ready for them. For what kind of prayer would this be: 'O Lord, I am truly uncertain whether You will hear me — but because I am troubled and anxious, I flee to You that You may help me if I am worthy'? This was not the manner of the holy ones whose prayers we read in Scripture. Nor has the Holy Spirit taught us this way — through the apostle who bids us to draw near to the heavenly throne with confidence, so that we may obtain grace (Hebrews 4:16); and through another passage teaching that in Christ we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him (Ephesians 3:12). We must therefore hold with both hands to this assurance of receiving what we ask — since the Lord Himself commands it with His own voice and all the holy ones demonstrate it by their example — if we are to pray with any profit. For only the prayer that springs from this presumption of faith — if I may call it that — and is grounded on a fearless certainty pleases God. The apostle could have been content with the bare word 'faith,' but he added not only 'confidence' but also 'boldness and free access' — by this mark distinguishing us from unbelievers, who also pray to God in their way, but aimlessly. For this reason the whole church prays in the psalm: 'Let Your lovingkindness, O Lord, be upon us, according as we have hoped in You' (Psalm 33:22). The prophet expresses the same condition in another place: 'In the day when I cry out, this I know — that God is for me.'

And again: 'In the morning I will direct my prayer to You and eagerly watch.' From these words we gather that prayers cast into the air are in vain unless hope is added, from which as from a watch-tower we may quietly wait for the Lord. This agrees with the order of Paul's exhortation. Before he urges the faithful to pray in the Spirit at all times with watchfulness and diligence, he first bids them take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:16-18). Now let readers recall what I said before: that faith is not overthrown when it is joined with an acknowledgment of our misery, need, and corruption. For however heavily the faithful feel burdened and pressed by their own sins — even if they are not only utterly lacking anything that might win God's favor but also loaded with many offenses that could rightly make them dread Him — they still do not cease to present themselves. This sense of their condition does not frighten them away from Him, since there is no other way to come to Him. For prayer was not ordained as a way to advance ourselves proudly before God or to think highly of anything of our own. Rather, it was ordained that we might, confessing our guilt, pour out our miseries to Him as children openly share their troubles with their parents. Indeed, the immeasurable weight of our sins ought to serve as a constant spur driving us to prayer. The prophet teaches us this by his own example: 'Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to You I cry all day long. Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You' (Psalm 41:4). I acknowledge that in such situations there would be deadly anguish without God's help — but the most kind Father, in His incomparable tenderness, has provided a timely remedy. By it He calms every trouble, soothes

every anxiety, wipes away every fear, gently draws us to Himself, and removes every doubt and obstacle — making the way to Him easy.

First, when He commands us to pray, He is by that very commandment accusing us of wicked stubbornness if we refuse to obey. Nothing could be stated more clearly than the psalm: Call upon Me in the day of trouble. But since Scripture commends no duty of godliness more often than prayer, I do not need to spend more time on this point. Ask, says our Master, and you shall receive. Knock, and it shall be opened to you. Yet here a promise is also joined with the command, as is necessary. For though everyone agrees that the command should be obeyed, most people would run from God when He calls unless He promised to listen willingly -- indeed, unless He offered Himself to them. With these two things established, it is certain that whoever delays and does not come straight to God is not only rebellious and disobedient but also guilty of unbelief, because they distrust His promises. This deserves special attention because hypocrites, under the appearance of humility and modesty, just as proudly despise the command of God as they distrust His gracious invitation. They even rob Him of the chief part of His worship. For after He rejected sacrifices, in which all holiness seemed to consist at the time, He declared that this is what He values above everything else: to be called upon in the day of need. Therefore, when He requires what is rightfully His and encourages us to obey cheerfully, no excuse for doubt can justify holding back. Every testimony in Scripture that commands us to call upon God is like a banner raised before our eyes to give us confidence. It would be rash to rush into God's presence unless He went ahead of us by calling us. So He opens the way with His own

voice, saying: I will say to them, You are My people, and they shall say to Me, You are our God. We see how He goes before His worshipers and wants them to follow Him. Therefore we should not fear that this is anything other than the sweetest invitation He could give. Let this remarkable title of God especially come to mind, for if we rest on it, we will easily overcome all obstacles. You, God, who hear prayer -- to You shall all flesh come. For what is more appealing or more inviting than for God to wear this title, which assures us that nothing is more natural to Him than to grant the desires of humble seekers? From this the prophet concludes that the gate stands open not just to a few but to all people, since he addresses everyone with these words: Call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. Following this pattern, David claims for himself that a promise was given to him so he could obtain what he asks: You, Lord, have revealed this to the ear of Your servant. Therefore Your servant has found the courage to pray. From this we conclude that he would have been afraid, except that the promise had encouraged him. Elsewhere he arms himself with this general teaching: He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him. We may also notice in the Psalms that David sometimes breaks off his prayer to reflect on God's power, sometimes on His goodness, and sometimes on the faithfulness of His promises. It might seem that by inserting these reflections David produced disjointed prayers. But believers know from practice and experience that their passion fades unless they add fresh fuel to it. Therefore meditating on both the nature of God and His word during prayer is not unnecessary. So following David's example, let us not hesitate to weave in such thoughts as can refresh our faltering hearts with new and living strength.

It is astonishing that we are either barely moved or hardly moved at all by such sweet promises — that a great part of humanity, wandering in circles, would rather leave these fountains of living water and dig for themselves dry pits, than embrace the generosity God freely offers. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower,' says Solomon; 'the righteous runs into it and is safe.' And Joel, after prophesying of the terrible destruction that was coming, added this notable word: 'And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' — a word we know applies especially to the course of the Gospel. Barely one in a hundred is moved to go out to meet God. God Himself cries through Isaiah: 'You will call upon Me, and I will hear you; indeed before you call, I will answer.' And in another place He gives this same privilege to the whole church as belonging to all the members of Christ: 'He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble — I will rescue him.' Yet, as I have already said, it is not my aim to list every passage but to select the chief ones, by which we may taste how kindly God draws us to Himself — and by how strong a bond our ingratitude is held, when, with such sharp motivations, our laziness still holds us back. Therefore let these words always sound in our ears: 'The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth' — along with those passages we cited from Isaiah and Joel, in which God declares that He pays close attention to prayers, and indeed is delighted by them as with a sweet-smelling sacrifice, when we cast our cares upon Him. This singular benefit we receive from God's promises: that we make our prayers not in doubt and fear, but trusting in His word — whose majesty would otherwise overwhelm us — we dare to call on Him by the name of Father, since He is pleased to put that most pre-

cious name in our mouths. It remains that we, being drawn by such invitations, should know that we have thereby more than enough ground to obtain our prayers — since our prayers rest on no merit of our own, but all their worthiness and hope of receiving are grounded upon and dependent on God's promises. They need no other support and need look nowhere else. We must therefore settle in our minds: though we do not surpass in holiness what is praised in the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, yet because the commandment of prayer is common to us and faith is also common, if we rest upon God's word, we are companions with them in this right. For God — as we have shown — by promising to be gentle and merciful to all, gives everyone, even the most miserable, ground for hope that they will obtain what they ask. Therefore the general declarations must be noticed, from which no one — from the greatest to the least — is excluded. There must simply be present a pure heart, self-reproach, humility, and faith. Let there be no unholy hypocrisy that deceitfully abuses the name of God in prayer. The most kind Father will not turn away those whom He not only invites to come to Him but draws by every possible means. Hence the manner of prayer from David that I quoted above: 'Look, You have promised, O Lord, to Your servant; because of this, Your servant has today found courage in his heart to make this prayer before You. Now therefore, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are truth; You have promised this good thing to Your servant; now begin and do it.' And in another place: 'Deal with Your servant according to Your lovingkindness.' And all the Israelites together, as often as they arm themselves with the remembrance of the covenant, make clear enough that we should pray without fear, since the Lord appoints it so. In this they fol-

lowed the example of the fathers — especially Jacob, who, after confessing that he was unworthy of the many mercies he had received from God, yet said he was encouraged to ask for greater things because God had promised to give them. But whatever excuses unbelievers make, when they do not flee to God as often as necessity presses them, when they do not seek Him or crave His help, they rob Him of His due honor just as much as if they were making for themselves new gods and idols — for by this they deny that He is the source of all good things for them. On the other side, there is nothing more powerful to deliver the godly from all doubt than to be armed with this thought: no obstacle ought to hold them back when they are obeying the commandment of God, who declares that nothing pleases Him more than obedience. Here again what I said earlier appears more clearly: that a bold spirit in prayer is perfectly consistent with fear, reverence, and deep concern — and that it is no contradiction to say that God lifts up the one who is cast down. In this way these forms of speech that seem to be in contradiction actually agree well together. Jeremiah and Daniel say they cast their prayers down before God. And again Jeremiah says: 'Let our petition fall before the Lord, that He may have compassion on the remnant of His people.' On the other hand, the faithful are frequently said to lift up prayer. So Hezekiah speaks, asking the prophet to intercede for him. And David desires that his prayer might rise like incense. For although, being persuaded of the fatherly love of God, they cheerfully commit themselves to His faithful care and do not hesitate to seek the help He freely promises — yet it is not an idle, shameless carelessness that

lifts them up. Rather, they ascend step by step through the promises, and yet remain humble suppliants in the depths of self-abasement.

More than one objection is raised here. For Scripture reports that the Lord granted certain requests that sprang from a mind that was neither calm nor properly formed. There was good reason: Jotham had called down destruction on the inhabitants of Shechem, and the destruction came. God seemed to kindle with the fervor of that angry curse and to approve its violent and ill-tempered passion. The same kind of heat drove Samson when he said: 'O Lord God, please strengthen me just this time, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.' For though some measure of righteous zeal was mixed into it, a hot and therefore faulty craving for vengeance was the ruling force. God granted it. From this it seems to follow that even prayers not shaped according to the rule prescribed by God's word can obtain their result. My first answer is that a general law is not abolished by individual examples. Beyond that, there are cases where special impulses were given to certain people, which meant a different standard applied to them than to ordinary people. For Christ's answer to His disciples must be kept in mind: when they rashly sought to imitate Elijah's example, He said they did not know what spirit they were acting from. But we must go further still and say that God does not always approve the prayers He grants. Rather, what such examples serve to illustrate — by making it plainly evident — is the teaching of Scripture: that He helps the miserable, hears the groaning of those who cry to Him when unjustly afflicted, and therefore carries out His judgments when the complaints of the poor rise up to Him, even if those praying are unworthy of any

benefit whatsoever. For how often has He — taking vengeance on the cruelties, robberies, violence, filthy lusts, and other wickedness of ungodly people; breaking their boldness and fury; overthrowing their tyrannical power — testified that He helps the wrongly oppressed, even those who were merely beating the air with prayers to some vague idea of a deity? And one psalm plainly teaches that prayers without faith — that do not pierce into heaven — are not without effect. For the psalmist gathers together prayers that necessity wrings from unbelievers no less than from the godly, through the sheer instinct of nature — and he shows by the outcome that God responds to them. Is it because He is thus testifying that they are pleasing to Him? No — but in order to display His mercy more fully by this circumstance: that even unbelievers are not denied in their prayers. And further, to stir His true worshipers all the more urgently to pray, when they see that even pagan lamenting sometimes meets with effect. Yet the faithful have no reason to depart from the rule laid upon them by God, or to envy unbelievers as though they had gained something great by having their desire granted. In the same way we said that the Lord was moved by Ahab's repentance — to show by that example how ready He is to be entreated by His elect when genuine repentance is brought to appease Him. Therefore in the psalm He rebukes the Israelites because, having proved by experience how readily He granted their prayers, they almost immediately returned to the stubbornness of their former ways. This also appears plainly in the book of Judges: as often as the people wept, even though their tears were insincere, they were delivered from their enemies. Just as the Lord causes His sun to rise on both the good and the evil, so He also does not despise the weeping of those whose cause is just

and whose misery is worthy of help. Yet He does not hear these people for salvation any more than He ministers food to those who despise His goodness. The question becomes harder with Abraham and Samuel. Abraham, warranted by no word from God, prayed for the Sodomites. Samuel prayed for Saul against a clear prohibition. And Jeremiah prayed that the city not be destroyed. Though their requests were denied, it seems harsh to say they lacked faith. But this answer should satisfy thoughtful readers: being taught by the general principles that God commands them to show mercy even to the unworthy, they were not altogether without faith — even though their judgment failed them in this particular case. Augustine writes wisely in one place: 'How is it that holy people, praying in faith, ask God for something contrary to what He has decreed? It is because they pray according to His will — not that hidden and unchangeable will, but the will He inspires in them, so that He may hear them in a different way.' He makes this distinction well. For by His incomprehensible counsel He so governs the outcome of events that the prayers of the holy ones — even when wrapped together with faith and error — do not go void. Yet this should carry no more weight as an example to follow than it excuses the holy ones themselves — whom I do not deny went beyond proper bounds. Therefore where no clear promise appears, we must ask of God with a condition attached. To this purpose serves David's saying: 'Watch over Your case as for the judgment You have commanded' — showing that he was assured by a special word of God to ask for a temporal benefit.

It is also important to note that the four rules of right prayer I have described are not required with such extreme strictness that God rejects prayers in which He does not find perfect faith, perfect

repentance, intense fervor, and perfectly ordered requests all together. We have said that though prayer is a familiar conversation between the godly and God, we must still maintain reverence and modesty — not giving free rein to every possible request, not desiring beyond what God permits, and lifting our minds upward to a pure and undefiled worship of Him, lest His majesty come to be taken lightly. No one has ever performed this with the purity it requires. For — to say nothing of ordinary people — how many of David's complaints savor of excess? Not because he intended to quarrel with God or find fault with His judgments, but because, fainting from weakness, he found no better comfort than to pour his sorrows into God's presence. Indeed, God bears with our child-like speech and pardons our ignorance whenever something escapes us carelessly — for without this tender forbearance, there would be no freedom to pray at all. But although David's intention was to submit himself fully to God's will, and he prayed with no less patience than desire to receive — still, troublous feelings arise within him, and sometimes boil out, that are very much at odds with the first rule we have set. We can see this especially in the conclusion of Psalm 39 — with what violent force of grief that holy man was swept away, so that he could no longer keep within proper bounds. 'Cease from me,' he says, 'that I may recover strength before I depart and am no more.' One would think that, like a desperate man, he desires nothing except that God's hand would lift and let him waste away in his miseries. He does not say it because he deliberately rushes into such extremity or — like the reprobate — would have God depart from him. He is only complaining that God's wrath is too heavy for him to bear. In such temptations, requests also arise that are not well formed according

to the rule of God's Word, and in which the holy ones do not sufficiently weigh what is lawful and fitting. Whatever prayers are stained by these faults deserve to be refused — yet if the holy ones regret it, correct themselves, and quickly come back to their senses, God pardons them. They also offend the second rule, since they are often compelled to wrestle with their own coldness, and their need and misery does not press them sharply enough to pray with earnestness. And often their minds slip away and wander into vanity. Therefore in this respect too there is need of pardon, lest our faint, imperfect, broken, and wandering prayers be denied. God has planted in human minds the natural sense that prayer is only complete when the mind is lifted upward. From this comes the ceremony of lifting up the hands, as I mentioned before — a practice observed in all ages and among all peoples, and still in use. But how many, when they lift their hands, find in their own conscience that they remain dull — because their heart stays rooted to the ground? As for the seeking of forgiveness of sins: though none of the faithful omit it, those truly exercised in prayer feel that they barely bring the tenth part of the sacrifice of which David speaks: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.' So there is always a double pardon to seek: first, because they know themselves guilty in conscience of many faults, but are not yet so moved by the sense of them that they loathe themselves as much as they ought; and second, so that those who have grown in repentance and the fear of God — being cast down with just sorrow for their offenses — may pray to escape the punishment of the Judge. Above all, the weakness or imperfection of faith corrupts the prayers of the faithful — unless God's tender mercy came to their aid. But it is no sur-

prise that God pardons this fault, since He Himself often disciplines His own through sharp trials as if deliberately quenching their faith. This is a most painful temptation, when the faithful are forced to cry: 'How long, O Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?' — as if their very prayers were making God more angry. So when Jeremiah says 'He has blocked my ways with blocks of stone; He has made my paths crooked,' there is no doubt he was shaken by a violent wave of anguish. Such examples are countless in Scripture, showing that the faith of the holy ones was often mixed and tossed with doubts, so that in believing and hoping they still betrayed some unfaithfulness. But because they do not reach the standard they should, they ought to strive all the more to mend their faults daily and draw closer to the perfect rule of prayer — and meanwhile to recognize how deeply they are drowned in evils, given that even in the very remedies they find new diseases. There is no prayer that the Lord does not have just cause to reject, unless He overlooks the spots with which all prayers are stained. I say this not to encourage the faithful to carelessly excuse themselves, but rather that in sharply reproving themselves they should work to overcome these obstacles. Even though Satan labors to block every path and keep them from praying, they should still press through — firmly persuaded that even if not free from all hindrances, their striving pleases God and their prayers are accepted by Him, provided they labor and bend themselves toward what they do not yet fully attain.

But since no one is worthy to present himself before God or come into His presence, the heavenly Father Himself — to deliver us from the shame and fear that would have crushed all our courage — has given to us His Son Jesus Christ our Lord to be our

advocate and Mediator with Him. Through His leading we may boldly come to God, trusting that with such an intercessor, nothing we ask in His name will be denied — since nothing can be denied to Him by the Father. To this must all we have taught about faith be referred. For just as the promise sets forth Christ to us as our Mediator, so our hope of receiving must rest on Him — or it loses the very benefit of prayer. For as soon as the terrible majesty of God comes to our minds, we cannot help but tremble, and the awareness of our own unworthiness drives us far away — until Christ steps between us and Him, changing the throne of dreadful glory into the throne of grace. As the apostle also teaches, we may therefore boldly draw near with full confidence to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. And as there is a law commanding us to call upon God, and a promise given that those who call upon Him will be heard, so we are specifically commanded to call upon Him in the name of Christ, and we have the promise that what we ask in His name we will receive. 'Until now,' He says, 'you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive.' 'In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf — for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me.' It is therefore clear beyond dispute that those who call upon God in any name other than Christ's stubbornly break His commandment, treat His will as nothing, and have no promise on which to base an expectation of receiving anything. For as Paul says, 'all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him Amen' — that is, confirmed and fulfilled.

The circumstance of the time is also to be carefully noted when Christ commands His disciples to flee to intercession with Him after He has gone up into heaven. 'In that day,' He says, 'you will ask

in My name.' It is certain that from the very beginning no one was heard in prayer except by means of the Mediator. For this reason the Lord had ordained in the law that the priest alone, entering the sanctuary, should bear on his shoulders the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and carry precious stones on his chest — while the people stood far off in the court and from there joined their prayers with the priest. Indeed, the sacrifice served to ensure that the prayers would be confirmed and effective. That shadowy ceremony of the law therefore taught that we are all shut out from the presence of God, and that we therefore need a Mediator who may appear in our name, bear us on His shoulders, hold us fast to His chest, so that we are heard in His person — and that through the sprinkling of blood our prayers are cleansed, which, as we have said, are never without some stain. And we see that the holy ones, when they desired to obtain anything, grounded their hope on sacrifices, knowing them to be the confirmations of all requests. 'May He remember all your offerings,' says David, 'and receive your burnt offering as acceptable.' From this it follows that God has from the beginning been moved to receive the prayers of the godly through the intercession of Christ. Why then does Christ appoint a new order when His disciples are to begin praying in His name? Because this grace, being now more glorious, deserves to be held in higher regard by us. For in this very sense He had said a little before: 'Until now you have asked nothing in My name — now ask.' Not that they understood nothing of the office of the Mediator — all Jews were instructed in those principles — but because they had not yet clearly known that Christ, by ascending into heaven, would be a more certain patron of the church than He had been before. Therefore comforting their grief at His departure with a

special benefit, He claims for Himself the office of advocate, and teaches that they had until then lacked the chief privilege — which would now be granted to them, so that, aided by His mediation, they could call upon God with greater freedom. As the apostle says, this new and living way has been dedicated in His blood. Our willfulness is therefore all the less excusable if we do not embrace with both arms — as the saying goes — so inestimable a benefit, which has been specially appointed for us.

Christ is the only way and the only entry by which we are permitted to come to God. Whoever turns away from this way and abandons this entry has no other path or entry to God — nothing remains for them at God's throne but wrath, judgment, and terror. The Father has appointed Christ as our head and guide. Anyone who departs from Him in any way is working to erase and mar the mark that God has placed upon Him. So Christ is appointed as the only Mediator, through whose intercession the Father is made favorable to us and ready to hear us. In the meantime, the saints do have their own intercessions, by which they commend one another's welfare to God — as the apostle mentions. But these intercessions depend entirely on that one single intercession and take nothing away from it. Just as they spring from the love with which we embrace one another as members of one body, so they are also directed toward the unity of the head. Since they are made in the name of Christ, what do they show except that no one can be helped by any prayer at all apart from the intercession of Christ? Just as Christ's intercession does not prevent us from being advocates for one another in prayer within the church, so this must remain certain: all the intercessions of the whole church must be directed to that one sole Mediator. We ought especially to be grateful

for this, because God — pardoning our unworthiness — not only permits each of us to pray for ourselves but also allows us to intercede for one another. For if God appoints members of His church as advocates who would rightly deserve to be rejected if they prayed only for themselves, what arrogance it would be to abuse this privilege in a way that darkens the honor of Christ!

It is pure nonsense when the Sophists claim that Christ is the Mediator of redemption while the faithful are mediators of intercession — as though Christ, having performed a temporary mediation, handed over to His servants an eternal mediatorship that will never end. How generously they treat Him, cutting away so small a portion of His honor! But Scripture says something far different, and a godly person should be content with Scripture's plain testimony and leave these deceivers behind. When John says that if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ — does he mean that Christ was once our patron in former times, and not rather that He assigns to Him an everlasting intercession? What do we say to Paul's statement that Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father and makes intercession for us? And when Paul in another place calls Him the only Mediator between God and men, does he not mean of prayers, of which he had just made mention? He had just said that intercession must be made for all people, and immediately adds as proof that there is one God and one Mediator for all people. Augustine expounds this in exactly the same way, saying: 'Christian people commend themselves to one another in prayer. But He for whom no one intercedes — who intercedes for all — He is the only and true Mediator.' Paul the apostle, though he was a leading member under the head, knew that he was still a member of the body of Christ, and knew that the great-

est and truest priest of the church had entered — not through a figure into the inner chambers of the veil, to a shadowy holy of holies — but in express and steadfast reality into the innermost places of heaven, to a holiness not shadowy but eternal. For this reason he commends himself to the prayers of the faithful. Paul does not make himself a mediator between the people and God, but asks that all members of the body of Christ would pray for one another — because the members care for each other, and if one member suffers, the others suffer with it. In this way the mutual prayers of all the members still traveling on earth ascend to the Head who has gone before into heaven, in whom there is appeasement for our sins. For if Paul were a mediator, the other apostles would also be mediators — and if there were many mediators, Paul's own argument would fall apart, where he said: 'There is one God, one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, in whom we also are one if we keep the unity of faith in the bond of peace.' And again in another place: 'But if you seek a Priest, He is above the heavens, where He makes intercession for you — who on earth died for you.' We do not imagine that He kneels before the Father and humbly pleads for us. Rather, as the apostle teaches, He so appears before the face of God that the power of His death serves as a perpetual intercession for us. Having entered the sanctuary of heaven, He alone — to the end of the ages — carries to God the prayers of the people who remain far off in the outer court.

Regarding the saints who have died in the flesh but live in Christ — if we offer any prayer to them, we must not imagine that they themselves have any other way of approaching God than Christ, who alone is the way, or that their prayers are acceptable to God in any other name. Therefore, since Scripture calls us back

from all things to Christ alone — since the heavenly Father's will is to gather all things together in Him — it is the height of foolishness, not to say madness, to seek an entry through the saints that leads us away from the One through whom even they themselves have no open entry. But who can deny that this has been the common practice in certain past ages, and that it is still practiced wherever Rome rules? The merits of the saints are constantly put forward to obtain God's favor, and for the most part God is prayed to in their names while Christ is passed over. Is this not, I ask you, transferring to the saints the very office of sole intercession that we have shown belongs to Christ alone? Furthermore, what angel or devil has ever revealed to anyone even one word of this intercession of the saints that these people invent? Scripture says nothing about it. What reason is there, then, for inventing it? Truly, when the human mind searches for helpers whose existence God's Word has never confirmed, it reveals its own distrust. If we probe the consciences of those who delight in the intercession of saints, we will find that it comes from no other source than a troubled worry — as though Christ were either too weak or too strict for the purpose. By this doubt they dishonor Christ, robbing Him of the title of sole Mediator — a title the Father gave Him as a singular prerogative that must not be transferred to anyone else. In doing so they also obscure the glory of His birth, make void His cross, and strip whatever He has done and suffered of its rightful praise — for all of it points to this end: that He truly is, and is recognized as, the only Mediator. At the same time they reject the goodness of God, who gave Himself to be their Father. He is not their Father unless they acknowledge Christ to be their Brother — which they effectively deny unless they believe He bears toward them a brotherly

affection, which could not be more kind or tender. Therefore Scripture offers only Him to us, sends us to Him, and keeps us in Him. As Ambrose says: 'He is our mouth, by which we speak to the Father; our eye, by which we see the Father; our right hand, by which we offer ourselves to the Father. Apart from His intercession, neither we nor all the saints have anything with God.' If they answer that the common prayers said in churches end with the conclusion, 'through Christ our Lord,' this is a feeble excuse. Christ's intercession is no less profaned when it is mixed with the prayers and merits of dead men than if it were left out entirely and only dead men were named. Moreover, in all their litanies, hymns, and hymn-prayers — where no honor is left ungiven to dead saints — Christ receives no mention at all.

Their foolish blindness went still further, giving us a clear picture of how superstition works — once it has shaken off restraint, it never stops going astray. After people began to look to the intercession of saints, each saint was gradually assigned a specific function — so that for different situations one or another saint would be called upon as intercessor. Then each person chose his own special patron saint into whose care he entrusted himself, as though into God's own protection. And not only were gods set up according to the number of cities — as the prophet once reproached Israel — but according to the number of individual people. Since the saints direct all their desires to God's will alone and rest in it, anyone who assigns them some other prayer than a prayer for the coming of God's kingdom is thinking foolishly, carnally, and slanderously about them. For the idea that each saint is more favorably inclined toward his own devotees is completely contrary to what the saints actually are. Eventually many people went so far as to

commit outright sacrilege, calling on the saints not as helpers but as the primary rulers of their salvation. This is where foolish people end up when they wander from their sure footing — which is the Word of God. I am not even speaking here of the more monstrous and gross forms of ungodliness, which — though abominable to God, angels, and people — they are neither ashamed of nor tired of. They fall prostrate before the image or picture of Barbara, Catherine, and others like them, and mumble the Lord's Prayer. The pastors show no care to heal or restrain this madness. Drawn by the scent of profit, they gladly approve of it. But even if they try to shift blame for so serious an offense, how will they defend this — that people pray to Loy or Medard to look down from heaven and help their servants? Or that the holy Virgin is asked to command her Son to do what they are requesting? The Council at Carthage once forbidden any direct prayer to the saints at the altar. It seems likely that when the godly men could not entirely suppress the force of this wicked custom, they at least added the restraint that public prayers should not be corrupted with the form, 'Saint Peter, pray for us.' But how much further has this devilish importunity gone — stopping at nothing to hand over to dead men what properly belongs to God and Christ alone?

Their attempts to ground the intercession of saints on Scripture's authority are worthless. They point out that Scripture often speaks of angels offering prayers, and even says that the prayers of the faithful are carried by angels into God's presence. But if they want to compare departed holy men to angels, they need to prove that those holy men are ministering spirits — ones commissioned to watch over our safety, charged to keep us in all our ways, to surround us, warn and counsel us, and watch over us.

All these things are assigned to angels, but not to departed saints. How wrongly they group deceased holy men with angels becomes clear from the many distinct roles by which Scripture differentiates between the two. No one may act as an advocate before an earthly judge unless he is officially admitted. So where do people get such audacity to thrust upon God patrons for whom Scripture nowhere assigns that office? It was God's will to appoint angels to watch over our safety. That is why they attend holy assemblies, and the church is a theater in which they marvel at God's diverse and many-sided wisdom. Whoever transfers to others what is peculiar to angels overturns and confounds the order God has established — an order that should be inviolable. With equal boldness they press forward in citing other testimony. God said to Jeremiah: 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not go out to this people.' Someone argues: could He have spoken thus of dead men unless He knew that they were interceding for the living? But I draw the opposite conclusion: since it is clear from this passage that neither Moses nor Samuel was actually interceding for the people of Israel, there was at that time no intercession of dead men at all. For if any saint could be counted on to care for the people's welfare, would it not be Moses — who surpassed all others in this role during his lifetime? Yet Moses was not interceding. If the argument is pressed by this subtle move — that the dead must intercede for the living because God spoke hypothetically about what would happen if they interceded — then I will argue even more plausibly: in the people's dire crisis, Moses did not intercede, even though God said 'if he were to intercede.' It follows that no one else intercedes either, since all others fall far short of the compassion, goodness, and fatherly care that charac-

terized Moses. By resorting to such quibbling they only wound themselves with the very weapon they thought was defending them. The plain reading of the sentence is that the Lord simply declares He will not spare the people's offenses — even if Moses or Samuel, whose prayers He had once so readily answered, were their patrons. This same sense is most clearly drawn from a parallel passage in Ezekiel. 'If these three men were in the city — Noah, Daniel, and Job — they would deliver only their own lives by their righteousness, not their sons or daughters,' says the Lord. Without doubt God means here: even if two of those men were to live again — for the third, Daniel, was then alive, and had in the first bloom of his youth shown an incomparable example of godliness — let us leave aside those whom Scripture plainly shows have finished their course. Therefore when Paul speaks of David, he does not teach that David helps his descendants through ongoing prayers, but only that he served his own generation.

They object again: are we then to strip the departed saints of all charitable prayer — they who throughout their whole lives breathed nothing but charity and mercy? I will not make a detailed investigation into what the saints do or think about in heaven. But it is not likely that they are carried back and forth by all kinds of particular requests from individual people. Rather, they rest in a settled and unchanging longing for the coming of God's kingdom — which consists no less in the destruction of the wicked than in the salvation of the godly. If this is true, then their charity is surely contained within the communion of the body of Christ, and extends no further than the nature of that communion allows. Even if I grant that they pray for us in this way, it does not follow that they depart from their own rest to be pulled down into earthly con-

cerns — and even less does it follow that we must call upon them. Nor does it follow that they must intercede for us merely because living people on earth may commend one another in prayer. That practice serves to nourish charity among the living, as they share and bear one another's burdens. They do this by God's command, and they have His promise — and both of these things are essential to prayer. None of this applies to the dead. When the Lord has removed them from our company, He has left us no ongoing exchange of activity with them, nor them with us — as far as we can determine. Even if someone argues that the departed must retain toward us the same charity they shared with us in one faith — still, who has revealed that they have such far-reaching ears to hear our voices, or such sharp eyes to observe our needs? People babble about some mysterious brightness of God's countenance shining on the saints, in which they can view from above the affairs of people below as in a mirror. But to assert this with such bold certainty — without any word from God to support it — is nothing other than breaking into the hidden judgments of God by the drunken fantasies of our own minds. It is to trample Scripture underfoot, which so often declares that the wisdom of the flesh is hostile to the wisdom of God, which condemns entirely the vanity of our natural understanding, which commands us to cast down all our reasoning and look only to God's will.

The other Scripture passages they bring to defend this lie are most wickedly twisted. Jacob, they say, prays that his name and the names of his fathers Abraham and Isaac be called upon over his descendants. But first let us consider what this "calling upon" means among the Israelites. They do not call upon their fathers to help them. Rather, they ask God to remember His servants

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore their example does nothing for those who speak directly to the saints themselves. But because these dull-minded people do not understand what it means to have the name of Jacob called upon someone, nor why it should be called upon, it is no wonder they stumble so childishly over the very form of the expression. This way of speaking is found frequently in Scripture. For Isaiah says that a man's name is called upon a woman when she has him as her husband, under whose care and protection she lives. Therefore, to have the name of Abraham called upon the Israelites means that they trace their lineage from him and honor him with solemn remembrance as their founder and ancestor. Jacob does this not because he is concerned about spreading the fame of his own name. Rather, since he knew that the entire blessedness of his descendants depended on inheriting the covenant God had made with him, he wishes for them what he sees as the greatest of all blessings: to be counted among his family. For this is nothing other than passing on to them the succession of the covenant. And when they bring this remembrance into their prayers, they do not flee to the intercession of dead men. Instead, they remind the Lord of His covenant, by which the most gracious Father promised to be favorable and generous to them for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How little the saints depended on the merits of their fathers is shown by the common confession of the church in the prophet: You are our Father, and Abraham did not know us, and Israel was ignorant of us. You, Lord, are our Father and our Redeemer. And when they speak this way, they add: Return, O Lord, for Your servants' sake -- yet they are not thinking of any intercession but are setting their minds on the benefit of the covenant. But now, since we have the

Lord Jesus, in whose hand the eternal covenant of mercy is not only established but also confirmed to us, whose name should we use in our prayers more than His? And since these self-appointed teachers insist that the patriarchs are shown by these words to be intercessors, I would like to ask them: why does Abraham, the father of the church, have no place at all among their list of patron saints? From what gutter they fetch their advocates is no secret. Let them tell me how fitting it is that Abraham, whom God preferred above all others and raised to the highest degree of honor, should be neglected and pushed aside. The truth is that since this practice was unknown in the ancient church, they thought it best to say nothing about the Old Testament fathers in order to hide how new their invention was -- as though using different names could excuse an invented and fabricated custom. As for the objection that God is asked to show mercy to the people for David's sake, this does nothing at all to support their error. In fact, it is one of the strongest proofs against it. For if we consider the role David played, he is set apart from all the other saints so that God would establish the covenant He made through David's hand. In this way, the covenant itself is what matters more than the man, and under a figure the sole intercession of Christ is affirmed. For it is certain that what belonged uniquely to David, insofar as he was an image of Christ, does not apply to anyone else.

Some are moved by the fact that the prayers of the saints are often recorded as having been answered. Why were they answered? Because they prayed. 'They trusted in You,' says the prophet, 'and they were saved; they cried and were not put to shame.' So let us also pray as they did, that we may be heard as they were. These people reason wrongly when they argue that only

those who have already been heard will be heard. How much better does James put it? 'Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.' Does James draw from this some special prerogative of Elijah, to which we must flee? No. He teaches us what constant power godly and sincere prayer has, in order to urge us to pray in the same way. We form too mean an idea of God's readiness and willingness to hear unless such experiences confirm us in a firmer trust in His promises — in which He promises that His ear is inclined not to one or two or a few, but to all who call upon His name. This foolishness is all the more inexcusable because these people seem to deliberately despise so many of Scripture's warnings. David was often delivered by God's power. Was this so that he could draw that power to himself for others to be delivered through his help? He himself says the opposite: 'The righteous wait for me, until You reward me.' And again: 'The righteous will see and rejoice, and trust in the Lord.' 'Behold, this poor man cried to God, and He answered him.' The Psalms contain many such prayers in which David urges God to act by pointing out that the righteous must not be put to shame — that they might be lifted up by his example to hope confidently. Let one example be enough. 'Therefore let every godly person pray to You in a time when You may be found.' I mention this passage all the more willingly because shameless peddlers of hired arguments have not been embarrassed to cite it in support of the intercession of the dead — as though David meant anything other than showing the fruit that comes from God's mercy and kindness when He answers prayer. We must learn here that God's grace shown to

ourselves and to others is no small help in confirming our confidence in His promises. I will leave unmentioned the many passages where David sets before himself God's past benefits as grounds for confidence, since readers of the Psalms will encounter them readily without searching. Jacob himself taught this same thing by his own example: 'I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and faithfulness You have shown Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.' He cites the promise — but not alone. He also brings in what God has already done, so that he may trust more boldly that God will continue to be the same toward him. For God is not like mortal men who grow weary of giving or whose resources run out. He is to be judged by His own nature, as David wisely says: 'You have redeemed me, O God of truth.' After praising God for his salvation, he adds that God is a truth-teller — because unless God were always the same, His past benefits would not provide a sufficiently strong reason for trust and prayer. But when we know that every time God helps us He shows an example and proof of His goodness, we need not fear that our hope will be put to shame or fail us.

Here is the summary. Since Scripture presents prayer as the chief act of worship — God himself, rejecting all sacrifices, requires this duty of godliness — directing prayer to anyone other than God is open sacrilege. The psalm says as much: 'If we stretch out our hands to a foreign god, will God not find this out?' Since God will not be called upon except through faith, and expressly commands prayers to be formed according to the rule of His Word — and since faith founded on the Word is the mother of right prayer — the moment we stray from the Word our prayer is inevitably corrupted. It has already been shown that when all of Scripture is ex-

amined, this honor is claimed for God alone. Regarding the office of intercession, we have also shown that it belongs uniquely to Christ, and that no prayer is acceptable to God apart from what this Mediator hallows. Though the faithful do offer prayers to God for one another, we have shown that this takes nothing from Christ's sole intercession — because they all rest upon it and commit both themselves and others to God through it. We have also shown that this practice is wrongly extended to the dead, since nowhere in Scripture are they commanded to pray for us. Scripture frequently urges us to this mutual duty for one another — but regarding the dead, there is not a single word. Indeed, James, in joining two things together — that we confess to one another and pray for one another — silently excludes the dead. To condemn this error, one argument alone is sufficient: right prayer begins in faith, and faith comes from hearing the Word of God, which contains no mention of this invented intercession. Superstition has rashly seized upon patrons whom God never appointed. Scripture is filled with many patterns for prayer, yet there is no example of this patronage system without which, in the Roman church, they believe no prayer is valid. Furthermore, it is certain that this superstition has grown from distrust — either because people were not content to have Christ as their intercessor, or because they have stripped Him of this honor altogether. The latter point is easily proved by their own argument. Their strongest case for needing the intercession of saints is that we are unworthy of direct access to God. We readily grant this is entirely true. But from that we conclude that those who value Christ's intercession as worthless — unless George, Hippolytus, or other such figures are added to it — have left nothing at all for Christ.

Although prayer in the strict sense means only requests and petitions, petition and thanksgiving are so closely related that both can rightly be covered under the one word. The specific forms Paul lists fall under this first division. Through asking and seeking we pour out our desires before God, requesting both things that spread His glory and advance His name, and benefits that are useful to us. Through thanksgiving we magnify His kindness toward us with fitting praise, acknowledging that everything good we receive comes from His generosity. David combined these two parts together: 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.' Scripture is not wrong to command us to practice both. As we have said elsewhere, our need is so great — and experience itself cries out that we are pressed and squeezed on every side by so many serious troubles — that everyone has more than enough reason to sigh to God and call upon Him in humble prayer. Even those free from outward trouble should be driven to seek help — the guilt of their failings and the countless attacks of temptation ought to spur even the most holy to ask for relief. But in the sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving there can be no interruption without serious sin, since God never stops heaping on people one benefit after another to draw us to gratitude, even when we are slow and sluggish. Indeed, so great and so rich is the outpouring of His benefits that it almost overwhelms us. So many and such great wonders are visible on every side that we never lack material for praise and thanksgiving. To make this clearer: since all our hope and wealth rests in God — as we have sufficiently shown — and since neither we nor anything we have can prosper without His blessing, we must continually commit ourselves and everything we have to Him. Whatever we plan, say, or do, let us plan,

say, and do it under His hand and will, and in hope of His help. All who devise or determine plans by trusting in themselves or others — who undertake anything without His will and without calling on Him — are pronounced cursed by God. We have already said several times that God is rightly honored when He is acknowledged as the source of all good things. From this it follows that all His gifts are to be received from His hand with continual thanks, and that there is no other proper way to use His benefits — which flow from His generosity for no other end than that we should be continually occupied in confessing His praise and giving thanks. When Paul says that things are sanctified by the word and prayer, he is saying they are not clean and holy for us without word and prayer — understanding 'word' here to mean 'faith' by a figure of speech. David therefore speaks well when, after receiving God's generosity, he says that a new song has been put in his mouth — signifying that it is a kind of malicious silence to pass over any of God's benefits without praise, since He gives us reason to speak well of Him as often as He does good to us. Isaiah also, when setting forth God's remarkable grace, calls the faithful to a new and extraordinary song. In this same spirit David says elsewhere: 'O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.' Likewise Hezekiah and Jonah testify that their deliverance will end in celebrating God's goodness with songs in the temple. David prescribes this same rule for all the godly: 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.' The same rule the church follows in another psalm: 'Save us, our God, that we may give thanks to Your name and glory in Your praise.' And again: 'He has regarded the prayer of the destitute and has not despised their prayer. This will be writ-

ten for the generation to come, and a people yet to be created will praise the Lord — to declare His name in Zion and His praise in Jerusalem.' Indeed, whenever the faithful ask God to act for His name's sake — professing they deserve nothing in their own name — they bind themselves to give thanks, promising that the right use of God's generosity will be to proclaim it. So Hosea, speaking of the coming redemption of the church, says: 'Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, and we will render as offerings the calves of our lips.' God's benefits not only call for praise of the tongue but naturally produce love. 'I love the Lord,' says David, 'because He has heard my voice and my supplications.' And elsewhere, recounting the help he had experienced: 'I will love You, O Lord my strength.' No praise will please God that does not flow from this sweetness of love. We must also hold fast to Paul's statement that all prayers are faulty and wrong to which thanksgiving is not joined — for he says: 'In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' Since irritability, weariness, impatience, bitter grief, and fear drive many people to grumble in prayer, Paul commands that our emotions be so regulated that the faithful — even before they have received what they desire — still cheerfully bless God. If this standard must be kept even in circumstances that are in some ways difficult and contrary, how much more firmly does God bind us to sing His praises whenever He grants what we have asked. As we have taught that our prayers are hallowed by Christ's intercession — which otherwise would be unclean — so the apostle, when he commands us to offer a sacrifice of praise through Christ, reminds us that we have no mouth clean enough to praise God's name unless Christ's priesthood serves as the means. From this we gather that

the people in the Roman church have been strangely deceived, when most of them marvel that Christ is even called an advocate. This is why Paul commands both prayer and thanksgiving without ceasing — he wants the prayers of all people to be lifted to God with as much continuity as possible, at every time, in every place, in all matters and circumstances. These people should look to God for everything and yield to Him the praise of everything, as He constantly provides occasion for both prayer and praise.

This constant diligence in prayer applies chiefly to the private prayers of each person, but it also has some bearing on the public prayers of the church. Public prayers cannot be continuous, nor should they be conducted in any way other than according to the established order agreed upon by common consent. I readily grant this. Certain hours are therefore set and appointed — indifferent before God, but necessary for the practical life of the community — so that everyone may be accommodated and all things may be done, as Paul says, properly and in order in the church. But this does not prevent every congregation from regularly stirring itself to frequent prayer, and when a pressing need arises, from praying with even greater earnestness. Perseverance in prayer, which is closely related to consistent diligence, will find a more fitting place to be discussed near the end. Now, none of this supports the meaningless babbling that Christ warned us against. He does not forbid praying at length, or often, or with deep feeling. He forbids trusting that we can wear God down with endless chatter — as though He could be persuaded the way a man might be. We know that hypocrites, because they fail to recognize they are dealing with God, put on as much of a show in prayer as they would in a public parade. The Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like other

men was no doubt congratulating himself in front of onlookers, as if prayer were a way to gain a reputation for holiness. From this came the empty babbling that is still common in the Roman church today — where some waste time repeating the same prayers over and over, and others parade before the crowd with a long heap of words. Since this babbling is a childish mockery of God, it is rightly forbidden in the church, so that nothing practiced there may be anything other than sincere prayer from the bottom of the heart. Closely related to this corruption is another which Christ condemns alongside it: hypocrites, for the sake of boasting, seek many witnesses and prefer the marketplace as a place to pray rather than have their prayers go unnoticed by the world. But since we have already shown that the goal of prayer is to lift our minds to God — both for confessing His praise and for seeking His help — we can see that the most important part of prayer lies in the mind and heart. Indeed, prayer in its truest sense is an inward movement of the heart, poured out and opened before God the searcher of hearts. Therefore, as already noted, the heavenly Teacher — when He meant to give us the best rule of prayer — commanded us to go into our room, shut the door, and pray to our Father who is in secret, so that our Father who sees in secret may hear us. He had already warned His disciples away from the example of hypocrites who made a showy, ambitious display of prayer to win human approval. Then He added the better alternative: go into your room and pray with the door shut. By these words He calls us, as I understand them, to seek out solitude that helps us descend and fully enter our own hearts with our whole mind — promising that God will be near to the heart's genuine affections, since our bodies ought to be His temple. He did not mean to deny that it is also fit-

ting to pray in other places. But He shows that prayer is essentially a private thing, seated chiefly in the soul and requiring its quiet away from the noise of distracting cares. For good reason the Lord Himself, when He wished to apply Himself more earnestly to prayer, would withdraw to some lonely place far from crowds. By His example He teaches us that these outward aids — which help a naturally slippery mind focus on earnest prayer — should not be despised. Yet at the same time, just as He did not refrain from praying in the midst of people when occasion called for it, so we too should in every place and in every need lift up pure hands. Finally, this must be held firm: whoever refuses to pray in the holy gathering of the godly does not truly know what it is to pray alone or in private. Likewise, whoever neglects private prayer — however diligently he attends public worship — offers only empty prayers there, because he cares more for the opinion of others than for the secret judgment of God. In the meantime, so that the church's common prayers should not fall into contempt, God in old times adorned them with glorious titles — especially when He called the temple 'a house of prayer.' By this He both taught that prayer is the chief part of His worship, and established the temple as a visible gathering point where the faithful could practice it together with one accord. A remarkable promise was also added: 'For You, O God, praise waits in Zion, and to You the vow will be performed.' By these words the prophet tells us that the church's prayers are never empty, because the Lord always gives His people reason to sing with joy. Although the shadows of the law have passed away, God's purpose in those ceremonies was to nurture unity of faith

among us. Therefore this same promise still belongs to us — confirmed by Christ's own words, and taught by Paul to remain in force forever.

Since the Lord commands the faithful through His Word to use common prayers, meeting places must be established for that purpose. Whoever refuses to join their prayers with God's people has no grounds to excuse themselves by pointing to the Lord's command to pray in one's room. Christ, who promises that He will answer whatever two or three ask when gathered in His name, shows clearly that He does not despise prayers offered openly — so long as they are free from boasting and the desire for human approval, and proceed from sincere and genuine affection rooted in the heart. If this is the right use of meeting places — as indeed it is — we must also guard against another error: treating them as the actual dwelling places of God, as if He hears us more readily from those locations because of some special holiness contained within the walls that makes prayer more acceptable to Him. Since we ourselves are God's temples, we must pray within ourselves if we wish to call upon God in His own holy temple. As for that crude notion, let us leave it to others. We have the commandment to call upon the Lord in spirit and in truth, without distinction of place. In ancient times God did command a temple where prayers and sacrifices were to be offered — but that was when the truth was still veiled under symbolic shadows. Now that the truth has been clearly revealed to us, we are no longer tied to any physical building. Nor was the temple given to Israel on the condition that they should confine God's presence within its walls. It was given as a means of training them to look toward the image of the true tem-

ple. Therefore those who thought in any way that God dwells in temples made by human hands were sharply rebuked — by Isaiah and by Stephen.

It is abundantly clear here that neither voice nor singing, when used in prayer, has any force or benefit before God unless it proceeds from deep affection in the heart. In fact, such prayer provokes God's anger if it comes only from the lips and throat — for that is an abuse of His holy name and a mockery of His majesty, as we see in Isaiah's words, which though they extend further still apply to this fault. 'This people draws near with their mouth and honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Their fear of Me consists of traditions learned by rote. Therefore I will once again deal marvelously with this people, and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the discernment of their discerning men will be hidden.' We do not condemn the voice or singing here — far from it. We commend them highly, as long as they accompany the genuine movement of the mind. Voice and song exercise the mind and keep it focused on God — which, being naturally slippery and restless, quickly loses concentration and wanders in many directions unless supported by various helps. Moreover, since God's glory should shine in some way through all the members of our bodies, the tongue especially — created specifically to declare and display God's praise — ought to be dedicated to this service in both speaking and singing. The chief use of the tongue is in the public prayers of the congregation, where we all glorify God with one voice, as though with one mouth — worshiping Him with one Spirit and one faith. This open confession allows everyone to draw strength and encouragement from one another's declaration of faith.

Regarding the use of singing in churches — to touch on this briefly — it is not only very ancient but was also practiced among the apostles, as we can gather from Paul's words: 'I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.' And again to the Colossians: 'Teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.' In the first passage Paul teaches that we should sing with both voice and heart. In the second he commends spiritual songs through which believers mutually build one another up. Augustine testifies that congregational singing was not universal from the beginning. He records that the church at Milan first began to sing during the time of Ambrose, when the people were holding more frequent night vigils than usual because of Justina — mother of Valentinian — who was cruelly persecuting the true faith. Other Western churches afterward followed Milan's example. He had noted a little earlier that this practice came originally from the Eastern churches. In his *Retractions* he also records that in his own time the practice was received in Africa, writing: 'A certain Hilary, a man in authority, seized every opportunity to attack with bitter criticism the then-new practice at Carthage, of singing hymns from the book of Psalms at the altar — either before the offering or when what had been offered was distributed to the people. I replied to him at my brothers' direction.' Truly, if singing is shaped to the gravity that befits the presence of God and angels, it lends dignity and grace to holy worship and greatly helps to lift the mind toward true and fervent prayer. But we must take careful care that our ears do not pay more attention to the melody than our minds pay to the spiritual meaning of the words. Augustine himself confessed that he was so troubled by this danger that he

sometimes wished for the practice Athanasius had maintained — commanding the reader to deliver the words with so slight a musical inflection that it resembled reading more than singing. But when Augustine recalled how much benefit he himself had received through singing, he leaned the other way. Used with this proper moderation, there is no doubt that singing is a most holy and profitable practice. On the other hand, songs composed purely for the sweetness and pleasure of the ear do not fit the dignity of the church and cannot fail to greatly displease God.

From this it also plainly follows that common prayers must not be spoken in Greek among Latin-speaking people, nor in Latin among French or English people — as has long been the universal custom — but in the native language of the people, commonly understood by the whole assembly. Since the purpose is to edify the whole church, a sound no one understands provides no benefit at all. Those who have no regard for either love or common sense should at least have been moved by Paul's authority, whose words could not be clearer. 'If you give thanks with your spirit, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the Amen at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.' Who can sufficiently marvel at the brazenness of Rome — with the apostle crying out against this so plainly — in roaring out babbling prayers in a foreign language that those praying often cannot understand themselves, and that they deliberately prevent others from understanding? Paul teaches us to do the opposite. How then? 'I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also. I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.' By 'spirit' he means the special gift of tongues, which many who

possessed were abusing by separating it from the mind — that is, from understanding. We must hold firmly to this: it is entirely impossible, in either public or private prayer, for the tongue to be used without the heart without greatly displeasing God. We must also hold that the mind ought to be kindled with such fervor of thought that it far exceeds what the tongue is able to express in words. The tongue is not strictly necessary for private prayer — except insofar as the inward feeling either needs the help of the voice to sustain its own warmth, or the intensity of that warmth carries the tongue along with it forcefully. Though very good prayers are often made in complete silence, it often happens that when the mind's feeling is deeply stirred, the tongue breaks out into words and the rest of the body into outward gesture — without any excessive display. From this came Hannah's murmuring — and this is something all the holy ones have experienced within themselves when they burst out in broken and incomplete words. As for the physical gestures commonly used in prayer — such as kneeling and bowing the head — these are exercises by which we strive to rise to a greater reverence for God.

Now we must learn not only a clearer rule of prayer but the very form of it — namely the one the heavenly Father has given us through His beloved Son. In this we may recognize His boundless goodness and kindness. Beyond warning and encouraging us to seek Him in every need — as children naturally run to their father's protection when any trouble presses them — He saw that we did not fully grasp how deep our poverty was, or what was fitting to ask, or what would truly benefit us. So He provided for our ignorance, and where our understanding fell short, He filled in what was lacking out of His own abundance. He prescribed for us a form

of prayer in which He has set out, as if on a table, everything we may rightly desire from Him, everything that works for our good, and everything that is necessary to ask. From His generosity in this we receive great comfort — knowing that we ask nothing inconvenient, nothing unbecoming or unfit, nothing that displeases Him, since we ask in a manner that comes from His own mouth. When Plato observed how foolishly men pray to God — asking for things that often turn out to harm them when granted — he said the best form of prayer was taken from an old poet: 'King Jupiter, give us the best things both when we ask and when we do not ask — but keep evil things away from us even when we ask for them.' The pagan philosopher is right about this much: he recognizes how dangerous it is to ask of God whatever our own desires move us to ask. He also reveals our sorry condition — that we cannot open our mouths before God without risk, unless the Spirit teaches us the right way to pray. All the more valuable, then, is this privilege — that the only begotten Son of God puts words in our mouths that free our minds from all uncertainty.

This form — or rule — of prayer consists of six petitions. The reason I do not agree with those who divide it into seven parts is this: the adversative word 'but' suggests that the evangelists intend to join those last two parts together, as if to say: 'Do not let us be overcome by temptation, but rather help our weakness and deliver us, so that we do not fail.' The ancient writers agree with this view, so that what Matthew adds in the seventh position is to be understood as an explanation of the sixth petition, not a separate one. Although the whole prayer is structured so that God's glory is to be specially regarded in every part, the first three petitions are set apart specifically for God's glory — and in those petitions we are to

look to nothing else, without any consideration of our own benefit. The other three concern our welfare and are specifically aimed at asking for things that benefit us. For instance, when we pray that the name of God be hallowed — since God is testing whether we love and honor Him freely or only in hope of reward — we must think nothing of our own benefit. His glory alone must be set before us, fixed before our eyes. The same posture belongs to the other petitions of this type. And even so, this turns greatly to our benefit — for when His name is sanctified as we pray, it becomes our sanctification as well. But our eyes, as it were, must look past and be in some sense blind to such benefit — not even glancing at it. If all hope of personal gain were removed, we should still not stop wishing and praying for this sanctification and for all things that pertain to God's glory. This is seen in the examples of Moses and Paul, who found it no hardship to turn their eyes away from themselves and — with passionate and burning zeal — wish for their own destruction if through it they might advance the glory and kingdom of God. On the other side, when we pray for our daily bread — though we desire something for our own benefit — even here we ought to seek God's glory above all, so that we would not ask it unless it might also serve His glory. Now let us come to explaining the prayer itself.

Our Father who is in heaven.

From the very opening we encounter what we said before: that all prayer must be offered to God in no other way than in the name of Christ, since it can be acceptable to Him through no other name. For in calling God 'Father,' we are in fact pleading the name of Christ. By what boldness could anyone otherwise call God Father? Who would dare claim for himself the honor belonging to the Son

of God — unless we had been adopted as children of grace in Christ? He, being the true Son, is given to us as our Brother by the Father — so that what is His by nature might become ours through adoption, if we embrace such great generosity with sure faith. As John says, to those who believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, power has been given to become children of God. Therefore God both calls Himself our Father and desires to be so called by us. The sweetness of this name frees us from all distrust — for nowhere can a greater love be found than in a father. He could give no surer evidence of His immeasurable love for us than by naming us His children. But His love toward us is even greater and more excellent than all human parental love, as He surpasses all people in goodness and mercy. Even if every father on earth were to cast off all natural fatherly feeling and abandon his children, He will never fail us — because He cannot deny Himself. He has given us this promise: 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him?' And through the prophet: 'Can a woman forget her nursing child? Even if she forgets, I will not forget you.' If we are His children, then just as a child cannot place himself under the care of a stranger without implying either cruelty or poverty on the part of his own father, so we cannot seek help from anywhere other than God alone without implying that He is either unable or unwilling to help us.

Let us not use the objection that our awareness of sin rightly makes us afraid — that even the most merciful and kind Father could be justly angered with us daily. For if among human beings a son can find no better advocate to plead his case to his father and no better means to regain lost favor than to humble himself, ac-

knowledge his fault, and beg his father's mercy — because then the father's heart cannot hold itself back but must be moved by such a plea — what will the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort do? Will He not hear the tears and groanings of His children pleading for themselves — especially since He calls and encourages us to do so — more readily than any other intercessions to which they flee so fearfully in near despair, distrusting the kindness and mercy of their Father? This overflowing abundance of fatherly kindness He pictures for us in the parable, where the father lovingly embraces a son who had turned away from him, wasted his inheritance in reckless living, and offended him in every way. He does not wait until the son asks forgiveness in words — he sees him coming from far off, runs to meet him of his own accord, comforts him, and receives him back into favor. By presenting in a human father this example of such great gentleness, God intends to teach us how much more abundant kindness we should expect from Him — who is not only a Father but the best and most merciful of all fathers — even when we are ungrateful, rebellious, and wayward children, as long as we cast ourselves upon His mercy. And to make it even more certain that He is such a Father to us who are Christians, He willed that we call Him not only 'Father' but specifically 'Our Father' — as if we might say to Him: 'O Father, who has such great natural kindness toward Your children and such ready willingness to forgive, we Your children call to You and pray to You, fully persuaded that You bear toward us nothing other than a father's love — however unworthy we are of such a Father.' But because our small hearts cannot take in so vast an abundance of grace, not only is Christ the pledge and guarantee of our adoption, but He has also given us the Spirit as witness of that

adoption — through whom we may cry with free and confident voice, 'Abba, Father!' So whenever any hesitation holds us back, let us remember to ask God to correct our fear and set before us that Spirit of boldness to guide us to pray with confidence.

We are taught not to call God each one's private Father separately, but to call Him together 'Our Father.' This reminds us of the great brotherly love that ought to exist among us — people who are all alike children of such a Father by the one same grace and generosity. We have one common Father, from whom comes every good thing that comes to us. There ought to be nothing kept separate among us that we are not ready and willing to share with one another as need requires. If we are as eager as we should be to extend a hand and help one another, there is nothing in which we may benefit our brothers and sisters more than by commending them to the care and providence of this most good Father — in whose favor and blessing nothing at all is lacking. Indeed, this is what we owe our Father. Just as someone who truly loves a father of a household also embraces his entire household with love and goodwill, so the love and affection we bear toward our heavenly Father must show itself toward His people, His household, and His inheritance — which He has so honored that He has called it the fullness of His only begotten Son. A Christian should therefore frame his prayers according to this rule: that they be common, encompassing all who are brothers and sisters in Christ — not only those he presently sees and knows to be such, but all people who live on earth. What God has determined for them is beyond our knowledge, but it is no less godly than human to wish them well and hope the best for them. We ought, however, to bear a special and particular affection toward those of the household of faith,

whom the apostle has especially commended to us in everything. In short, all our prayers should be formed with regard to the community that our Lord has established in His kingdom and His household.

This does not prevent us from praying specifically for ourselves or for certain others — so long as our minds do not lose sight of this broader community, nor turn away from it, but relate all things to it. For though prayers may be expressed in individual terms, if they are aimed at that common goal they do not cease to be common prayers. A simple example makes this clear. God's commandment is general — to relieve the needs of all the poor. Yet those who help the ones they actually know and see to be in need are obeying this commandment, even if they pass over many others who are no less desperately needy. They simply cannot know everyone or help everyone. In the same way, those who, with the common fellowship of the church in view, offer particular prayers by which they commend to God — in specific words — themselves or others whose need God has placed more immediately before them, are not going against God's will. However, prayer and the giving of material help are not entirely parallel. Material generosity can only be shown to those whose need we have actually observed. But through prayer we may help even complete strangers who are entirely unknown to us and separated from us by any distance whatsoever. This is accomplished through that general form of prayer in which all God's children are included — and among them, so are those distant strangers. To this we may apply Paul's exhortation to the faithful of his time, that they lift up pure hands

everywhere without strife — because by warning them that quarreling shuts the door to prayer, he calls them to lay their petitions before God together with a united mind.

The prayer adds that He is in heaven. This does not mean He is locked in, enclosed, or confined within the circle of heaven as within fixed barriers. Solomon himself acknowledges that the highest heavens cannot contain Him. And He says through the prophet that heaven is His throne and the earth His footstool — meaning truly that He is not limited to any particular region but is spread throughout all things. But because our minds, being so limited, could not otherwise grasp His unspeakable glory, it is represented to us by heaven — than which nothing more vast or majestic can come before our sight. Since our senses tend to attach themselves to whatever they perceive, God is placed above all location — so that in seeking Him we must be lifted above all sensory perception, both bodily and mental. By this way of speaking He is also raised above all possibility of corruption and change. And it signifies that He encompasses and rules the entire world with His power. Therefore 'who is in heaven' is essentially the same as calling Him One of infinite greatness and height, of incomprehensible being, of immeasurable power, of everlasting immortality. Whenever God is spoken of, this should lift our minds higher — so that we dream nothing earthly or fleshly about Him, measure Him by no human standard, and do not bend His will to fit our own desires. At the same time, our confidence in Him should be strengthened — Him by whose providence and power heaven and earth are governed. Let this be the summary: under the name 'Father' there is set before us the God who has made Himself known in His own image — so that He may be called upon with firm faith. The famil-

iar name 'Father' is given not only to build our confidence but also to keep our minds from wandering toward uncertain or invented gods, and instead to ascend through the only begotten Son to the only Father of angels and of the church. Then, because His throne is placed in heaven, the ordering of the world reminds us we do not come to Him without cause — He who with watchful care comes out to meet us of His own will. 'Whoever comes to God,' says the apostle, 'must first believe that He exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.' Both of these things Christ affirms belong to His Father, so that our faith may rest in Him and we may be fully persuaded that He is not indifferent to our welfare — since He extends His providence even to us. Paul uses these very truths to prepare us to pray rightly. Before he tells us to bring our petitions before God, he first says: 'Be anxious for nothing; the Lord is near.' This shows that those who have not firmly settled in their minds that the eye of God is upon the righteous will toss their prayers about in doubt and confusion.

The first petition is that the name of God be hallowed — and the need for it comes to us with great shame. For what is more shameful than that God's glory should be dimmed — partly by our ingratitude, partly by our wickedness — and as much as possible blotted out entirely by our boldness and defiant stubbornness? Though all the wicked strain themselves in their sacrilegious willfulness, the holiness of God's name shines gloriously on. The prophet rightly cries out: 'As Your name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth.' Wherever God's name is known, His strength, power, goodness, wisdom, righteousness, mercy, and truth must make themselves known — drawing us to wonder at Him and stirring us to publish His praise. Since God's holiness is

so shamefully stripped from Him on earth, we are at the very least commanded — if we cannot restore it ourselves — to care for it in our prayers. The petition in sum means: we wish for God to receive the honor He deserves — that people would never speak or think of Him without the highest reverence. This stands against the unholy disrespect that has always been widespread in the world and runs rampant today. Hence the necessity of this petition — which, if even a little godliness lived in us, would have been unnecessary. But since the name of God has its holiness kept only when, set apart from all others, it breathes out nothing but glory, we are commanded not only to pray that God will protect that holy name from all contempt and dishonor, but that He will bring all humanity to reverence it. Since God reveals Himself to us partly through teaching and partly through His works, He is sanctified by us only when we give Him His due in both — embracing whatever comes from Him, and honoring His severity no less than His mercy. For in the rich variety of His works He has stamped marks of His glory that ought rightly to draw from every tongue a confession of His praise. The result will be that Scripture holds full authority with us, and that no event in the history of the world keeps us from blessing God as He deserves throughout its entire course. This petition also aims at this: that all ungodliness which defiles this holy name may be destroyed and removed — that whatever dims and diminishes this sanctifying, both slanders and mockeries, may be driven away — and that as God subdues all sacrilege, His glory may shine more and more brightly.

The second petition is that God's kingdom may come. Though it contains nothing entirely new, it is not without reason separated from the first — because given how sluggish we are in the most im-

portant matters, something that should be obvious by itself must be pressed into us repeatedly with many words. After commanding us to pray that God would subdue and ultimately destroy whatever mars His holy name, we are now given a similar and closely related request: that His kingdom come. Though we have already explained what this kingdom is, I will briefly restate it: God reigns when people, forsaking themselves and despising the world and earthly life, so yield themselves to His righteousness that they press toward the heavenly life. This kingdom has two parts: first, that God subdues by His Spirit's power all the corrupt desires of the flesh that wage constant war against Him; second, that He shapes all our faculties into obedience to His rule. No one prays this prayer in the right order unless they begin with themselves — that is, asking to be cleansed of all the corruptions that disturb the peace of God's kingdom and contaminate its purity. Since God's Word is like a royal scepter, we are commanded here to pray that He will bend the minds and hearts of all people into willing obedience to it. This is accomplished when, through the inward working of His Spirit, He releases the effective power of His Word so that it advances to the degree it deserves. Then we must think also of the wicked who stubbornly and furiously resist His authority. God establishes His kingdom by humbling the whole world — though He does this in different ways: taming the willfulness of some and breaking the unbending pride of others. It is to be wished daily that God would gather churches out of every region of the world, enlarge and increase them in number, enrich them with His gifts, and establish right order in them — while also overturning all the enemies of pure doctrine and true religion, scattering their plans, and bringing down their schemes. From this it is clear that we are

not commanded in vain to press forward daily — for human affairs are never in such good condition that all filth is swept away and complete purity flourishes in full force. But the fullness of it is reserved for the last coming of Christ, when Paul teaches that God shall be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). So this prayer should draw us away from all the corruptions of the world that separate us from God and prevent His kingdom from flourishing within us. It should kindle our desire to put the flesh to death, and instruct us in carrying the cross — since this is how God wills His kingdom to spread. We should not be troubled when the outward person is worn away, as long as the inner person is being renewed. This is the nature of God's kingdom: when we submit to its righteousness, it makes us partakers of His glory. This happens as God continually shines forth His light and truth in ever-growing measure — by which the darkness and lies of Satan and his kingdom fade, are broken, and perish. He defends His own, guides them to uprightness by the help of His Spirit, and strengthens them to persevere. At the same time He overturns the wicked conspiracies of His enemies, exposes their treachery and deceptions, thwarts their malice, and crushes their stubbornness — until at last He kills the Antichrist with the breath of His mouth and destroys all ungodliness with the brightness of His coming.

The third petition is that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Though this is closely connected to His kingdom and cannot truly be separated from it, it is added separately for our benefit — because we are not quick to grasp what it means for God to reign in the world. It will therefore be no error to take this as a plainer explanation: that God rules in the world when all things submit themselves to His will. This is not speaking of His secret will, by

which He governs all things and directs them toward their ends. Even when Satan and people strenuously oppose Him, He is able through His incomprehensible counsel not only to redirect their violent movements but also to bring them into order and use them to accomplish what He has purposed. This petition speaks of another will of God — the one to which willing obedience corresponds. This is why heaven is specifically compared to earth: the angels, as the psalm says, willingly obey God and are diligently set to carry out His commands. We are therefore commanded to pray that just as nothing is done in heaven except at God's direction — and the angels are quietly shaped toward all uprightness — so the earth too, with all stubbornness and perverseness extinguished, may come under such governance. In making this request we are renouncing the desires of our own flesh. For whoever does not surrender his desires to God sets himself against God as far as he is able, since nothing that comes from us is without fault. By this prayer we are once again shaped toward self-denial — so that God may govern us according to His will. And not that only: so that He may also create within us new minds and new hearts, our old ones being put to death. We pray to feel within ourselves no desire except what agrees with His will, to will nothing on our own, and to have His Spirit govern our hearts — teaching us inwardly to love what pleases Him and hate what displeases Him. From this it also follows that whatever impulses fight against His will, He would make empty and void. Here, then, are the first three chief petitions of this prayer. In asking them we must keep God's glory alone before our eyes, setting aside all regard for ourselves and no concern for our own benefit — even though that benefit does come to us abundantly through these things, we must not be seeking it here.

Although all these things must come to pass in their proper time even if we neither think about them nor wish for them nor ask for them, we must still wish for them and ask for them. Doing so is no small benefit to us — it shows that we are in fact servants and children of God, striving as much as possible and with genuine devotion to advance the honor due to Him as both Lord and Father. Whoever does not pray with sincere desire and zeal for God's glory — that His name be hallowed, His kingdom come, His will be done — should not be counted among His children and servants. And since all these things will come to pass against their will, they will turn to their shame and destruction.

Now follows the second part of the prayer, in which we come down to our own needs. This does not mean we leave behind God's glory — which Paul says is to be regarded even in eating and drinking — and seek only what benefits ourselves. We have already noted the distinction: God, having reserved three petitions for Himself, draws us entirely to Himself in order to test our godliness. He then permits us to have regard for our own needs as well — but only on this condition: that we ask nothing for ourselves except to the end that whatever benefits He gives us may display His glory. For nothing is more fitting than that we live and die for Him. In this petition we ask God generally for all things the body needs in this earthly life — not only food and clothing, but whatever He foresees will be useful to us, so that we may eat our bread in peace. By this prayer we entrust ourselves to His care and commit ourselves to His providence, that He may feed, cherish, and sustain us. The most good Father does not disdain to take even our bodies under His faithful protection and care — exercising our faith in these small matters as we look to Him for everything, down to a

crust of bread and a drop of water. By our own fault, somehow, we are far more troubled with care for our bodies than for our souls. Many who dare to trust God with their soul are still anxious for their bodies — uncertain about what they will eat or what they will wear. If they do not have an ample stock of wine, grain, and oil laid up ahead of time, they tremble with fear. This shows how much more we prize this brief flickering life than everlasting immortality. But whoever has once trusted God and cast away bodily anxiety will also expect salvation and eternal life from His hand — things far greater than food and clothing. It is therefore no small exercise of faith to hope in God for these things that otherwise consume us with worry. We have made real progress when we have shed this unbelief that soaks into the bones of nearly everyone. As for those who interpret this as asking for 'super-substantial bread,' their reading seems poorly suited to Christ's meaning. But if we do not give God the role of nourishing Father even in this frail life, our prayer would be incomplete. The argument against asking for daily bread — that it is unfitting for God's children, who ought to be spiritual, to fix their minds on earthly concerns and drag God into them — is far too carnal. As if His blessing and fatherly favor do not also appear in sustaining our life! As if it were written in vain that godliness holds promise for the present life as well as the life to come. Although the forgiveness of sins is of far greater value than bodily sustenance, Christ placed the lesser matter first in order to raise us gradually to the other two petitions that belong properly to the heavenly life — adapting to our limitations. We are commanded to ask for our bread — meaning we should be content with what our heavenly Father chooses to give us and not seek gain by dishonest or crafty means. At the same time we must learn that

it is made ours by God's gift alone — for neither our effort, nor our labor, nor our hands, as Moses says, gain us anything on their own unless God's blessing is present. Indeed, an abundance of bread would be of no use at all unless God turned it into nourishment for us. Therefore God's generosity is no less necessary for the rich than for the poor. Even those with full cellars and storerooms would grow faint and empty unless they enjoyed their bread through His grace. The words 'this day' or 'day by day' — as the other evangelist records — along with the adjective 'daily,' restrain the excessive craving for earthly things in which we habitually burn beyond measure and which brings other evils with it. When we have abundant plenty we lavishly squander it on pleasure, entertainment, boasting, and every kind of wasteful excess. We are therefore commanded to ask only enough for our need — as though from day to day — with this confidence: that the heavenly Father who has fed us today will not fail us tomorrow. However great the abundance flowing to us, even when our storerooms are stuffed and our cellars full, we should still always ask for our daily bread. We must firmly believe that all wealth amounts to nothing except insofar as the Lord, by continually pouring out His blessing, makes it fruitful — and that even what is in our hands is not truly our own except insofar as He grants us a portion of it each hour. Human pride finds this very hard to accept. But the Lord gave a singular example of it for all ages when He fed His people with manna in the wilderness — to teach us that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from His mouth. This declares that it is His power alone by which our life and strength are sustained, even when He supplies it through material means. He teaches the same lesson by the opposite example: whenever He

chooses, He breaks the strength — what He calls the 'staff of bread' — so that those eating still waste away with hunger and those drinking are still parched with thirst. But whoever, not content with daily bread, greedily craves endless abundance — or whoever, secure in their wealth, still goes through the motions of this prayer — is only mocking God. The first type asks for something they do not actually want — namely daily bread only — and is secretly hiding from God the true desire of their greed. True prayer must pour out before God the whole mind and everything hidden within. The second type asks for something they do not actually expect from Him — namely what they think they already have through their own means. That it is called 'our' bread makes God's generosity all the more evident, as we said — for He makes ours what is by no right due to us. Yet the explanation that 'our bread' refers to what is earned by honest and lawful labor — not gotten through fraud and exploitation — should not be dismissed, since what we gain through any wrongdoing is never truly our own but belongs to another. When we pray that bread be 'given' to us, this signifies it is the sole and free gift of God, however it comes to us — even when it most appears to come from our own planning, effort, and labor. For it is only through His blessing that our labors succeed.

Next comes: 'Forgive us our debts.' In this petition and the one following, Christ has briefly gathered everything that belongs to the heavenly life — just as these two elements make up the spiritual covenant God has made for the salvation of His church: 'I will put My laws in their hearts, and I will be merciful to their iniquity.' Christ begins here with the forgiveness of sins. He will then immediately add the second grace: that God defend us by the power of His Spirit and sustain us with His help, so that we may stand un-

defeated against all temptations. He calls sins 'debts' because we are obligated to pay the penalty for them — a penalty we could not satisfy in any way unless we were pardoned. This pardon comes from His free mercy alone. He liberally wipes away these debts, taking no payment from us but satisfying Himself with His own mercy — in Christ, who once gave Himself as the sufficient payment. Therefore whoever trusts that God will be satisfied by their own merits or the merits of others, and that forgiveness is purchased and compensated by such satisfactions, has no share in this free forgiveness. When they call upon God in this manner, they do nothing but confirm their own accusation and seal their own condemnation with their own testimony. For they confess themselves debtors — but they refuse the very pardon that alone can release them, thrusting their own merits and satisfactions at God instead. In doing so they do not plead for His mercy but appeal to His judgment. As for those who dream of a perfection in themselves that removes any need to ask forgiveness — let them attract whatever disciples their ear-tickling teaching draws. But this much is certain: every disciple they gain is taken from Christ, who instructs all people to confess their guilt and receives none but sinners. He does not flatter sin, but He knows the faithful are never so completely stripped of the flesh's vices that they cease to stand under God's judgment. It is indeed to be earnestly desired and striven for, that having fulfilled all our duty we might truly stand before God free from every stain. But since God is pleased to renew His image in us only gradually, and some infection of the flesh always remains, this remedy must not be despised. If Christ, by the authority His Father has given Him, commands us to seek forgiveness for our guilt throughout the entire course of our lives — who

can tolerate these new teachers who try to dazzle the simple with a fantasy of perfect innocence, convincing them they can be made free of all fault? As John testifies, this is nothing other than making God a liar. And by this wicked work — canceling this one article — they tear apart and undermine the entire covenant of God, in which we have shown our salvation is contained. They are robbers of God, tearing apart what He has joined together. They are cruel and wicked for drowning poor souls in despair. And they are traitors to themselves and those like them — leading themselves into a laziness directly contrary to the mercy of God. Some object that in praying for God's kingdom to come, we are already asking for the removal of sin. But this is too shallow a reading, because the first part of this prayer sets before us the highest perfection, while this part sets before us our own weakness. So these two things fit well together: that while we press on toward the goal, we do not despise the remedies that our need requires. Finally, we pray that we may be forgiven as we ourselves forgive our debtors — that is, as we forgive and release all who have offended us, whether by unjust action or insulting words. We cannot grant pardon for the guilt of sin itself — that belongs to God alone. But our forgiving means this: willingly putting away anger, hatred, and the desire for revenge from our hearts, and trampling the memory of the wrong underfoot with deliberate forgetfulness. We cannot ask God for forgiveness of our sins if we do not also forgive the offenses of those who wrong or have wronged us. But if we hold any hatreds in our hearts, plan any revenge, look for ways to harm others, or fail to work toward reconciliation with our enemies and to treat them well and win them back — then this very prayer becomes a request that God not forgive us. For we are asking Him to grant us the

same forgiveness we grant to others. To ask for less than that is to pray that He withhold it from us. What do such people obtain by their prayer but a more severe judgment? Finally, it must be noted that this condition — 'as we forgive our debtors' — is not added to suggest that we deserve forgiveness by the forgiveness we extend to others, as if that were the cause of our pardon. Rather, the Lord added it for two reasons: partly to strengthen the weakness of our faith, giving us a sign by which we can be assured that He has surely granted us forgiveness of our sins — as surely as we know in our conscience that we have forgiven others, when our minds are free from all hatred, envy, and desire for revenge. And partly He uses this as a mark by which He excludes from the number of His children those who should not dare call upon Him as Father — those who are quick to seek revenge, slow to forgive, who nurse ongoing enmities, and cherish toward others the same ill will they are asking God to turn away from themselves. This is also stated expressly in Luke in Christ's own words.

The sixth petition, as we have said, corresponds to the promise of writing God's law on our hearts. But since we obey God only through constant warfare and great, hard-fought struggles, we pray here to be equipped with weapons and defended with help — so that we may gain the victory. This reminds us that we need not only the grace of the Spirit to soften, bend, and direct our hearts to obedience, but also His active help to make us invincible against both Satan's treacherous traps and his violent attacks. Temptations come in many and different forms. The perverse thoughts that provoke us to break God's law — whether stirred up by our own desires or by the devil — are temptations. So also are things not evil in themselves, which through the devil's cunning

are made into temptations when they are placed before our eyes in such a way that we are drawn away or turn aside from God. These temptations come from either the right hand or the left. On the right hand: riches, power, and honors — which commonly so dazzle people with their glitter and apparent goodness, and catch them with the baited hook of their flattery, that being trapped by these deceits or intoxicated by their sweetness, people forget their God. On the left hand: poverty, reproaches, contempt, troubles, and the like — which by their bitterness and harshness can so discourage a person that faith and hope are thrown away and he becomes completely estranged from God. Against both kinds of temptations — whether kindled within us by our own desires or set against us by Satan's schemes — we pray to our heavenly Father not to let us yield. We ask rather that He sustain and raise us up by His hand, so that, strong in His strength, we may stand firm against all the assaults of the evil enemy — whatever thoughts he plants in our minds. And we ask that whatever is placed before us on either side, we may turn it to good, neither becoming proud in prosperity nor crushed by adversity. We are not asking to feel no temptations at all — for we greatly need to be stirred, prodded, and pressed by them, lest we grow dull through too much ease. David prayed not without reason to be tested, and the Lord daily tests His elect — disciplining them with shame, poverty, trouble, and other kinds of trial. But God tempts differently from Satan. Satan tempts to destroy, condemn, confuse, and overthrow. God tempts to test the genuineness of those who are His, to strengthen them through exercise, to mortify and purge and refine their flesh — which, unless restrained this way, would become undisciplined and run wildly out of control. Satan attacks people when they are

unarmed and unprepared, looking to overwhelm them unexpectedly. But God, even through testing, works in His people so that they bear patiently whatever He sends upon them. Whether by 'the evil' we understand the devil or sin makes little difference. Satan is the enemy who lies in wait for our lives, but sin is the weapon with which he destroys us. Our request is therefore this: that we not be overcome or crushed by any temptation, but may stand firm in the Lord's power against all the opposing forces that assault us — that is, that we not surrender to temptations, but being received into His care and kept safe by His protection, we may stand unconquered over sin, death, the gates of hell, and the whole kingdom of the devil. This is what it means to be delivered from evil. It must be carefully noted here that matching the devil — so mighty a warrior — and bearing his force and violence is beyond our strength. Otherwise we would be asking for something we already had within ourselves, which would be vain and mockery. Those who enter this battle trusting in themselves do not sufficiently understand what a fierce and well-armed enemy they are facing. We pray to be delivered from his power — as from the mouth of a raging lion, who would tear us with his teeth and claws and swallow us down — unless the Lord delivers us from the midst of death. Yet we know this too: if the Lord stands by us and fights for us when we are brought down, we will show strength in His strength. Let others trust as they wish in their own abilities and in what they imagine to be the power of their own free will. Let it be enough for us to stand and be strong in God's strength alone. But this prayer contains more than it appears to at first. For if God's Spirit is our strength in fighting our battle with Satan, we cannot gain the victory until — being filled with that Spirit — we have put off all the

weakness of our flesh. When therefore we pray to be delivered from Satan and the devil, we are praying to be continuously enriched with new measures of God's grace — until, being fully filled with them, we triumph over all evil. Some find it troubling to ask God not to lead us into temptation, since James testifies that it is contrary to God's nature to tempt. But this difficulty is partly resolved where we said that our own desires are properly the cause of all the temptations by which we are overcome, and therefore rightly bear the blame for them. James means nothing other than this: faults are wrongly attributed to God when we ourselves know in our conscience that we are guilty of them. But this does not mean God cannot, when it pleases Him, hand us over to Satan, give us up to a depraved mind and corrupt desires, and so lead us into temptation by His righteous judgment — one that is often hidden from human eyes but always known to Him. From this we gather that there is nothing unfitting in this manner of speaking, if we are persuaded that He does not without cause so often threaten that when the reprobate are struck with blindness and hardness of heart, these will be sure signs of His vengeance.

These three petitions, in which we commend ourselves and our concerns to God, clearly demonstrate what we said earlier: that Christians' prayers ought to be common — directed toward the mutual edification of the church and the building up of fellowship among the faithful. No one prays to receive something privately for himself alone — all together pray for our bread, for forgiveness of our sins, that we may not be led into temptation, and that we may be delivered from evil. There is also added a statement of why we may pray with such boldness and expect to be heard with such confidence. Though it does not appear in the Latin copies, it fits

too well in this place to be left out: 'For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.' This is the perfect and settled rest of our soul. For if our prayers had to commend themselves to God by their own worthiness, who would dare even open his mouth before Him? But however miserable we are, however unworthy above all people, however empty of all merit, we will never lack reason to pray and will never be without confidence — because our Father cannot be stripped of His kingdom, power, and glory. At the end is added 'Amen,' by which we express our earnest desire to receive what we have asked of God and confirm our hope that all these things are already granted and will certainly be given to us — because they are promised by God, who cannot deceive. This agrees with the manner of prayer we rehearsed earlier: 'Do it, Lord, for Your name's sake, not for our sake or our righteousness.' By this the holy ones not only express the goal of their prayers but also confess that they are unworthy to receive anything unless God draws the cause from Himself — and that their confidence in being heard rests solely on God's own character.

In this form — this rule of prayer — Christ our teacher, whom the Lord set over us and whom He alone has commanded us to hear, has set before us everything we ought to, or even may, ask of God. For He has always been God's eternal wisdom, and being made man He was given to humanity as the messenger of great counsel. This prayer is in every respect so complete and perfect that whatever foreign thing is added which cannot be referred back to it is ungodly and unworthy of God's acceptance. In it He has set forth what is fitting for Him, what is pleasing to Him, what is necessary for us, and what He will grant. Therefore whoever dares to go beyond it and ask God for anything outside these bounds is,

first, adding to God's wisdom out of his own knowledge — which cannot be done without insane blasphemy. Second, he refuses to stay within God's will, but despising it goes wandering greedily beyond it. And third, he will never obtain anything, because he is praying without faith. All such prayers are undoubtedly made without faith — because the Word of God is absent, and without the Word as its foundation, faith cannot stand. Those who abandon the Master's rule and follow their own desires are not only without the Word of God but are striving with all their effort against it. Therefore Tertullian, both fittingly and accurately, called this the lawful prayer — implying that all others are lawless and illegitimate.

We do not mean by this that we are so bound to these exact words that we may not change a syllable. Many prayers in Scripture differ widely from this prayer in wording, yet were written by the same Spirit and are still profitable for us to use today. The same Spirit continually puts into the mouths of the faithful prayers that do not match this prayer word for word. Our only point in this teaching is that no one should seek, expect, or ask anything that is not in substance covered in this prayer — even if the wording differs greatly, as long as the meaning does not. Just as it is certain that all the prayers found in Scripture and springing from godly hearts are directed toward the same ends as this prayer, so truly no prayer anywhere can be found that matches — much less surpasses — its perfection. Nothing has been left out that could be thought of for God's praise; nothing has been overlooked that ought to come into a human mind for his own benefit. The prayer is so complete that all hope of anyone doing better is

rightly cut off. In short, let us remember that this is the doctrine of God's wisdom — who taught what He willed and willed what was needed.

Although we have said above that we must always lift our minds to God and pray without ceasing, our weakness needs to be upheld by many supports and our sluggishness needs to be prodded by many spurs. It is therefore good for each of us to set aside certain regular hours that will not pass without prayer, in which the whole focus of our mind will be fully engaged — such as when we rise in the morning, before beginning the day's work, when we sit down to eat, when we have been fed by God's blessing, and when we go to rest. Only this must not become a superstitious observance of hours — as though by fulfilling these we had discharged our duty to God for the rest of the day. It should be training for our weakness, an exercise that keeps us regularly engaged and stirred up. We should take particular care that whenever we ourselves face hardship or see others in difficulty, we run immediately to Him — not with our feet but with our hearts. And we should take care not to let any blessing of our own or others' pass without acknowledging it as His gift through praise and thanksgiving. Finally, this is to be carefully observed in all prayer: we must not attempt to bind God to certain circumstances, or prescribe for Him what He shall do, when, where, or how. This prayer teaches us to impose no law on Him and set no conditions, but to leave it entirely to His will to act as He pleases, in whatever manner, at whatever time, and in whatever place He sees fit. Therefore before making any request for ourselves, we first pray that His will be

done — by which we already submit our will to His. Restrained by this as by a bridle, our will cannot presume to dictate to God but must make Him the judge and governor of all our desires.

If, with minds shaped to this obedience, we allow ourselves to be governed by the laws of God's providence, we will easily learn to continue in prayer and patiently wait for the Lord with longing desires — being assured that though He may not appear to act, He is always present with us and will in His time show that He has not given deaf ears to the prayers that appeared in human eyes to be despised. And this will be a most immediate comfort — keeping us from fainting and sinking into despair when God does not answer on our first request. This is what those are prone to do who, carried along by sudden fervor, call upon God — but if He does not come immediately and bring instant help, they immediately imagine He is angry and hostile toward them, and casting away all hope they stop praying altogether. Instead, let us keep our hope alive with a well-balanced steadiness of mind and press on in that perseverance Scripture commends to us so strongly. In the Psalms we can often see how David and the other faithful, when they seemed nearly exhausted from praying, felt as if they were throwing their words into the air to a God who did not hear — and yet they did not stop praying. For the Word of God does not hold its full authority unless its credibility is held above all earthly outcomes. Let us not test God or provoke Him by wearying Him with presumptuous demands. Many people treat God as though everything were conditional — binding Him to the terms of their agreement as though He were a servant to their wishes. If He does not immediately comply, they grow indignant, they fume, they find fault, they murmur, they chafe. Therefore to such people He often gives in

anger what in mercy He withholds from others. The children of Israel are an example of this — for whom it would have been better never to have been heard by the Lord than to eat the meat that came wrapped in His wrath.

But if even after long waiting our senses perceive no fruit from our praying and feel no result, yet faith will assure us of what the senses cannot perceive: that we have obtained what was best for us. For the Lord so often and so firmly promises to take care of our griefs once they have been laid in His bosom. And so He will make us find abundance in poverty, and comfort in affliction. However everything else may fail us, God will never fail us — He will not let the waiting and patience of those who are His be put to shame. He alone will be sufficient in place of everything else, since He contains within Himself all good things, which He will one day fully reveal when at the last judgment He openly displays His kingdom. Moreover, even when God does answer us, He does not always respond in the exact form we requested — but holding us in apparent suspense, He shows by means we cannot see that our prayers were not in vain. This is what John means: 'If we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.' This seems like a weak repetition of words, but it is a remarkably useful statement — declaring that God, even when He does not follow our exact desires, is still kind and favorable to our prayers, so that the hope resting on His Word will never disappoint us. The faithful need to be sustained by this patience, for without it they could not long stand firm. For the Lord tests those who are His with no light trials and exercises them with no gentle hand. He often drives them to the most extreme straits, and once there, He lets them remain stuck in the mud for a long

time before giving them any taste of His sweetness. As Hannah says, He brings death and gives life; He brings down to the grave and raises up. What could they do in such circumstances but sink into discouragement and fall headlong into despair — unless, when they are in distress, forsaken, and already half dead, this thought lifts them up: that God is watching over them and that an end to their troubles is coming? Yet however firmly they hold to that assured hope, they do not stop praying in the meantime — because without steadfast perseverance in prayer, our prayers accomplish nothing.

¶THE. XXI. CHAPITER. OF THE ETERNALL ELECTION, WHEREBY GOD HATH PREDESTINATE SOME TO SALUATION, AND OTHER SOME TO DESTRUCTION.



The covenant of life is not preached equally to all people, and even among those who hear it, it does not find equal or lasting reception. In this diversity the wonderful depth of God's judgment appears. There is no doubt that this diversity also serves the free choice of God's eternal election. It is plain that by God's will salvation is freely offered to some while others are prevented from coming to it. From this arise great and difficult questions that can only be rightly handled if godly minds are firmly grounded in what they should hold concerning election and predestination. Many consider this a troublesome question, thinking nothing more unreasonable than that some people are foreordained to salvation and others to destruction. But it will become clear afterward that they are entangling themselves needlessly. Moreover, in the very darkness that makes people afraid, there shines forth not only the usefulness of this doctrine but also its most sweet fruit. We will never be clearly and firmly persuaded — as we ought to be — that our salvation flows from the fountain of God's free mercy, until we

know His eternal election. It is election that vividly displays God's grace by the contrast it creates: that He does not adopt all people without distinction into hope of salvation, but gives to some what He withholds from others. How much ignorance of this principle diminishes God's glory and withdraws from true humility is plain to see. But Paul insists that what is so necessary to know cannot be known except when God, setting aside all regard for works, chooses those He has predetermined within Himself. 'At the present time,' he says, 'there has also come to be a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is by works, it is no longer on the basis of grace, otherwise work is no longer work.' If we are to be brought back to the source of election — so that it may be certain that salvation comes to us from nowhere but God's sheer generosity — then those who would suppress this principle are doing their utmost to dim what ought to be proclaimed gloriously and openly, and they are tearing up the very root of humility. Paul, in ascribing the salvation of the remnant of Israel to free election, plainly testifies that God saves only those He wills by His sheer good pleasure — not as a reward — and that this is only truly known when the doctrine of election is known. Those who close the door so no one may dare approach this doctrine wrong both humanity and God alike. Nothing else will humble us as we ought to be humbled, and nothing else will make us feel from our heart how much we owe to God. There is also no other solid foundation for genuine confidence. As Christ Himself teaches — to deliver us from all fear and make us unconquerable amid so many dangers, ambushes, and deadly battles — He promises that whatever His Father has given Him to keep will remain safe. From this

we gather that all who do not know themselves to be God's own possession will live in continual trembling and misery. Therefore those who, by refusing to see these three benefits we have touched on, would wish the whole foundation of our salvation to be removed, are doing a terrible disservice to themselves and to all the faithful. Furthermore, the church becomes visible to us through this doctrine — which, as Bernard rightly teaches, could not otherwise be found or known among created things. For in a wonderful way it lies hidden both within the embrace of blessed predestination and within the mass of those destined for condemnation. But before entering the subject itself, I must first address two different kinds of people. Human curiosity — which cannot be restrained from wandering into forbidden territory and climbing where it has no business — has made the doctrine of predestination, which is already somewhat complex by nature, dangerously confused and contentious. Many rush headlong into this presumption, including people who are otherwise not wicked. There is therefore good reason to warn them of the proper limits of their duty here. Let them first remember that when they inquire into predestination, they are entering the hidden chambers of God's wisdom. Anyone who breaks into those chambers carelessly and boldly will not only fail to satisfy his curiosity but will plunge into a maze from which he cannot find his way out. It is not fitting for human beings to freely search out the things God has chosen to keep hidden within Himself — to overturn from eternity the deep heights of His wisdom, which He willed to be honored and not comprehended, so that it might inspire wonder toward Him. Those secrets of His will that He determined to open to us He has disclosed in His Word — precisely as far as He saw it would concern us and benefit us.

'We have come,' says Augustine, 'into the way of faith — let us hold it steadfastly. It leads into the King's chamber, in which all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hidden. For the Lord Christ Himself did not withhold from His excellent and most chosen disciples when He said, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." We must walk forward, we must grow, we must increase, that our hearts may be able to grasp what now we cannot. If the last day finds us still making progress, there we shall learn what here we could not.' If this truth has any power over us — that the Word of the Lord is the only path that can lead us to seek what is lawful to learn of Him, and the only light that can reveal what we ought to see of Him — it will easily hold us back and restrain us from all rashness. For we will know that the moment we step outside the bounds of the Word, we go off the path and into darkness, where we are bound to stray, slip, and stumble. Therefore let this be kept before our eyes: to desire any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God sets forth is no less foolish than wanting to walk an impassable road or to see in total darkness. Let us not be ashamed to remain ignorant in a matter where learned ignorance is the wisest posture. Rather, let us willingly hold back from searching for knowledge that in its excessive craving is foolish, perilous, and even deadly. If the restlessness of our minds provokes us, it will always help to remind ourselves of this: just as too much honey is not good, so the endless searching for glory does not bring glory to the curious. There is good reason to be turned away from a boldness that can do nothing but hurl us headlong into ruin.

Others, wanting to correct this excess, command that all mention of predestination be more or less buried — or at least teach people to avoid every question about it as one avoids a dangerous reef. Their moderation is rightly praised to this extent: they judge that these mysteries should be approached with sobriety. But because they go too far in the other direction, they accomplish little with the human mind, which does not easily allow itself to be restrained. To keep to the right course here as well, we must return to the Word of God, where we have a sure rule of understanding. For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which nothing that is necessary and profitable to know has been left out, and nothing is taught except what is useful to learn. Whatever Scripture says about predestination, we must not block the faithful from it — lest we appear either to spitefully deprive them of the benefit of knowing their God, or to find fault with the Holy Spirit, who has made public what it would in any way be profitable to suppress. Let a Christian person, I say, open his mind and his ears to everything God addresses to him — only with this restraint: that as soon as the Lord has closed His holy mouth, he must also close off the path to further inquiry. The best boundary of sobriety is this: not only in learning to always follow the Lord as He leads, but also when He stops teaching, to stop wanting to know more. The danger these people fear is not so serious that it should make us turn our minds away from the oracles of God. Solomon's saying is notable: 'It is the glory of God to conceal a matter.' But since both godliness and common sense teach that this does not apply to absolutely everything, we must find a proper distinction — lest a crude ignorance please us under the guise of modesty and sobriety. That distinction is plainly stated in a few words by Moses: 'The secret things belong

to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.' He commends the study of the law's teaching to the people for this reason alone: God was pleased to make it public. And he restrains the people within those bounds for this reason alone: it is not lawful for mortal people to force themselves into the secret things of God.

I grant that irreverent people quickly seize on something in the matter of predestination to mock, cavil, or scoff at. But if their mockery is allowed to drive us away from the topic, the central articles of the faith would have to be kept secret — and there is almost no article of faith that such people do not touch with blasphemy. A perverse mind will rant just as proudly when hearing that in God's essence there are three persons as when hearing that God foresaw the fate of humanity when He created them. Nor will they refrain from laughing when told that the world was created only about five thousand years ago — they will ask why God's power was idle and dormant for so long before that. In the end there is nothing that cannot be mocked. Must we then stay silent about the deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit in order to restrain these sacrileges? Must we pass over in silence the creation of the world? Not at all. God's truth is more than strong enough, here and everywhere, to withstand the slanders of the wicked — as Augustine firmly maintains in his work on the gift of perseverance. We see that the false apostles could not, by defaming and attacking Paul's true doctrine, make him ashamed of it. As for the claim that this whole discussion is also dangerous for godly minds — because it works against exhortation, shakes faith, and disturbs the heart — this is empty. Augustine does not hesitate to admit that he was often blamed for preaching predestination too freely. But he had an-

swers ready and thoroughly refuted those objections. We, because so many different objections are pressed here, prefer to address each one in a fitting place. One thing only I ask in general: that what the Lord has kept secret we may not search into, and what He has openly disclosed we may not neglect — lest on the one hand we be condemned for idle curiosity, or on the other for ingratitude. Augustine was right to say that we may safely follow Scripture, which walks at a gentle pace, stooping low so as not to leave our weakness behind. But as for those who are so cautious they would have predestination buried, lest it trouble weak souls — with what justification, I ask, will they cover their own arrogance? They are indirectly accusing God of foolish carelessness, as though He had not foreseen the danger they imagine themselves to have wisely anticipated. Whoever therefore works to bring the doctrine of predestination into disrepute is openly speaking evil of God — as though something had carelessly slipped from God that is harmful to the church.

No one who wants to be considered godly will flatly deny predestination — by which God adopts some into hope of life and condemns others to eternal death. But they bury it in objections, especially those who make foreknowledge the cause of predestination. We say that both foreknowledge and predestination belong to God, but that it is wrong to make one subordinate to the other. When we speak of God's foreknowledge, we mean that all things have always been and continually remain before His eyes — that to His knowledge nothing is future or past, but all things are present. And so present that He does not merely picture them through mental images, as we recall the past, but truly and directly beholds them as set before Him. This foreknowledge extends over the whole of cre-

ation and all creatures. By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He determined within Himself what He willed to become of every person. For not all are created to the same end: eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal condemnation for others. Therefore, as each person is created for one end or the other, we say that he is predestined either to life or to death. God has testified this predestination not only in the case of individuals but has demonstrated it in the entire lineage of Abraham — making plain that the fate of every nation rests in His will. 'When the Most High divided the nations, when He separated the sons of man, the people of Israel were His portion, Jacob His allotted inheritance.' This separation stands before the eyes of all: in the person of Abraham, as from a common stock, one people was specially chosen while all others were passed over. But the cause does not lie in the people themselves — Moses, to cut off all grounds for boasting, teaches that they excelled only because of God's free love. He assigns this as the reason for their deliverance: that God loved the fathers and chose their descendants after them. More plainly in another passage: 'The Lord set His love on you and chose you, not because you were more numerous than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but because the Lord loved you.' Moses often repeats the same warning: 'Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them — you above all peoples.' And again, holiness is commanded of them because they are chosen to be a special people. And love is declared to be the reason for their protection. The faithful declare this in one voice: 'He chose our inheritance for us, the glory of

Jacob whom He loved.' They attributed all the gifts God had adorned them with entirely to His free love — not only because they knew they had earned none of them, but also because even the holy patriarch Abraham had not possessed such virtue as could purchase for himself and his descendants so great an honor. And to press down all pride more firmly, God rebuked them for deserving no such thing — for they were a stubborn and stiff-necked people. Often the prophets threw Israel's election in their face as a reproach, because they had so shamefully turned away from it. Now let those come forward who want to tie God's election to the worthiness of people or the merit of works. When they see one nation preferred above all others, and when they hear that God was moved by no merit to show greater favor to a small, common, even rebellious and disobedient people — will they quarrel with Him for choosing to display such an example of mercy? Their protests will neither hinder His work nor harm His righteousness by hurling insults at heaven — those insults will only fall back upon their own heads. The Israelites are also called back to this principle of the free covenant whenever they give thanks to God or look for hope in what is to come. 'He made us, and we are His; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.' The negative added here — 'not we ourselves' — is not superfluous. It excludes the Israelites themselves from taking any credit, so that they would know that God was not only the source of all their blessings but drew the cause from within Himself — because there was nothing in them worthy of such great honor. He also tells them to be content with God's sheer good pleasure, in these words: 'The descendants of Abraham are His servants, the children of Jacob, His chosen ones.' After recounting God's continued benefits as the fruit of election, the text

concludes that He acted so generously 'because He remembered His covenant.' This teaching agrees with the song of the whole church: 'Your hand drove out the nations and planted them; You afflicted the peoples and spread them abroad — for by Your own sword they did not possess the land, and their own arm did not save them, but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, for You favored them.' It must be noted that where the land is mentioned, it is a visible sign of the hidden separation in which adoption is contained. David also urges the people to thanksgiving: 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage.' And Samuel encourages them to hope: 'The Lord will not abandon His people, for the sake of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.' Likewise David, when his faith is assailed, arms himself: 'Blessed is the one You choose and bring near, to dwell in Your courts.' Since the election hidden in God was confirmed both by the first deliverance and the second, and by other intervening benefits, in Isaiah the word of election is applied to the future restoration: 'The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel' — because by speaking of a future time, Isaiah shows that the gathering of the remnant whom God seemed to have abandoned will be a sign of the stable and steadfast election that once seemed to have collapsed. When God says in another place, 'I have chosen you and have not rejected you,' He sets forth the continuing course of His remarkable fatherly goodness. And still more plainly the angel says in Zechariah: 'The Lord will again choose Jerusalem' — as though in severely disciplining it

He had rejected it, or as though exile were an interruption of election. Yet election remains inviolable, even when its signs are not always visible.

A second degree must be added — one more narrowly focused — in which God's grace appears in a still more particular way: when, from within the same family of Abraham, God passed over some while nurturing others in the church and showing them to be His children. Ishmael had at the beginning the same standing as his brother Isaac, for the spiritual covenant had been sealed in him no less by the sign of circumcision. He was cut off. Then Esau was cut off. And eventually an innumerable multitude — nearly all of Israel — was cut off as well. In Isaac the promised line was called; the same calling continued through Jacob. God showed a similar example in rejecting Saul. And it is gloriously described in the psalm: 'He rejected the tent of Joseph; He did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but He chose the tribe of Judah' (Psalm 78:67-68). The sacred history repeats this pattern several times, so that the wonderful secret of grace may appear more clearly through these changes. Ishmael, Esau, and others like them, I grant, fell away from adoption by their own fault and guilt — because a condition was attached, that they faithfully keep God's covenant, which they falsely broke. Yet it was still a singular benefit of God that He deigned to elevate them above the other nations — as the psalm says: 'He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they have not known His ordinances' (Psalm 147:20). But I have not without reason mentioned two degrees here. In the choosing of the whole nation, God showed that His free generosity is bound by no laws — He is free, and equal portions of grace cannot be demanded from Him. The inequality of what He gives shows that it is truly a free

gift. Therefore Malachi magnifies Israel's ingratitude: not only were they chosen from all humanity, but they were also set apart from a holy family to be a special people — and yet they faithlessly and wickedly despise God their generous Father. 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' he says. 'Yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau' (Malachi 1:2-3). God takes it as settled that since both were born of a holy father and were heirs of the covenant — branches of a holy root — the children of Jacob were more than ordinarily obligated, having been taken into that special dignity. But when the firstborn Esau was passed over and their father — by nature the lesser son — became the heir, God proved them doubly ungrateful and complained that they were not held by this double bond.

It is already sufficiently clear that God by His secret counsel freely chooses whom He will and rejects others. But His free election is only half revealed until we come to individual persons — to whom God not only offers salvation but assigns it in such a way that the certainty of its fulfillment is not in suspense or doubt. For these are counted among that one seed of which Paul speaks. Although adoption was given into Abraham's keeping, many of his descendants were cut off as rotten branches. For election to be effectual and truly steadfast, we must therefore ascend to the Head — in whom the heavenly Father has bound His elect together with one another and knit them to Himself with a bond that cannot be broken. So in the adoption of Abraham's family, God's generous favor shone — the favor He denied to other peoples. But among the members of Christ, a far more excellent measure of grace appears — because being grafted into their Head, they never fall away from salvation. Therefore Paul rightly argues from the passage in Malachi I just cited: where God calls any people to Himself

through a covenant of eternal life, there is within that a special manner of election — He does not effectually choose all with that common grace. When it is said 'I have loved Jacob,' this applies to the entire lineage of the patriarch, which the prophet sets in contrast to the descendants of Esau. Yet this does not prevent the person of that one man from being set before us as an example of an election that cannot go astray but must accomplish its purpose. Paul pointedly calls these elect people 'a remnant' — because experience shows that out of a large multitude many slip away and disappear, so that often only a small portion remains. But why the general election of a people is not always firm and steadfast has a ready answer: when God covenants with people, He does not immediately give them all the Spirit of regeneration, by whose power they would continue in the covenant to the end. The outward change without the inward working of grace — which alone can hold them fast — is a kind of middle state between the abandonment of all humanity and the election of the small number of the godly. The whole people of Israel was called God's inheritance, yet many among them were strangers to true faith. But because God had not made His covenant with them for nothing — promising to be their Father and Redeemer — He looked rather to His own free favor than to the faithless defection of many. Through them His truth was not destroyed, for whenever He preserved a remnant, it was clear that His calling was without repentance. When God chose to gather His church from the children of Abraham rather than from pagan nations, He had regard to His covenant. When the whole multitude broke it, He restricted it to a few, so that it would not utterly fail. In short, the general adoption of Abraham's descendants was a visible image of a greater benefit, which God

granted to a few out of many. This is why Paul so carefully distinguishes between the physical children of Abraham and his spiritual children — those who were called after the pattern of Isaac. Not that being a physical child of Abraham was worthless — that could not be said without dishonoring the covenant — but because God's unchangeable counsel, by which He predestined whom He would, leads effectively to salvation only for this latter group. I warn readers not to bring a preconceived conclusion on either side, until they have seen what Scripture's own passages teach. What Scripture clearly teaches, then, is this: God by eternal and unchangeable counsel has once for all appointed whom He would bring to salvation in time, and on the other side, whom He would condemn to destruction. This counsel toward the elect is grounded in His free mercy, without any regard to human worthiness. But to those He appoints to condemnation, the entry to life is barred by His judgment — a judgment that is just and without reproach, though also incomprehensible. Among the elect, we understand calling as the testimony of election, and justification as another clear sign of it, until they come to the glory in which it is fulfilled. Just as God by calling and justification makes known His elect, so by shutting out the reprobate — either from the knowledge of His name or from the sanctifying work of His Spirit — He as it were marks out by these signs what judgment awaits them. I will pass over here the many invented objections that foolish people have constructed to overthrow predestination. They need no refutation — they expose their own falsehood as soon as they are brought forward. I will deal only with those objections that are disputed

among the learned, that may cause difficulty for simple people, or that ungodliness — with a plausible appearance — uses to mock the righteousness of God.

¶THE .XXII. CHAPTER. A CONFIRMATION OF THIS DOCTRINE BY TESTIMONIES OF THE SCRIPTURE.



Everything we have set forth is disputed by many people, especially the free election of the faithful — yet it cannot be overturned. The common view is that God makes distinctions between people according to what He foresees their merits will be — that He adopts those He foreknows will not be unworthy of His grace, and appoints those whose nature He foresees will tend toward wickedness to the condemnation of death. By covering election with the veil of foreknowledge, they do not only obscure election but invent a different origin for it. I freely admit that this common opinion is not held only by ordinary people — it has had prominent defenders in every age. I say this plainly so that no one trusts that our case is harmed if those names are thrown against us. God's truth here is too certain to be shaken, and too clear to be darkened by human authority. But others — with no serious knowledge of Scripture and worthy of no serious reply — attack this doctrine with a malice too great to deserve patience. Because God, acting from His own will, chooses some and passes by others, they pick a quarrel with Him. But if the thing itself is true, what

will quarreling with God accomplish? We teach nothing except what experience confirms: it has always been God's prerogative to bestow His grace on whom He wills. I will not ask what made Abraham's descendants excel all others — except that voluntary favor which has no cause outside of God Himself. Let these objectors answer why they are human beings rather than oxen or donkeys. When God could have made them dogs, He fashioned them in His own image. Will they allow brute animals to quarrel with God about their condition, as though the difference were unjust? It is no more unjust for God to distribute His benefits according to His own judgment than it is for these objectors to enjoy a privilege they have done nothing to earn. If they shift to the case of individual persons, where the inequality becomes more offensive to them, they ought at least to be silenced by the example of Christ — and afraid to speak so boldly about so high a mystery. He was conceived from the seed of David, a mortal man. By what virtues will they say He deserved to be made in the very womb the Head of angels, the only begotten Son of God, the image and glory of the Father, the light, righteousness, and salvation of the world? Augustine wisely observed that in the very Head of the church there is a perfectly clear mirror of free election — so that it should not trouble us in the members. He was not made the Son of God by righteous living; rather, He was freely given so great an honor so that He might make others partakers of His gifts. If anyone asks why others were not what He was, or why we are all so far below Him, why we are all corrupt while He is pure — such a person betrays not only his foolishness but his shamelessness as well. But if they press on to strip God of the free power to choose and refuse, let them also strip that power from what was given to Christ. Now

it is worth carefully considering what Scripture says about each individual. Paul, when he teaches that we were chosen in Christ, removes all consideration of our own worthiness. It is as though he said: because the heavenly Father found nothing in the entire race of Adam worthy of election, He turned His eyes to His Christ, to choose out of His body, as it were, those He would bring into the fellowship of life. Let this reasoning therefore stand firm among the faithful: we were adopted in Christ into the heavenly inheritance because we in ourselves were incapable of receiving so great an honor. Paul also touches this in another place, when he urges the Colossians to give thanks that God has qualified them to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light (Colossians 1:12). If election precedes this grace of God — by which we are made fit to obtain the glory of eternal life — then what will God find in us that would move Him to elect us? His meaning will be even more plainly expressed by another of his statements: 'He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, according to the kind intention of His will, that we would be holy and blameless before Him' (Ephesians 1:4) — where he sets God's kind intention against all our merits, whatever they may be.

To make the proof stronger, it is worth carefully noting all the parts of that passage — which, taken together, leave no room for doubt. When Paul names the elect, he is without question speaking to the faithful, as he immediately confirms afterward. Therefore those who twist that term to refer only to the age when the Gospel was first proclaimed are engaging in a grossly distorted reading. When he says they were chosen before the beginning of the world, he removes all consideration of worthiness. For what basis of distinction exists between those who did not yet exist and those who

would later be equal in Adam? And since they are chosen in Christ, it follows not only that each one is set apart from himself but also that they are distinguished from one another — since clearly not all are members of Christ. The added statement — that they were chosen in order to be holy — plainly refutes the error that derives election from foreknowledge. Paul cries out against this, declaring that whatever virtue appears in people is the effect of election, not its cause. If a higher cause is asked, Paul answers: God so predestined — and He did so according to the kind intention of His will (Ephesians 1:5). In these words he overthrows every basis of election that people imagine to exist within themselves. He also teaches that all the gifts God bestows for spiritual life flow from this one source: that God chose whom He would, and before they were born He had individually reserved for them the grace He was pleased to give them.

But wherever God's good pleasure reigns, works have no place to stand. Paul does not draw out this contrast in full here, but it is to be understood as he himself explains it. 'He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity' (2 Timothy 1:9). We have already shown that all doubt is removed by what follows: 'that we would be holy and blameless.' For if you say, 'He chose us because He foresaw we would be holy,' you reverse Paul's order. You may therefore safely draw this conclusion: if He chose us in order that we might be holy, then He did not choose us because He foresaw that we would be holy. These two things are opposites: that the godly receive their holiness from election, and that they come to election by means of works. The familiar escape they run to is worthless —

that God does not give the grace of election as a reward for past works but grants it in consideration of future works. For when it is said the faithful were chosen in order that they might be holy, it is clearly stated that the holiness that would come to them had its beginning in election. And how can it be made to agree that the very things derived from election are what gave rise to election? He seems to reinforce this further by adding: 'according to the purpose of His will, which He purposed in Himself' (Ephesians 1:11). To say that God purposed in Himself is in effect saying that He looked to nothing outside of Himself in making His decree. He then immediately adds that the whole aim of our election is 'to the praise of the glory of His grace' (Ephesians 1:6). Truly, God's grace deserves praise in our election only if that election is free. But it will not be free if God, in choosing His people, takes into account what each person's works will be. Therefore we find that what Christ said to His disciples applies universally to all the faithful: 'You did not choose Me, but I chose you' (John 15:16). He not only excludes past merit but also indicates that they had nothing in themselves that made them worthy to be chosen — had He not first met them with His mercy. This must also be understood in light of Paul's words: 'Who has first given to Him that He should be repaid?' (Romans 11:35). He means to show that God's goodness comes to people first — finding in them nothing, past or future, that could win His favor toward them.

In writing to the Romans, where Paul addresses this question more thoroughly and at greater length, he denies that all who are descended from Israel are truly Israel — for though they all received the blessing by right of heritage, that succession did not pass equally to all. The dispute arose from the pride and self-serv-

ing boasting of the Jewish people. For when they claimed the name of the church for themselves, they wanted the credibility of the Gospel to depend on their own approval — just as the Roman church today gladly uses this disguise to thrust itself into the place of God. Paul, while granting that the offspring of Abraham is holy by reason of the covenant, affirms that the majority of them are strangers to it — not only because they have fallen away from true sonship and become as it were illegitimate children, but because God's special election stands above and governs all, and it alone makes the adoption secure. If the godliness of some established them in hope of salvation and their own falling away alone disinherited others, Paul would have been both foolish and pointless to lift his readers' eyes to the hidden counsel of election. But if God's will — whose cause neither appears nor is to be sought outside of Himself — is what distinguishes one group from another, so that not all children of Israel are true Israelites, then the claim that every person's standing originates in himself is baseless. Paul then pursues the matter further under the example of Jacob and Esau. Both were sons of Abraham, both enclosed together in the same womb — and yet it was a startling reversal that the honor of the firstborn was transferred to Jacob. In this reversal Paul affirms that the election of the one and the rejection of the other were testified. The question of origin and cause is asked, and those who hold to foreknowledge want it to be found in the virtues and vices of the men themselves. Their neat short answer is this: God showed in the person of Jacob that He chooses those worthy of His grace, and in the person of Esau He passes by those He foreknows to be unworthy. This they say boldly. But what does Paul say? 'For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything

good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:11-13). If foreknowledge had any part in this difference between the brothers, there would be no point in mentioning the timing. Suppose we grant that Jacob was chosen because he had merit from future works — why would Paul say that he was not yet born? Someone may object that this was a pointless detail to add — since nothing is hidden from God, and Jacob's godliness was present before Him. But if works earn grace, then their value should have existed before Jacob was born, as though he had already lived his life. The apostle presses on to untangle this knot and teaches that Jacob's adoption rested not on works but on God's calling. He leaves out entirely any mention of past or future works, then sets them directly in opposition to God's calling — making plain by affirming one that he is explicitly overturning the other. It is as if he said: what matters is what God was pleased to do, not what people bring from themselves. Finally, it is certain that by the words 'election' and 'purpose,' Paul removes from the matter every cause that people are accustomed to invent outside of God's secret counsel.

What excuse can those offer who assign some role to past or future works in election? They are mocking the apostle's plain declaration that the distinction between the brothers rests on no consideration of works at all, but solely on God's calling — because it was settled between them before they were yet born. Paul was well aware of their subtle escape, had it carried any weight. But because he knew very well that God cannot foresee any goodness in a person except what He has first determined through the gift of elec-

tion to bestow upon him, he refuses to resort to that inverted logic of placing good works before the cause of those works. So we have from the apostle's own words that the salvation of the faithful is founded on the will of God's sole election alone — and that this favor is not earned by works but comes from His free calling. We also have a concrete picture set before us. Esau and Jacob are brothers, born of the same parents, enclosed together in one womb, not yet brought into the world. In them all circumstances are equal, yet God's judgment is different for each. He takes the one and passes by the other. Nothing distinguished them except the right of the firstborn — by which one surpassed the other. But even this was passed over: what was denied to the elder was given to the younger. Indeed, God seems throughout history to have deliberately set aside the firstborn, as if on purpose, to cut off all grounds for fleshly boasting. Passing over Ishmael, He turned to Isaac. Pushing aside Manasseh, He honored Ephraim.

If someone objects that we should not use these lesser earthly blessings to determine what belongs to eternal life — arguing that receiving the honor of the firstborn does not mean being adopted into the heavenly inheritance — and if some even spare not Paul himself, as though in citing these texts he had twisted Scripture to a foreign meaning, I answer as before: the apostle neither stumbled by carelessness nor willfully misused Scripture. He saw — what these objectors cannot bear to consider — that God intended by an earthly sign to declare the spiritual election of Jacob, which was otherwise hidden in His inaccessible counsel. For unless the firstborn birthright given to Jacob points forward to the world to come, it would be a hollow and foolish form of blessing by which he obtained nothing but many miseries, disappointments, painful

exile, and bitter sorrow and care. When Paul saw without question that God by this outward blessing was testifying to the spiritual and imperishable blessing He had prepared for His servant in His kingdom, he did not hesitate to draw his argument for that spiritual blessing from the outward one. We must also remember that the land of Canaan was joined to the pledge of the heavenly dwelling — so there is no reason to doubt that Jacob was grafted together with the angels into the body of Christ to be a partaker of the same life. Jacob is therefore chosen while Esau is rejected — and by God's predestination he is distinguished from one from whom he differed in no deserving. If you ask for a cause, the apostle supplies this one: because it was said to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion' (Romans 9:15). And what does this mean? Truly, the Lord Himself declares most plainly that people have nothing in themselves that gives Him reason to do good to them — He draws the cause from His mercy alone. Therefore the salvation of His people is His own work. When God places your salvation in Himself alone, why will you look to yourself? When He assigns to you His mercy alone, why will you run to your own merits? When He fixes your gaze entirely on His mercifulness, why will you turn part of your attention to your own works? We must therefore come to that smaller group which Paul in another place says was foreknown by God (Romans 11:2) — not in the way these people imagine, as though God had foreknown from a detached watchtower things that He Himself had not worked, but in the sense the word commonly carries in Scripture. Indeed, when Peter in Acts says that Christ was delivered up by the determined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), he does not present God as

a passive observer but as the author of our salvation. So Peter, when he writes that the faithful to whom he wrote were chosen according to God's foreknowledge (1 Peter 1:2), is properly expressing that hidden predestination by which God marked as His children those He would have. And the word 'purpose,' which he joins as an equivalent term, signifying a firm and settled determination, unmistakably teaches that God, as the author of our salvation, goes no further than Himself. In this same sense Peter says in that passage that Christ was the lamb foreknown before the creation of the world. For what is more foolish and trivial than to say that God stood by watching from on high to see from what direction salvation would come to humanity? Therefore in Paul, the foreknown people are simply a small portion hidden within the larger multitude that falsely claims God's name. Paul says in another place, to put down the boasting of those who under a false pretense take first place among the godly before the world: 'The Lord knows those who are His' (2 Timothy 2:19). Paul is pointing to two groups: first, the whole family of Abraham; and second, those chosen out of it individually — a group stored up before God's eyes but hidden from human sight. And without doubt Paul drew this from Moses, who affirms that God will be merciful to whom He will be merciful — though there Moses was speaking of the chosen people, whose outward condition appeared equal. It is as if Moses had said that contained within the general adoption is a special grace toward some — a more sacred treasure, as it were. The common covenant does not prevent that small number from being set apart in degree. God, wanting to be the free sovereign ruler of this thing, expressly refuses to give any other reason for being merciful to one rather than another except that it pleases Him — because when

mercy reaches the one who seeks it, though that person is not turned away, he either anticipates or partly appropriates for himself the favor of which God claims the full credit.

Now let the sovereign Judge and Master pronounce on the whole matter. When Christ saw such great hardness in His hearers — so that He was in effect wasting His words on the unresponsive multitude — He cried out to correct this offense: 'All that the Father gives Me will come to Me.' And: 'This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing' (John 6:37, 39). Note that the beginning point is the Father's gift — so that we are entrusted into the faithful keeping and care of Christ. Some may try to circle back and object that only those who come voluntarily through faith are counted as properly belonging to the Father. But Christ's whole point is this: even when the defections of great multitudes shake the world, God's counsel will stand more firmly than the heavens themselves, so that His election may never fail. They are called the Father's elect before He gave them to His only begotten Son. You may ask whether they came by nature — but no, those who were strangers He made His own by drawing them to Himself. Christ's words are too clear to be clouded by any evasion. 'No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him' (John 6:44). 'Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me' (John 6:45). If all people without distinction were to bow the knee before Christ, then election would be universal. But the small number of believers makes a visible distinction plain. Therefore, after Christ affirmed that the disciples given to Him were the special possession of God the Father, He added shortly after: 'I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours' (John 17:9).

This proves that the whole world does not belong to its Creator in the same way — that grace delivers a few from God's wrath and eternal death, who would otherwise have perished, while the world itself is left to the destruction to which it was appointed. In the meantime, though Christ stands between, He claims for Himself together with the Father the right of choosing. 'I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen' (John 13:18). If you ask where He has chosen them from, He answers in another place: out of the world — which He explicitly excludes from His prayer when He commends His disciples to the Father. This must be grasped: when He says He knows whom He has chosen, it points to a particular group within the general mass of humanity. And this particular group is made different not by the quality of their own virtues but by the heavenly decree. From this it follows that many people excel by their own effort and diligence, while Christ declares Himself the author of election. When Christ elsewhere numbers Judas among the elect, this refers only to the office of apostleship. Though the apostolic office is a clear display of God's favor — as Paul so often acknowledges in his own case — it does not in itself carry the hope of eternal salvation. Judas therefore, having faithlessly held the office of apostle, could prove himself worse than a devil. But those whom Christ has once grafted into His body, He will allow none to perish — for in preserving their salvation He will fulfill what He has promised: that He will exercise the power of God, which is greater than all. When He says elsewhere: 'Father, of those whom You have given Me I lost not one except the son of destruction' (John 17:12) — although this is a figurative way of speaking, its meaning is not in doubt. The sum is this: God makes those

His children by free adoption whom He wills to be His children, and the inward cause of this is in Himself — because He is content with His own secret good pleasure.

Ambrose, Origen, and Jerome held that God distributes His grace among people according to what He foresees each will do with it. Augustine once held this same view. But after further growth in his knowledge of Scripture, he not only retracted it as plainly false but strongly refuted it. Indeed, after retracting it, while rebuking the Pelagians for persisting in the same error, he says: 'Who can fail to marvel that the apostle was ignorant of this most subtle point? For when he had set forth something astounding concerning the brothers — that before they were born God had made a distinction between them — and then raised the objection against himself, "What then, is there injustice with God?" — here was the ideal moment to answer that God had foreseen the merits of them both. Yet he does not say this but takes refuge in the judgments and mercy of God.' And in another place, after taking away all merits before election: 'Here is refuted the empty reasoning of those who defend God's foreknowledge against God's grace, saying that we were chosen before the foundation of the world because God foreknew we would be good — not that He Himself would make us good. But He who says, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you," does not say this. For if He had chosen us because He foresaw we would be good, He would also have foreknown that we would choose Him — and so on.' Let the testimony of Augustine carry weight with those who willingly rest in the authority of the fathers. Augustine, moreover, does not allow himself to be separated from the others but shows by plain testimonies that the disagreement charged against him by the Pelagians is

false. For in the nineteenth chapter of his work on the predestination of the saints, he cites Ambrose: 'Christ calls those on whom He has mercy.' And again: 'If He had willed, He could have made the ungodly devout. But God calls those He chooses, and makes religious those He wills.' If I wanted to compile an entire volume from Augustine, I could readily show the reader that I need no other words but his. But I will not burden them with too much. Let us, however, set all of that aside and attend to the matter itself. A difficult question was raised: whether God acted rightly in extending His grace to some but not others. Paul could have resolved this in a single word if He had appealed to the consideration of works. Why then does he not do so — but instead continues a discussion that remains equally difficult? Because he should not. The Holy Spirit who spoke through his mouth was not afflicted with forgetfulness. Without qualification, then, he answers: God favors His elect because He wills to; He has mercy because He wills to. For this divine oracle — 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will show compassion on whom I have compassion' — amounts to saying that God is moved to mercy by no other reason than that He wills to be merciful. Augustine's statement therefore stands true: the grace of God does not find people worthy of being chosen — it makes them worthy.

We pay no heed to Thomas's subtle distinction — that the foreknowledge of merits is not truly the cause of predestination on the side of the one who predestines, but may in a certain sense be called a cause on our side: as when it is said that God predestines glory to a person by merits, because He has decreed to give that person grace by which they may merit glory. For since in election the Lord would have us look to nothing but His sheer goodness,

anyone who wants to see more than that is guilty of wrongful greed. If we wished to match subtle arguments with subtle arguments, we are not without the means to counter Thomas's empty cleverness. He claims that glory is in a certain sense predestined to the elect together with the grace by which they may merit glory. But what if I answer in the opposite direction and say that predestination to grace serves election to life, and is as it were its attendant? That grace is predestined for those for whom the possession of glory was appointed long ago — because it pleases the Lord to bring His children from election through to justification? For from that it would follow that predestination to glory is rather the cause of predestination to grace than the reverse. But let us be done with these quarrels — they are superfluous for those who find wisdom enough in the Word of God. For an ancient church writer rightly said: those who assign God's election to merits are wiser than they ought to be.

Some object that God would be contradicting Himself if He universally called all people to Himself and yet received only a few elect. In their view, the universality of the promise eliminates the distinction of special grace. Some sober-minded people say this not so much to attack the truth as to sidestep elevated questions and restrain the curiosity of many. Their intention is praiseworthy, but their approach cannot be approved — evasion by clever detours is never justified. But the objection raised by those who attack this doctrine more aggressively is either too foolish or too embarrassingly wrong. I have already explained elsewhere how Scripture holds together these two truths — that through outward preaching all people are called to repentance and faith, and yet the Spirit of repentance and faith is not given to all. A little of that

must be repeated shortly. For now, I deny what they demand, since it is wrong in two ways. He who threatens that while it rains on one city, another will suffer drought — and who declares that another place will have a famine of God's Word — does not bind Himself by any law to call all people equally. And He who forbade Paul to speak in Asia, turned him away from Bithynia, and drew him into Macedonia, shows that it is in His own sovereign power to distribute this treasure to whomever He pleases. He makes this even clearer through Isaiah, where He directs the promises of salvation specifically to the elect — saying of them alone, not of all people indiscriminately, that they will be His disciples. From this it is certain that the doctrine of salvation is wrongly said to be open equally to all for effective benefit, when Scripture says it is stored up separately for the children of the church. For now, let it be enough to say: although the voice of the Gospel speaks broadly to all, the gift of faith is rare. Isaiah gives the reason: because the Lord's arm is not revealed to all. If he had said that the Gospel is despised with malice and willfulness, because many stubbornly refuse to hear, perhaps this excuse about universal calling would carry some weight. But the prophet's point is not to reduce human guilt. He is teaching that because faith is a special gift, outward preaching rings in deaf ears unless God opens His arm to them. He is warning that the outward word, beaten into the ear, accomplishes nothing by itself. But I would like to ask these teachers: what makes people children of God — preaching alone, or faith? When John 1 says that those who believe in the only begotten Son of God are themselves made children of God, this is not a jumbled mass — it establishes a specific order for the faithful, who are born not of blood, nor of human will, nor of man's will, but of God. They

may say there is a mutual joining of faith with the Word — wherever faith is, the Word is. But it is nothing new that seed falls among thorns or on rocky ground — not only because the majority appear openly resistant to God, but also because not all people have eyes to see and ears to hear. How then can it be consistent that God calls those He knows will not come? Let Augustine answer for me: 'Will you dispute with me? Marvel with me instead, and cry out, "O the depth!" Let us both agree in fear, lest we perish in error.' Moreover, if election — as Paul testifies — is the mother of faith, I turn the argument back on their own heads: faith is not universal because election is specific. For by the natural connection of causes and effects, it is easily gathered that where Paul says we are blessed with every spiritual blessing because God chose us before the creation of the world, these riches are not common to all — because God chose only those He willed. That is why Paul in another place praises the faith of the elect — lest anyone think that a person obtains faith by his own effort — so that the glory remains with God, that He freely enlightens those He had chosen beforehand. Bernard says it rightly: 'Friends hear individually — to them He also says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Who are these? Even those whom He foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. A great and secret counsel is made known. The Lord knew who are His. But what was known to God is now made manifest to people. And He deigns to make no others partakers of so great a mystery except the very ones He foreknew and predestined to be His.' A little later Bernard concludes: 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him — from everlasting by predestination, to everlasting by glorification:

the one having no beginning, the other no end.' But why do I need to cite Bernard as a witness when we hear from the Master's own mouth that none can see unless they are of God? By these words He indicates that all who are not born again of God are dazzled and blinded by the brightness of His countenance. Faith is rightly joined to election — taking second place in order. Christ's words clearly express this order elsewhere: 'This is the will of My Father, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing' (John 6:39). And: 'This is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life' (John 6:40). If He wished all to be saved, He would appoint His Son as keeper over all, and would graft them all into His body by the holy bond of faith. But it is certain that faith is a special pledge of His fatherly love, reserved for His children whom He has adopted. Therefore Christ says elsewhere that the sheep follow the shepherd because they know His voice, but do not follow a stranger because they do not know the stranger's voice. Where does this difference come from, if not that their ears have been opened by God? For no one makes himself a sheep — he is made one by heavenly grace. For this reason also the Lord teaches that our salvation will always be secure and out of danger, because it is guarded by the invincible power of God. He therefore concludes that unbelievers are not His sheep — because they are not among those whom God promised through Isaiah would be His disciples. And since the passages I have cited include perseverance, they also testify to the unshakable certainty of election.

Now let us speak of the reprobate, whom the apostle brings in here alongside the elect. For just as Jacob — having yet earned nothing by good works — is received into grace, so Esau — not yet

stained by any wicked deed — is rejected. If we shift our eyes to works, we are doing wrong to the apostle, as though he had failed to see what we clearly see. But he did not see works as the cause — as is plain from the fact that he expressly presses the point that when neither had done anything good or evil, one was chosen and the other refused, precisely to prove that the foundation of God's predestination is not in works. Again, when he raises the objection whether God is unrighteous, he does not appeal to the most obvious and direct defense of God's righteousness — namely that God repaid Esau according to his wickedness. Instead, he is content with another answer: that the reprobate are raised up for this purpose, that God's glory may be displayed through them. He then adds his concluding statement: God has mercy on whom He wills, and He hardens whom He wills (Romans 9:18). Do you not see how he traces both back to the sole will of God? Therefore, if we cannot state any reason why God grants mercy to those who are His other than that it pleases Him, so also we will have no other reason for the rejection of others than His own will. For when Scripture says that God hardens or shows mercy to whom He wills, people are thereby directed to seek no cause beyond His will.

¶THE .XXIII. CHAPITER. A
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When the human mind hears these things, its stubbornness cannot be held back — it rushes into conflict from every side, as though provoked by a battle trumpet. Many people, as though trying to clear God of wrongdoing, accept election but deny that any are reprobate. But they do this foolishly and childishly — because election itself cannot stand unless it is set in contrast with reprobation. God is said to set apart those He adopts to salvation. It would be more than foolish to say that others attain by chance or by their own effort what election gives to only a few. Therefore those whom God passes over He rejects — for no other reason than that He chooses to exclude them from the inheritance He predestined for His children. The stubbornness of people is intolerable if it will not submit to the Word of God when God's incomprehensible counsel is at issue — counsel that the angels themselves worship. We have already heard that hardening is no less in the hand and will of God than mercy. Paul does not busy himself

with defending God through dishonest excuses, as these people do. He simply teaches that it is not lawful for the thing formed to quarrel with its maker. Now, those who will not admit that any are rejected by God — how will they handle Christ's statement: 'Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted' (Matthew 15:13)? They hear plainly that all those whom the heavenly Father did not plant as holy trees in His ground are condemned to destruction. If they deny this is a sign of reprobation, then nothing could be plain enough to prove it to them. But if they persist in quarreling, the sobriety of faith must be content with Paul's warning: there is no reason to quarrel with God if — willing on the one hand to display His wrath and make His power known — He bears with long patience the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and on the other hand makes known the riches of His glory toward the vessels of mercy which He prepared for glory. Readers should note how Paul, to cut off all grumbling and murmuring, gives supreme authority to God's wrath and power — because it is unjust to subject to our judgment those deep counsels that overwhelm all our understanding. The objection of our opponents is very flimsy — that God does not completely reject those with whom He bears patiently, but remains toward them in a kind of suspense, waiting to see if they might repent. As though Paul gives God a waiting posture toward those he says are made for destruction. Augustine rightly says in expounding this passage: 'Where power is joined with patience, God does not merely endure — He governs by His power.' They further argue that it is not for nothing that the vessels of mercy are said to be 'prepared by God,' while the vessels of wrath are said to be 'prepared to destruction' — the difference in language, they say, shows that God claims the

praise of salvation for Himself while casting the blame for destruction on those who bring it upon themselves by their own will. I grant that Paul by this variation in wording did soften the rough edge of the first part. Yet it is not right to assign the preparing for destruction to anything other than the secret counsel of God — which is also affirmed just before in the same passage. God stirred up Pharaoh; He hardens whom He wills. From this it follows that God's hidden counsel is the cause of hardening. At the very least I receive what Augustine says: when God turns wolves into sheep, He reforms them with a stronger grace — enough to tame their hardness. And therefore God does not convert the obstinate because He does not display in them that stronger grace, which He is not lacking should He choose to display it.

These words should be enough for the godly and sober, who remember that they are only human. But since these venomous attackers hurl not just one kind of poison against God, we will answer each objection as occasion demands. Foolish people quarrel with God in various ways, as though they had Him on trial before their accusations. First, they ask by what right the Lord is angry with His creatures, when they have not first provoked Him by any offense — for to condemn to destruction whoever He wills looks more like the caprice of a tyrant than the lawful sentence of a judge. Therefore, they say, people have grounds to charge God if they are predestinated to eternal death by His bare will, without any deserving of their own. If thoughts like these ever press upon the godly, this alone — if they have nothing else — should be enough to break their violent force: the consideration of how great a wickedness it is even to inquire into the causes of God's will. Since God's will is the cause of all that is, it rightly ought to be so.

For if God's will had a cause, then something would have to precede it to which it would be bound — which it is not lawful even to imagine. The will of God is the highest rule of righteousness. Whatever He wills, for the very reason that He wills it, ought to be taken as right. When therefore the question is asked, 'Why did the Lord do it?' the answer is: because He willed it. If you press further and ask why He willed it, you are asking for something greater and higher than the will of God — which does not exist. Therefore let human rashness hold itself back and not search for what is not, lest it fail to find what is. This bridle, I say, will rightly restrain whoever will discuss God's secrets with reverence. As for the boldness of the wicked who do not shrink from openly speaking evil of God — the Lord will sufficiently defend Himself by His own righteousness, without any defense from us, when He strips all evasion from their consciences, holds them tightly convicted, and condemns them. We are not inventing the false device of an 'absolute power' — which, being godless in its conception, we rightly abhor. We do not imagine God as lawless. He is a law to Himself — because, as Plato says, laws are needed by human beings who are troubled by unlawful desires. But God's will is not only pure from all fault; it is the highest standard of perfection and indeed the law of all laws. But we do deny that He is required to give an account. We also deny that we are fit judges to pronounce on this matter by our own reasoning. Therefore, if we press further than is lawful, let that warning of the psalm bring us to fear: that God will prevail every time He is judged by any mortal man.

God could silence His enemies by saying nothing at all. But so that we may not allow them to mock His holy name unchallenged, He equips us from His Word with weapons against them.

Therefore if someone attacks us with this question — why God from the beginning predestined some to death, who when they did not yet exist could not have deserved the sentence of death — we may answer by turning the question back: what do they think God owes to humanity, if He judges it according to its own nature? Since we are all corrupted with sin, we cannot but be hateful to God — not through tyrannical cruelty on His part, but by the completely righteous logic of justice. If all those whom the Lord predestines to death are, by their natural condition, already subject to the sentence of death — of what injustice against themselves may they complain? Let all the sons of Adam come — let them strive and dispute with their Creator that by His eternal providence they were condemned to everlasting misery before they were born. What can they possibly mutter in reply, when God on His side calls them to examine themselves? If they are all drawn from a corrupt source, it is no wonder they are subject to condemnation. Let them not therefore accuse God of injustice if by His eternal judgment they are appointed to death — to which they themselves, whether they will or not, feel themselves drawn by their own nature. This reveals how wrongful their murmuring is: they deliberately hide the cause of condemnation that they are forced to acknowledge within themselves, hoping that by blaming God they can absolve themselves. But though I grant a hundred times over — as is entirely true — that God is the author of it, this does not wipe away the guilt that is engraved in their consciences and presents itself again and again to their eyes.

Again they object: were these people not predestinated by God's decree to the very corruption that is now alleged as the cause of their condemnation? When they perish in their corruption, they

are only suffering the punishment of the misery into which Adam fell by God's predestination and into which he dragged his descendants headlong. Is God not unjust, then, for so cruelly mocking His creatures? I grant that all the children of Adam fell by God's will into that miserable condition in which they are now held. And this is what I said at the outset — that we must always come back to the determination of God's will, the cause of which is hidden within Himself. But it does not immediately follow that God is subject to this slander. We will answer them as Paul does: 'O man, who are you to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has not the potter a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?' (Romans 9:20-21). They will say that this is not a real defense of God's righteousness — merely an evasion of the kind used by those who lack a just excuse. For what is being said here, they argue, other than that God has a power that cannot be prevented from doing whatever He wills? But it is far otherwise. What stronger reason can be given than to be directed to think about what kind of God He is? For how could He commit any injustice — He who is the judge of the whole world? If it belongs to God's very nature to execute judgment, then He naturally loves righteousness and abhors unrighteousness. Therefore the apostle was not looking for a hiding place when pressed. He was showing that the righteousness of God is too high to be measured by a human standard or grasped by the limited capacity of human understanding. The apostle acknowledges that there is such depth in God's judgments that human minds would be swallowed up if they tried to penetrate it. But he also teaches what a serious wrong it is to bind God's works to a human law — so that as soon as we

cannot understand His reason, we feel justified in disapproving them. Solomon's well-known saying is understood by few: 'The great God who created everything renders to the fool his due, and renders to transgressors their due' (Proverbs 26:10). He is proclaiming the greatness of God — in whose will it lies to punish fools and transgressors, even though He does not give them His Spirit. It is monstrous madness that people desire to subject what is immeasurable to the small measure of their own reason. The angels who remained upright Paul calls elect. If their steadfastness was grounded in God's good pleasure, then the fall of the others shows they were abandoned — and no other cause can be assigned for that than reprobation, hidden in God's secret counsel.

Come then — let a Manichee or a Celestine, a slanderer of God's providence, step forward. I say with Paul that no reason is owed for it — because in its greatness it far surpasses our understanding. What is so remarkable or absurd about this? Would one have God's power limited so that it can accomplish no more than the human mind can conceive? I say with Augustine: they were created by the Lord — and He undoubtedly foreknew they would go to destruction. It was done because He willed it. But why He willed it, we cannot comprehend — and it is not our place to demand a reason. Nor is it fitting that the purpose of God should be brought before our tribunal. For whenever it is mentioned, what is named by that word is the highest rule of righteousness. Why then raise any question about injustice where righteousness clearly appears? Let us not be ashamed, following Paul's example, to silence the mouths of the wicked — and as often as they dare to bark, to repeat: 'Who are you, miserable people, to bring a charge against God?' Do you bring it against Him because He does not scale down

the greatness of His works to fit your dullness? As though His works were unjust simply because they are hidden from flesh. The immeasurable depth of God's judgments is plainly known to you. You know they are called 'the deep' — an unfathomable abyss. Now ask your narrow intellect whether it can comprehend what God has decreed within Himself. What good does it do to plunge yourself with frantic searching into the bottomless depth, when reason itself tells you this will lead to your destruction? Why are you not at least restrained by the awe that both the book of Job and the prophets inspire when they speak of God's incomprehensible wisdom and terrible power? If your mind is unsettled, take comfort in Augustine's counsel: 'You — being a man — look for an answer from me. I too am a man. Therefore let us both hear the One who says, "O man, who are you?" Better is a faithful ignorance than rash knowledge. Seek for merits — you will find nothing but punishment. O the depth! Peter denies, yet the thief believes. O the depth! Do you seek a reason? I will tremble at the depth. You reason — I will wonder. You dispute — I will believe. I see the depth, but I cannot reach the bottom. Paul stopped because he found only wonder. He calls the judgments of God unsearchable — and have you come to search them? He says His ways are impossible to trace — and yet you trace them?' We will gain nothing by going further. We will not satisfy their restless curiosity. The Lord needs no other defense than what He has already provided through His Spirit speaking by the mouth of Paul. And we lose the ability to speak rightly when we cease to speak with God.

Their other objection also springs from ungodliness, though it aims not so much at accusing God as at excusing the sinner. Yet a sinner condemned by God cannot be justified without dishonoring

the Judge. So irreverent voices bark against God: 'Why should God charge as sin the things that His predestination has made necessary for people? What are they supposed to do? Should they fight against His decrees? That would be futile since it is impossible. Therefore they are not rightly punished for things whose cause lies in God's predestination.' Here I will leave aside the defense to which church writers commonly retreat — namely, that God's foreknowledge does not prevent the person from being counted the sinner, since God foresees the evil in the person, not in Himself. For the objection would not stop there but would press further: God could have provided a remedy for the evils He foresaw, and since He did not, He deliberately created people for this end — that they should conduct themselves as they do. And if by God's providence a person was created in this condition — to do all that he does — he cannot rightly be blamed for what he could not avoid and what he undertook by God's will. Let us therefore see how this knot ought to be properly untied. First, this saying of Solomon should be held as certain by all: 'The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil' (Proverbs 16:4). Behold — when the ordering of all things is in God's hand, and the rule of life and death rests in His power, He orders them by His counsel and decree so that among human beings some are born condemned even from their mother's womb to death — that through their destruction He may glorify His name. If someone answers that God's providence lays no necessity upon them — that He created them in such a condition only because He foresaw their future perverseness — he is saying something, but not really resolving anything. The older writers sometimes use this solution, but somewhat tentatively. The Scholastics rest on it as though it

were unanswerable. I am willing to grant that foreknowledge alone does not impose necessity on creatures — though not all agree on this, since some hold that foreknowledge is also the cause of things. But it seems to me that Valla — a man not otherwise deeply versed in sacred writings — saw both more deeply and wisely when he showed that the whole dispute is superfluous, because both life and death are actions of God's will rather than of His foreknowledge. If God merely foresaw the outcomes of human affairs without also ordering and arranging them by His will, there would be some reason to debate whether His foreseeing something imposed necessity on it. But since He foresees what will come to pass only because He has decreed that it shall come to pass, it is pointless to argue about foreknowledge when it is certain that all things happen by His ordinance and command.

They say it is not written in so many words that God decreed Adam's fall. As though the same God, whom Scripture says does whatever He wills, created the most noble of all His creatures toward an uncertain end. They say Adam had free will to shape his own destiny, and that God decreed nothing except to deal with him according to his deserving. If so weak a solution is accepted, where is the almighty power of God by which He governs all things according to His secret counsel — counsel that depends on nothing outside itself? But predestination shows itself in Adam's descendants, whether people want it to or not. It did not happen by natural causes that all humanity should lose salvation through the fault of one parent. What prevents them from acknowledging in one man what they are forced to acknowledge against their will regarding all of humanity? Why exhaust themselves with evasive games? Scripture declares plainly that in the person of one man all people

were made slaves of eternal death. Since this cannot be attributed to nature, it is clear it proceeded from the wonderful counsel of God. But there is far too much absurdity in these defenders of God's righteousness stumbling over a straw while leaping over enormous beams. I ask again: how did it come to pass that Adam's fall plunged so many nations — along with their infant children — into eternal death without remedy, unless it pleased God? Here the tongues that are otherwise so talkative must fall silent. It is indeed a fearful decree. Yet no one will be able to deny that God foreknew what end humanity would come to before He created it — and He foreknew it because He had so ordained it by His decree. If someone attacks God's foreknowledge here, he stumbles rashly and carelessly. For what reason is there to charge the heavenly Judge simply for not being ignorant of what was coming? Therefore, if there is any just or plausible complaint, it touches predestination. Nor should what I say seem absurd — that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also arranged it according to His own will. For just as it belongs to His wisdom to foreknow all things that will be, so it belongs to His power to govern and direct all things with His hand. Augustine discusses this very well, as he does other matters: 'We most healthfully confess what we most rightly believe — that God and Lord of all things, who created all things very good and foreknew that evil things would rise out of good, and knew that it pertained more to His almighty goodness to do good even out of evil things than not to permit them to be evil, so ordered the life of angels and of men that He might first show in it what free will could do, and then what the benefit of His grace and the sentence of His justice could do.'

Here they retreat to the distinction between will and permission — claiming that the wicked perish by God's permission, not His will. But why do we say He permits it, except that He wills it? Moreover, it is not credible that the human being by himself alone, through God's bare permission without any ordinance, brought ruin upon himself — as though God did not determine what condition He would have the chief of His creatures be in. I will therefore not hesitate to confess plainly with Augustine: the will of God is the necessity of things, and what He wills must of necessity come to pass — just as those things He has foreseen will truly come to pass. Now if the Pelagians, Manichees, Anabaptists, or Epicureans — for we are dealing with these four groups in this question — should plead on their own behalf or on behalf of the ungodly the necessity imposed by God's predestination, they bring forward nothing that helps their case. For if predestination is nothing other than a dispensation of God's righteousness — hidden indeed, but still without fault — it is as certain that they were not undeserving of being predestined to that condition as it is that the destruction they enter through predestination is entirely just. Moreover, their destruction hangs upon God's predestination in such a way that its cause and material are found within themselves. For the first man fell because the Lord judged it fitting. Why He so judged, we do not know. Yet it is certain He so judged for no other reason than because He saw that through it His name's glory would be rightly displayed. When you hear mention of God's glory, think of His righteousness — for what deserves praise must be righteous. Man therefore falls, God's providence so ordaining it — but he falls by his own fault. The Lord had just pronounced that everything He had made was very good. Where then does the perverseness come

from in the man who turns away from his God? Lest it be thought to have come from the creation, the Lord had approved what came from Himself. Therefore by his own wickedness he corrupted the nature he had received pure from the Lord, and by his fall dragged his entire posterity into destruction with him. Let us therefore look at the evident cause of condemnation in the corrupted nature of humanity — which is near at hand — rather than searching for its hidden and utterly incomprehensible cause in God's predestination. And let us not be troubled to submit our understanding to the immeasurable wisdom of God, so that it may yield before many of His secrets. For those things which it is neither permitted nor lawful to know — ignorance of them is well-learned wisdom. The craving for that knowledge is a kind of madness.

Someone may say that I have not yet said enough to silence that wicked excuse. I freely confess it can never be done in such a way that ungodliness will stop grumbling and complaining. Yet I believe I have said enough to remove not only every valid argument but even every plausible pretext for objecting. The reprobate want to be considered excusable in sinning because they cannot escape the necessity of sinning — especially since that necessity is said to be laid upon them by God's ordinance. But we deny that they are excused by this, because the ordinance of God by which they complain they are destined to destruction has its righteousness — unknown to us, indeed, but most certain. From this we conclude that they suffer no evil that has not been laid upon them by God's most righteous judgment. Furthermore, we teach that they act perversely when — seeking the origin of their condemnation — they fix their eyes on the hidden chambers of God's counsel and shut their eyes to the corruption of nature from which their

condemnation actually springs. This prevents them from charging God with it, since He testified well concerning His own creation. For although a person is created by God's eternal providence for the calamity to which he is subject, the material of that calamity came from himself — not from God. He was lost for no other reason than that he departed from the pure creation of God and fell into corrupt and impure perverseness.

The opponents of predestination also charge it with a third absurdity. Since we attribute it to nothing but the choice of God's will that those He makes heirs of His kingdom are freed from the universal destruction, they argue that this makes God a respecter of persons — which Scripture everywhere denies. Therefore, they conclude, Scripture contradicts itself, or God's election must take merit into account. First, Scripture denies that God is a respecter of persons in a different sense than they suppose. By the word 'person' Scripture does not mean the individual as such but rather those visible qualities in a person that tend to win favor, esteem, and dignity, or to earn hatred, contempt, and shame — such as wealth, power, nobility, office, social standing, physical beauty, and the like, or on the other side, poverty, lowliness, disgrace, and so on. When Peter and Paul teach that the Lord is not a respecter of persons, they mean He makes no distinction between Jew and Greek — refusing one and embracing the other based merely on national identity. James uses the same words to affirm that God in His judgment pays no regard to riches. Paul elsewhere says that in God's judging there is no consideration of whether someone is free or a slave. Therefore there is no contradiction in saying that God, according to the will of His good pleasure, without any consideration of merit, chooses some to be His sons and rejects others. Let

the matter be opened further so that people may be more fully satisfied. They ask: how does it happen that of two people between whom no merit makes any difference, God in electing passes over one and takes the other? I in turn ask them: do they think there is anything in the one who is taken that could incline God's will toward him? If they admit — as they must — that there is nothing, it follows that God does not look at the person but draws the cause from His own goodness when He does good to him. When therefore God chooses one person and passes over another, this comes not from respect of persons but from His mercy alone — which must be free to show itself where and when it pleases Him. We have shown elsewhere also that from the beginning not many who were noble, wise, or honored were called — precisely so that God might humble the pride of the flesh. So far is His favor from being bound to persons.

Many therefore falsely and wickedly accuse God of partial injustice, on the grounds that He does not follow one uniform course toward all in His predestination. If He finds people guilty, they say, let Him punish all equally. If He finds them not guilty, let Him withhold the rigor of His judgment from all. But in arguing this way, they deal with God as though mercy were forbidden to Him, or as though if He chose to show mercy He would be compelled to entirely abandon His judgment. What exactly are they demanding? That since all are guilty, all must suffer the same punishment together? We grant the guilt is common, but we say God's mercy helps some. 'Let it help all,' they say. But we answer: it is right that He should also, in punishing, show Himself a just judge. When they refuse to allow this, what are they doing but trying to strip God of the power to show mercy — or at best, granting it to Him

only on the condition that He utterly abandon His judgment? Therefore these statements of Augustine agree well together: 'Since in the first man the whole mass of humanity fell into condemnation, those vessels that are made from it to honor are not vessels of their own righteousness but of the mercy of God. And where others are made to dishonor, this is not to be attributed to unrighteousness but to judgment.' 'To those He refuses, God renders the punishment they are owed. To those He calls, He gives undeserved grace. They are released from all accusation in the manner of a creditor who has the power to forgive one debt and demand payment of another.' Therefore the Lord may give grace to whom He wills, because He is merciful — and may withhold it from all others, because He is a just judge. He may by giving to some what they do not deserve show His free grace, and by not giving to all, declare what all deserve. For where Paul writes that God shut all up in disobedience, so that He might have mercy on all, it must be added that He is debtor to no one — since no one first gave to Him so as to put Him under obligation.

They also often say, in order to overthrow predestination, that while it stands, all diligence and effort toward living well falls away. For who — they ask — upon hearing that life or death has been certainly fixed for him by God's eternal decree, will not immediately conclude that it makes no difference how he conducts himself, since the predestination of God can be neither hindered nor advanced by anything he does? In this way all people will recklessly abandon themselves and run headlong wherever their passions take them. And they are not entirely wrong — for there are many crude and irreverent people who defile the doctrine of predestination with filthy blasphemies and use it as an excuse to mock

all warnings and reproofs, saying: 'God knows what He has decided to do with us. If He has decreed our salvation, He will bring us to it at the appointed time. If He has predestined our death, we would labor in vain against it.' But Scripture, in teaching how much greater reverence and godly fear we ought to have for so great a mystery, shapes the godly toward a very different understanding and thoroughly refutes these people's insolence. For Scripture does not speak of predestination to encourage boldness, or to invite lawless searching into God's hidden secrets — but rather to humble us, so that we learn to tremble at His judgment and look up with reverence to His mercy. The faithful will align themselves to this purpose. As for that crude grumbling, Paul answers it well. They say they go on carelessly in their vices because, if they are among the elect, their vices will not prevent them from ultimately being brought to life. But Paul says we are chosen for this very end: to lead a holy and blameless life. If the mark of election is aimed at holiness of life, it ought to awaken and stir us all the more eagerly to pursue that holiness — not to serve as a cover for laziness. For how great is the difference between these two: ceasing to do good because election is sufficient for salvation, and recognizing that the appointed goal of election is that we should devote ourselves to doing good. Away, then, with such sacrilege, which so wickedly perverts the whole order of election. Where they go further in their blasphemies and say that a person who is reprobate before God wastes his effort by trying to commend himself to God through innocent and honorable living — in this they are caught in the most shameless lie. For where would such an effort even come from, except from election? Those who are among the reprobate — being as they are vessels made for dishonor — never

cease to provoke God's wrath against themselves with their ongoing wickedness, and by unmistakable signs confirm the judgment of God already pronounced upon them. They are far from striving against God in vain.

Others maliciously and shamelessly slander this doctrine, claiming that it destroys all exhortation to godly living. Augustine was once heavily burdened with this charge, which he cleared away in his book *On Rebuke and Grace*, addressed to Valentinus. Reading it will put all godly and teachable people at ease. I will touch on a few points that should satisfy those who are honest and not merely contentious. We have already seen how openly and forcefully Paul preached free election — was he therefore cold in giving admonition and exhortation? Let these supposedly zealous men compare their own earnestness with his, and they will find themselves far below his incredible warmth. And indeed this principle removes all doubt: 'God has not called us to impurity, but that each one of you should know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.' And again: 'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them' (Ephesians 2:10). In summary, anyone who has even moderate familiarity with Paul will easily see, without lengthy explanation, how well he holds together what these people claim cannot be reconciled. Christ commands people to believe in Him — yet His own definitive statement is neither false nor in conflict with this command: 'No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him by the Father' (John 6:65). Therefore let preaching run its course — bringing people to faith and holding them steadfastly in perseverance. And let the knowledge of predestination not be suppressed, so that those who obey

may not pride themselves as though the fruit were their own, but may glory in the Lord. Not without reason does Christ say: 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.' When we exhort and preach, those who have ears willingly obey. But those who lack ears — in them is fulfilled what is written: 'Hearing, they do not hear.' But why do some have ears and others not? 'Who has known the mind of the Lord?' Must what is openly stated be denied because what is hidden cannot be comprehended? These things I have faithfully drawn from Augustine. But since his words may carry more authority than mine, let us bring forward his actual words. 'If when this is heard, many are turned to laziness and sloth, and inclined from effort toward desire, do they follow their lusts? Ought what is said of God's foreknowledge therefore to be accounted false? If God has foreknown that they will be good, will they not be good — however great their wickedness now? And if He has foreknown they will be evil, will they not be evil — however great their goodness now appears? Shall the things that are truly said of God's foreknowledge be denied or left unsaid for such reasons? Especially when if they are left unsaid, people fall into error.' 'The rule for keeping truth unspoken is one thing; the necessity of speaking the truth is another. The causes for keeping truth unspoken are many and would take long to search out. One such cause is this: that those who do not understand a thing might not be made worse while we try to instruct those who do — when in fact those we address are made neither more learned nor worse.' 'But when a true thing is in such a case that speaking it makes the one who cannot grasp it worse, and not speaking it makes the one who can grasp it worse — what should be done? Is it not better to speak the truth, that the one who can grasp it may grasp it, than to keep

silent — so that not only neither grasps it, but even the one of greater understanding is made worse? Whereas if he heard and grasped it, through him also many might learn? And we would not be saying what, as Scripture testifies, we may lawfully say. For we fear so much that when we speak, the one who cannot grasp it may be offended — but we fear not at all that while we remain silent, the one who can grasp the truth may be deceived by falsehood.' 'Therefore if the apostles and those who followed them — the teachers of the church — both preached godly concerning God's eternal election and also kept the faithful in awe under the discipline of godly living: why do our adversaries, confuted by the invincible force of truth, think they speak well when they say that what is said about predestination must not be preached to the people, even if it is true?' 'Yes, it must in every way be preached, so that he who has ears to hear may hear. But who has ears, unless he has received them from the One who promises to give them? Let the one who does not receive them refuse — yet let the one who does receive them take and drink, drink and live. For as godliness is to be preached so that God may be rightly worshiped, so also is predestination to be preached — so that he who has ears to hear of the grace of God may glory in God and not in himself.'

Yet that holy man, with his intense desire to build others up, also shapes the manner of teaching the truth so that offense is wisely avoided as much as is lawfully possible. For he shows that what is truly said can also be said fittingly. If someone were to preach to the people: 'If you do not believe, the reason is that God has already predestined you to destruction' — such a person not only nurses laziness but actively promotes wickedness. If someone also extends his statement to the future and says that those who

hear will not believe because they are reprobate, this is more a curse than a teaching. Therefore Augustine rightly tells such people to leave the church as foolish teachers and ill-omened prophets. In another place he truthfully affirms that a rebuke only makes a person better when God in His mercy makes it effective — for God makes whom He will to profit even without rebuke. But why does this happen with some and not others? God forbid that we should say the power of judgment belongs to the clay rather than to the Potter. He writes again: 'When people by rebuke either come or return to the way of righteousness, who works salvation in their hearts but the One who, when any person — whoever he is — plants and waters, gives the increase? And when He wills to save, no man's free will resists Him?' 'It is therefore not to be doubted that the wills of people cannot resist the will of God — who in heaven and earth has done whatever He wills, and who will also do what is yet to come. He does what He wills even with the very wills of men.' 'When He wills to draw people to Himself, does He bind them with bodily chains? He works inwardly, holds hearts inwardly, moves hearts inwardly, and draws them with their own wills — wills which He Himself has made in them.' And what he adds immediately after must not be omitted: that because we do not know who belongs or does not belong to the number of the predestined, we ought to be so disposed that we wish all people to be saved. Let this then come to pass: that whoever we encounter, we strive to make them a partaker of peace. But our peace will rest upon the children of peace. Therefore on our part, we must apply wholesome and sharp rebuke to all people like medicine, so that

they may not perish or destroy others. But it will be the work of God to make that medicine profitable for those He has foreknown and predestined.

THE .XXIIII. CHAPTER. ¶ THAT
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But to make the matter more clear, we must treat both the calling of the elect and the blinding and hardening of the wicked. I have already addressed the first of these when I refuted the error that the generality of the promises extends equally to all humanity. But this election, which God otherwise keeps hidden within Himself, He at length discloses clearly by His calling — which may therefore be called the testimony of election. For those He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son. Those He foreordained, He also called. Those He called, He also justified — so that in time He may glorify them. When the Lord has already adopted His own into the number of His children through election, we see how they do not enter into possession of so great a benefit until they are called. And on the other side, once called, they now enjoy a certain sharing in His election. For this reason Paul calls the Spirit they receive both the

Spirit of adoption and the seal and guarantee of the inheritance to come — because it confirms and seals to their hearts the assurance of the coming adoption through its testimony. For though the preaching of the Gospel springs from the fountain of election, yet because it is also common to the reprobate, preaching alone cannot by itself be a sure proof of election. But God effectually teaches His elect so as to bring them to faith — as we have already cited from the words of Christ. 'Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me' (John 6:45). And: 'I have made Your name known to the men whom You gave Me' (John 17:6). He also says in another place: 'No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him' (John 6:44). Augustine weighs this passage wisely, in these words: 'If, as Truth says, everyone who has learned comes — then whoever does not come has certainly not learned. It does not therefore follow that the one who can come does in fact come, unless he has both willed and done it. But everyone who has learned from the Father not only can come but does come — since now both the benefit of coming, and the desire to will it, are present together.' Yet in the meantime I do not deny that to be certain of our salvation we must begin with the Word, and that our confidence should be satisfied there — so that we may call upon God by the name of Father. For some, seeking to be certain of God's counsel — which is near us, in our mouth and in our heart — wrongly try to fly up above the clouds. Therefore that rashness must be restrained by the sobriety of faith, so that it is enough for us that God in His outward Word is a witness of His hidden grace. Just as a channel that carries water for us to drink in abundance does not diminish the honor due to the spring itself.

Therefore, just as those who anchor the force of election to the faith of the Gospel — through which faith we sense that election applies to us — are doing wrong, so we will follow the best order if in seeking the certainty of our election we hold firmly to these later signs, which are sure testimonies of it. Satan assails us with no temptation more severely or more dangerously to unsettle the faithful than when he troubles them with doubt about their election and moves them with a perverse desire to seek it in the wrong way. I call it seeking in the wrong way when a miserable person undertakes to break into the hidden secrets of God's wisdom and pierce all the way up to eternity to discover what has been determined for him at God's judgment seat. For then he plunges headlong to be swallowed up in the immeasurable abyss. He wraps himself in countless snares from which he cannot escape. He buries himself in bottomless and blinding darkness. It is right that the foolishness of the human mind should be punished with such terrible ruin when it attempts by its own strength to scale the height of God's wisdom. And this temptation is all the more deadly because there is almost no one who is not at some point driven by it. Rarely is there a person whose mind is not at some moment struck by this thought: 'Where does your salvation come from if not from God's election? And what revelation do you have of your election?' Once this thought takes root in a person, it either torments the miserable soul with constant dread or crushes it completely. Truly I would have no more certain proof that such thinking about predestination is wrong than this very experience. For the mind can be infected with no error more deadly than one that drags and pushes the conscience away from its peace and rest in God. Therefore if we fear shipwreck, we must carefully steer clear

of this rock — which is never struck without destruction. And though debating predestination may seem like sailing a dangerous sea, yet in passing through it one finds a safe, calm, and even pleasant voyage — unless a person deliberately seeks out danger. For just as those who — to confirm their election — search God's secret counsel apart from His Word drown in a deadly abyss, so those who rightly and orderly search it as it is contained in the Word find in it a remarkable fruit of comfort. Let our course of inquiry therefore be this: begin with the calling of God, and end in the same. Yet this does not prevent the faithful from recognizing that the benefits they daily receive from God descend from that secret adoption. As they say in Isaiah: 'You have done wonderful things; Your plans from long ago are faithful and true' — because through that adoption as through a sign, the Lord wills to confirm as much of His counsel as may lawfully be known. And lest anyone think this a weak testimony, let us consider how much clarity and certainty it brings. Bernard speaks fittingly about this. After speaking of the reprobate, he says: 'The purpose of God stands, the sentence of peace stands upon those who fear Him — both covering their evils and rewarding their good things: so that to them, in a marvelous way, not only good but even evil works together for good. Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is enough for all my righteousness to have Him alone merciful to me — the One against whom alone I have sinned. Whatever He has decreed not to count against me is as if it had never been.' And a little later: 'O place of true rest, to which I may not unworthily give the name of a bedchamber, where God is seen — not troubled with wrath, not weighed down with care, but His will is proved in Him good, and well-pleasing, and perfect. This sight does not frighten but calms.

It does not stir up restless curiosity but quiets it. It does not weary the senses but brings them rest. Here is true rest. God being at peace, brings peace to all things. To behold Him at rest is to be at rest.'

First, if we seek the fatherly kindness and favorable disposition of God, we must turn our eyes to Christ — in whom alone the soul of the Father rests. If we seek salvation, life, and the immortality of the heavenly kingdom, we must also flee to none other — for He alone is both the fountain of life, the author of salvation, and the heir of the kingdom of heaven. Now what is the purpose of election but this: that being adopted by the heavenly Father into the place of children, we may obtain salvation and immortality by His grace? However you turn it over and examine it, you will find that the ultimate aim of election extends no further than this. Therefore when God takes people as His children, He is not said to have chosen them in themselves, but in His Christ — because He could not love them except in Him, nor grant them the honor of the inheritance of His kingdom unless they had first been made partakers of Him. If we are chosen in Him, we will not find the certainty of our election in ourselves — nor in God the Father, if we imagine Him apart from the Son. Christ therefore is the mirror in which we both must, and without deception may, behold our election. For since it is into His body that the Father has appointed to graft all those whom from eternity He willed to be His — that He might count as His children all those He acknowledges among His members — we have a clear and sure witness that we are written in the book of life, if we have communion with Christ. And He gave us that sure communion with Himself when, through the preaching of the Gospel, He testified that He had been given to us by the Father —

that He, with all His good things, should be ours. We are said to put Him on and to grow into Him, that we may live — because He lives. This doctrine is repeated again and again: 'The Father did not spare His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish.' And he who believes in Him is said to have passed from death into life. In this sense He calls Himself the bread of life — whoever eats of it will not die forever. He, I say, has been our witness: that those who receive Him by faith will be received by the heavenly Father as His children. If we desire anything more than to be counted among the children and heirs of God, then we may try to climb above Christ. But if this is our ultimate goal — how foolish we are to seek without Him what we already possess in Him and can only be found in Him! Moreover, since He is the eternal wisdom, the unchangeable truth, and the firmly established counsel of the Father, there is no need to fear that what He declares to us in His Word will vary in the slightest from the Father's will that we seek. Rather, He faithfully opens it to us just as it was from the beginning and ever will be. The practical use of this doctrine must also govern our prayers. For though the knowledge of election encourages us to call upon God, when we actually pray it would be disorderly to force it into God's presence and pray conditionally: 'Lord, if I am elected, hear me' — since He wills us to be content with His promises, and nowhere else to inquire whether He will be favorable toward us. This wisdom will deliver us from many snares, if we know how to apply what has been rightly written to its right use — and do not carelessly pull it into places where it was never meant to go.

There is also another support for establishing faith in our election — which we said is joined with our calling. For those whom Christ draws into the bosom of His church, enlightened with the knowledge of His name, He is said to receive into His faith and protection. And all whom He receives are said to have been entrusted to Him by the Father and delivered into His care to be kept unto eternal life. What do we mean? Christ cries out loudly that all those the Father wills to be saved, He has delivered into His protection. Therefore if we wish to know whether God cares for our salvation, let us consider whether He has entrusted us to Christ, whom He has made the only Savior of all who are His. Now if we doubt whether Christ has received us into His faith and keeping, He removes our doubt by voluntarily offering Himself as our Shepherd and declaring that we shall be among His sheep if we hear His voice. Therefore let us embrace Christ — who is freely opened to us and comes to meet us. He will number us in His flock and keep us enclosed in His fold. Yet concern about our future state enters in. For as Paul teaches that those who were chosen beforehand are called, so Christ declares that many are called but few are chosen. And Paul himself in another place warns us against false security: 'Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall' (1 Corinthians 10:12). And again: 'You are grafted into the people of God — do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For God is able to cut you off and graft in others in your place' (Romans 11:20-21). Experience itself teaches sufficiently that calling and faith are worth little unless perseverance accompanies them — and perseverance does not come to all. But Christ has relieved us of this anxiety — for truly these promises look toward the future. 'All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I

will certainly not cast out' (John 6:37). 'This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day' (John 6:39). 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish — and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand' (John 10:27-29). When He also says, 'Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted' (Matthew 15:13), He implies on the other side that those who are rooted in God can never be torn away from salvation. This agrees with John's statement: 'If they had been of us, they would have remained with us' (1 John 2:19). From this also comes Paul's magnificent confidence against life and death, present things and things to come — which confidence must be grounded on the gift of perseverance. There is no doubt he directs this to all the faithful. The same Paul says in another place: 'He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus' (Philippians 1:6). And when David's faith faltered, he leaned on this support: 'Do not forsake the works of Your hands' (Psalm 138:8). It is also certain that when Christ prays for all the faithful, He asks the same thing for them that He asked for Peter — that their faith may never fail (Luke 22:32). From this we conclude that they are out of danger of falling away, because the Son of God, asking for their steadfast perseverance, was met with no refusal. What would Christ have us learn from this but that we should trust we will be perpetually safe, because we have once been made His?

But it happens daily that those who seemed to be Christ's revolt from Him and fall away. And in that very passage where He affirms that none of those given to Him by the Father have perished,

He excepts the son of destruction. That is true. But this is equally certain: such people never clung to Christ with that heartfelt trust through which I say the assurance of our election is established. 'They went out from us,' says John, 'but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us' (1 John 2:19). I do not deny that they showed the same outward signs of calling as the elect. But I do not grant that they had that sure establishment of election that I urge the faithful to draw from the Word of the Gospel. Therefore let such examples not disturb us. Let us quietly rest on the Lord's promise, where He declares that all who receive Him through true faith have been given to Him by the Father — and since He is their keeper and Shepherd, none of them will perish. Of Judas we will speak later. Paul does not warn Christians against assurance altogether, but against the careless and loose assurance of the flesh, which brings pride, presumption, contempt of others, and quenches humility and reverence toward God, and leads to forgetfulness of received grace. For he is speaking to the Gentiles, teaching them that they must not proudly and harshly reproach the Jews for being disinherited while they were put in their place. The fear he requires is not a fear that dismays and staggers, but one that shapes us to receive God's grace with greater humility — without diminishing faith in it, as we said elsewhere. Besides, he is not there speaking to every individual, but to different groups generally. When the church was divided into two parts and envy stirred up conflict, Paul reminded the Gentiles that being grafted in to take the place of God's special and holy people ought to be a cause of fear and modesty for them. Among them were many puffed up with self-glory, whose empty boasting needed to be brought down. But we have shown elsewhere that our

hope stretches even beyond death into the future, and that nothing is more contrary to the nature of hope than doubting what will become of us.

The saying of Christ about many being called but few being chosen is being badly misread. If we hold firmly to what should be clear from what has been said above, there will be nothing doubtful — for there are two kinds of calling. There is a universal calling, by which God calls all people to Himself through the outward preaching of the Word — including those for whom it becomes the aroma of death and the occasion of still heavier condemnation. The other is a special calling, which for the most part He grants only to the faithful — when by the inward illumination of His Spirit He causes the preached Word to take root in their hearts. Yet He sometimes grants it even to those whom He enlightens only for a time, and afterward — through the deserving of their ingratitude — forsakes and strikes with greater blindness. When the Lord saw the Gospel being widely proclaimed but despised by many and properly valued by few, He portrayed God through the figure of a king who prepares a great banquet and sends his servants to invite a large crowd — but can gather only a few, because everyone makes excuses. He is finally forced by their refusal to call in anyone he can find from the roads and lanes. Everyone can see that the parable must be understood as referring to the outward calling. He then adds that God is like a watchful host at a feast who goes through the tables to look after his guests. If he finds anyone not wearing wedding clothes, he will not allow that person's uncleanness to dishonor the celebration. This part of the parable, I grant, refers to those who enter the church through the profession of faith but are not clothed with the sanctification of Christ. Such dis-

graces and stains on the church the Lord will not endure forever — but as their filthiness deserves, He will cast them out. Therefore, out of the great number of those who are called, few are chosen — but this is the general calling, not the kind of calling by which we say the faithful ought to judge their election. For that general calling is common to the wicked as well. But the special calling brings with it the Spirit of regeneration, who is the guarantee and seal of the inheritance to come — with which our hearts are sealed up against the day of the Lord. In short, since hypocrites boast of godliness just as true worshipers of God do, Christ declares that they will in the end be cast out from the place they wrongly occupy — as the psalm says: 'O Lord, who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity and works righteousness' (Psalm 15:1-2). And in another psalm: 'This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face — the God of Jacob' (Psalm 24:6). The Spirit thus exhorts the faithful to endurance, so that they do not be troubled that Israelites by outward profession are mingled with them in the church — for in the end their mask will be stripped off and they will be cast out with shame.

The same reasoning applies to the exception just cited, where Christ says that none perished except the son of destruction. It is an improper way of speaking, though not an unclear one. Judas was not counted among Christ's sheep because he truly was one, but because he held the place of one. And where the Lord says elsewhere that He chose him along with the apostles, that refers only to the apostolic office. 'I chose the twelve of you,' He says, 'and one of you is a devil' (John 6:70) — meaning He chose him for the office of apostle. But when He speaks of choosing to salvation, He excludes Judas entirely from the number of the chosen: 'I do

not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen' (John 13:18). If one confuses the word 'choosing' in both passages, he will tie himself in hopeless knots. If he distinguishes them, nothing is more plain. Gregory therefore teaches badly and perniciously when he says that we know only our calling but are uncertain of our election — thereby moving all people to fear and trembling. He also uses this reasoning: that we know what we are today, but not what we will be. In that passage, he plainly shows how he stumbled over this obstacle. Because he made election depend on the merits of works, he had more than enough material to discourage people's minds — but he could not strengthen them, since he did not move them away from themselves to trust in God's goodness. From this the faithful receive some taste of what we established at the beginning: that predestination, rightly understood, does not shake faith but rather strengthens it most effectively. I do not deny, however, that the Holy Spirit sometimes shapes His language to the small measure of our understanding. For instance, He says in Ezekiel: 'They shall not be in the council of My people, nor shall they be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel' (Ezekiel 13:9) — as though God first begins writing in the book of life those He counts among His own, whereas we know from Christ's own testimony that the names of God's children are written in the book of life from the beginning. But these words simply express the casting away of those who appeared to be among the elect — as the psalm says: 'May they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous' (Psalm 69:28).

But the elect are not gathered into the flock of Christ immediately from the womb, nor all at once — but as it pleases God to distribute His grace to them. Before they are gathered to that chief

Shepherd, they wander scattered in the common wilderness and differ nothing from others, except that the singular mercy of God protects them from falling into the final plunge of death. Therefore if you look at them in themselves, you see offspring of Adam who share in the common corruption of the whole human race. That they are not carried away into extreme and open ungodliness does not come from any goodness naturally planted in them — but from the watchful eye of God and His hand stretched out for their salvation. Those who dream that some kind of seed of election is planted in their hearts from birth — by whose power they are always inclined toward godliness and the fear of God — have no scriptural support for this and are refuted by experience itself. They do bring forward a few examples to prove that the elect, even before their enlightenment, were not complete strangers to religion — that Paul as a Pharisee lived blamelessly (Philippians 3:5), that Cornelius was accepted by God for his alms and prayers (Acts 10:2), and so on. Regarding Paul, we grant the point. Regarding Cornelius, we say they are mistaken. For it appears that he was already enlightened and regenerate at that point — lacking only the clear proclamation of the Gospel. But what do they prove from these few examples? That all the elect are always endowed with the spirit of godliness? No more than if someone, by pointing to the integrity of Aristides, Socrates, Xenocrates, Scipio, Curius, Camillus, and others, concluded that all those left in the blindness of idolatry were eager pursuers of holiness and virtue. Moreover Scripture cries out against this in more than one place. The condition that Paul describes for the Ephesians before their regeneration (Ephesians 2:2) shows not a single grain of this supposed seed. 'You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you previ-

ously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.' And again: 'Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.' And again: 'You were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light' (Ephesians 5:8; 4:23). Perhaps they will say these passages refer only to ignorance of the true God, which they do not deny characterizes the elect before they are called. But even if that were not shameless special pleading — since Paul draws from this that they must no longer lie or steal — what will they say to other passages? For instance, to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9), where after declaring that neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the covetous shall inherit the kingdom of God, he adds that they had been entangled in these same shameful offenses before they knew Christ — but now they have been both washed by His blood and made free by His Spirit. And again, to the Romans: 'As you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness.' And: 'For what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?' (Romans 6:19-21).

What kind of seed of election was budding in those who, being defiled in every area of life with what might as well have been deliberate wickedness, wallowed in the most abominable and ac-

cursed sins imaginable? If Paul had intended to speak along these people's lines, he would have shown how deeply those converts owed their gratitude to God's generosity — by which they had been preserved from slipping into such great filthiness. So Peter also would have urged his readers to give thanks for the perpetual seed of election. But instead Peter reminds them that the past time was more than enough for carrying out the desires of the Gentiles (1 Peter 4:3). What if we turn to examples? What bud of righteousness was there in Rahab the harlot before faith (Joshua 2)? In Manasseh, when Jerusalem was saturated and virtually drowned in the blood of the prophets (2 Kings 21:16)? In the thief, who in his dying gasps began to think of repentance (Luke 23:42)? Away, then, with these arguments that foolish and overly curious people rashly invent for themselves without Scripture. Let what Scripture does say stand firm: that all have strayed like lost sheep, each turning to his own way — that is, to destruction (Isaiah 53:6). Out of that pit of destruction, those whom the Lord has determined to pluck forth He delays until His fitting time. Until then, He only keeps them from falling into unpardonable blasphemy.

Just as the Lord perfects the salvation of the elect through His effectual calling — according to His eternal counsel — so He executes His counsel against the reprobate through His judgments. Those whom He has created for dishonor and destruction, to serve as instruments of His wrath and examples of His severity — from them He sometimes withdraws the very ability to hear His word, and sometimes He uses the preaching of it to blind and confuse them all the more. Of the first way, there are countless examples, but let us choose one that is clearer than all the rest. For roughly four thousand years before Christ, God hid the light of His saving

doctrine from all the Gentiles. If someone answers that He withheld this great benefit because He judged them unworthy, then those who came later cannot be shown to be any more worthy. Malachi himself is a clear witness to this — for even while rebuking unbelief mixed with blatant blasphemy, he foretells that a Redeemer will come (Malachi 4:1). Why then was this Redeemer given to some nations and not others? Anyone who searches for a cause higher than the secret and unsearchable counsel of God will only exhaust himself in vain. There is no need to fear that critics like Porphyry will attack God's justice while we offer no defense. When we say that no one perishes undeservingly, and that it is purely by God's free generosity that some are delivered — that is more than enough to display His glory, and no clever reasoning is needed beyond it. The sovereign Judge therefore clears the way for His predestination: those He has once rejected He leaves in blindness, deprived of the light of His truth. Of the second way, there are both daily examples and many found in Scripture. The same message is preached to a hundred people; twenty receive it with ready faith and obedience — the rest either ignore it, mock it, hiss it away, or despise it. If someone says this difference comes from the others' own wickedness and stubbornness, that still does not satisfy us — because the first group had the same wickedness, unless God corrected it with His grace. We will remain stuck in the question unless we recall what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7: 'Who makes you different?' By this he means that some excel others not by their own virtue, but solely by the grace of God.

Why then does God grant grace to some and pass over others? For those who receive it, Luke gives the reason: they were appointed to life. For those who do not — what shall we think, except

that they are vessels of wrath made for dishonor? So let it not trouble us to say with Augustine: 'God could turn the will of evil people to good, because He is almighty.' He could indeed. Why then does He not do it? Because He does not will to. Why He does not will to is something known only to Himself. We should not try to be wiser than we ought to be. This answer is far better than Chrysostom's way of handling it — saying that God draws only the willing and reaches out His hand to those who extend theirs — as if the difference lay not in God's sovereign will but only in human choice. The truth is that it does not rest in any natural human movement, for even the godly and God-fearing need a special work of the Spirit. Lydia the seller of purple feared God, and yet her heart still needed to be opened so that she could truly listen to Paul's teaching and benefit from it (Acts 16:14). This is not said about her alone — it shows us that every person's growth in godliness is a secret work of the Spirit. It is beyond question that the Lord sends His word to many people whose blindness He intends to deepen. Consider why He sent so many commands to Pharaoh. Was it because He hoped that repeated messages would eventually soften him? No — before He even began, He knew the outcome and announced it in advance. He said to Moses: 'Go and declare My will to him — but I will harden his heart so that he will not obey' (Exodus 21). When He sent Ezekiel, He warned him ahead of time that he was being sent to a rebellious and stubborn people — so that he would not be discouraged when he found himself speaking to deaf ears (Ezekiel 2:3; 12:2). He also told Jeremiah that his message would become a fire to destroy and consume the people like stubble (Jeremiah 1:10). But Isaiah's prophecy makes the point most forcefully of all. He was sent by the Lord with these words: 'Go and say to the chil-

dren of Israel — Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the hearts of this people hard, and their ears dull, and close their eyes — otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed' (Isaiah 6:9). He is told to direct his voice to them — but so that they grow even deafer; to light a lamp — but so that they become even blinder; to deliver doctrine — but so that they grow even more dull; to offer a remedy — but not so that they are healed. John, quoting this prophecy, declares that the Jews could not believe the teaching of Christ because this curse of God was upon them (John 12:39). It is also beyond dispute that to those whom God does not will to enlighten, He delivers His word in darkened speech — so that they gain nothing from it but instead sink into greater dullness. Christ also explains why He expounded the parables only to the apostles and not the crowds: because to the apostles it had been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the people at large it had not (Matthew 13:11). You may ask: what does the Lord intend in teaching people He has determined will not understand? Look where the fault lies, and you will stop asking. For however much darkness there may be in the word, there is always enough light to convict the conscience of the wicked.

We still need to ask why the Lord does what He clearly does. If someone answers that men deserve this treatment through their own ungodliness, wickedness, and ingratitude — that is true and well said. But it still does not explain the underlying difference: why some are brought to obedience while others remain hardened. To find the answer, we must go where Paul goes when he draws on Moses — namely, that God raised certain people up from the be-

ginning in order to display His name throughout the whole earth. The reprobate do not obey God's word when it is opened to them, and their disobedience can rightly be attributed to the wickedness and stubbornness of their hearts. But this must be added alongside: they are given over to that stubbornness because, by God's righteous though unsearchable judgment, they were raised up to display His glory through their condemnation. Similarly, when Scripture says that the sons of Eli did not listen to wholesome warnings because the Lord had decided to put them to death — it does not deny that their stubbornness came from their own wickedness. But it touches on why they were left in that stubbornness when God could have softened their hearts: His unchangeable decree had appointed them to destruction. The same point is made in John: 'Though He had done so many signs, no one believed in Him — so that the word of Isaiah might be fulfilled: Lord, who has believed our report?' (John 12:37-38). John does not excuse the hardness of heart, but he is content with this explanation: God's grace is distasteful to people until the Holy Spirit creates a receptive heart. When Christ quotes Isaiah's prophecy — 'They shall all be taught of God' — His purpose is to show that the Jews were rejected and excluded from the church precisely because they were unwilling to learn, and the only reason He gives is that God's promise did not belong to them. Paul confirms this when he says that Christ — who is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles — is to those who are called the power and wisdom of God. After describing what commonly happens when the Gospel is preached — that it hardens some and is despised by others — Paul says it is valued only by those who are called. Paul had just spoken of them as believers, but he did not intend to take away the honor

due to the grace of God that comes before faith. He added the second description as a clarification: those who embraced the Gospel should credit their faith to God's calling. And shortly after he makes clear that they were chosen by God. When ungodly people hear these things, they cry out that God is abusing His poor creatures for sport through some arbitrary display of cruelty. But we know that all people stand liable before God's judgment seat in countless ways — that if asked about a thousand things they could not give a satisfactory account of even one. We therefore acknowledge that the reprobate suffer nothing that does not fit perfectly with God's most just judgment. Where we cannot fully grasp the reason, let us not be disturbed to remain ignorant of something that lies where God's wisdom rises to a height far beyond us.

A few Scripture passages are commonly raised as objections — passages where God seems to deny that the wicked perish by His decree, and instead appears to protest their willful choice of death. Let us briefly examine these passages and show that they do not contradict what we have established. The passage from Ezekiel is brought forward: God does not will the death of a sinner, but rather desires that the sinner turn and live. If they mean to apply this to all humanity without exception — then why does God not move many to repentance whose hearts would be more receptive than those He daily calls and who only grow harder? Christ Himself testifies that the preaching of the Gospel and miracles would have produced more fruit in Sodom than in Judea. How then, if God wills all people to be saved, did He not open the door of repentance to those people who would have been more ready to receive grace? From this it is clear that the passage is being forced into a meaning it cannot bear, if this will of God is set against His

eternal counsel by which He has separated the elect from the reprobate. The true natural meaning of the prophet is this: he is offering hope of pardon to those who repent. The heart of it is simply that God is ready to forgive as soon as a sinner turns. He does not will that sinner's death because He wills that sinner's repentance. But experience shows that while He generally calls people to repentance, He does not move all their hearts. Yet it would be wrong to say He is being deceptive — for the outward call, while it only leaves those who hear and refuse it without excuse, is genuinely the testimony of His grace by which He offers reconciliation to people. Therefore the meaning of the prophet is this: God takes no pleasure in a sinner's death. The godly can be confident that as soon as they are moved to repentance, pardon is ready with God. And the wicked should feel that their guilt is doubled because they do not respond to such great mercy and gentleness. God's mercy will always meet repentance — but to whom repentance is given, all the prophets, apostles, and Ezekiel himself clearly teach. Second, there is Paul's passage saying that God wills all people to be saved. Though its meaning differs somewhat from the Ezekiel passage, they have something in common. My first answer is that the very context shows how He wills this — because Paul joins together that He wills people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. If they insist this means God's eternal counsel is that all receive the doctrine of salvation — then what does Moses mean when he asks, 'What nation is so great that God is near to them as He is to you?' How is it that God withheld the light of the Gospel from so many nations for so long? How is it that the pure knowledge of godliness never reached some people, and others barely encountered even the faintest traces of it? From this it be-

comes easy to see where Paul is going. He had instructed Timothy to offer solemn prayers in the church for kings and rulers. But since it seemed strange to pray for people who seemed almost beyond hope — people who were not only strangers to the body of Christ but were actively working to destroy His kingdom — Paul added that such prayer is acceptable to God, who wills all people to be saved. By this he means simply that God has not shut the door of salvation to any rank of people, but has so poured out His mercy that He does not wish any group to be excluded from it. These passages do not declare what God has determined in His secret judgment about every individual — they show that pardon is available to all sinners who simply turn and seek it. But if they press the point more stubbornly, insisting that God wills mercy on all, I will answer from another Scripture: 'Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases' (Psalm 115:3). That text must be reconciled with this one: 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion' (Romans 9:15). He who selects those on whom He will have mercy does not give it to everyone. But since it is clear that Paul in that passage is speaking not of every individual person but of different ranks and classes of people, we will not belabor the point further. It should also be noted that Paul is not stating what God always and universally does in every person — he is leaving it to God's freedom to eventually bring kings and rulers into the light of heavenly doctrine, even though they currently rage against it in their blindness. The passage from Peter seems to press us more forcefully: God wills that no one should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the answer to this is found immediately in the second part of the statement — for 'the will to receive' cannot mean any-

thing other than what is taught consistently throughout Scripture. Repentance is in God's hand. Whether He will turn all or not — let Him be asked about that, since He promises to give some a heart of flesh while leaving others a heart of stone. It is true that if He were not ready to receive those who call on His mercy, the promise 'Turn to Me and I will turn to you' would be false. But the point is that no one at all comes to God unless God has first come to them. If repentance were a matter of human will, Paul would not write, 'If perhaps God will grant them repentance' (2 Timothy 2:25). And unless the very same God who calls all people outwardly to repentance also inwardly moves His chosen ones by His Spirit — Jeremiah would not have said, 'Turn me, Lord, and I shall be turned; for after You turned me, I repented' (Jeremiah 31:18).

But you may ask: if this is true, then the promises of the Gospel contain little truth — for they testify to a will of God that conflicts with His inviolable decree. Not so. However universal the promises of salvation may be, they do not contradict the predestination of the reprobate — as long as we pay attention to how the promises actually take effect. The promises become effective only when we receive them by faith. When faith is absent, the promise yields nothing. Given this, let us consider whether these two things conflict: that God from eternity ordained those He would embrace with love and those on whom He would exercise wrath — and that He offers salvation to all without distinction. I say they agree perfectly. In making these universal promises, God means nothing other than that His mercy is open to all who desire and seek it — but only those whom He has enlightened actually do seek it. And those He enlightens are those He predestined for salvation. For them, the promises stand firm and unshaken — which is why there

is no contradiction between God's eternal election and the testimony of His grace, which He offers to all. But why does He address everyone? He does so for two reasons: first, so that the consciences of the godly may rest more securely when they understand that there is no distinction among sinners as such — that the offer is genuinely open. Second, so that the wicked have no excuse — they cannot claim there was no refuge available to them from the bondage of sin, when they have refused it by their own ingratitude. When the mercy of God is offered through the Gospel to both groups, it is faith — that is, God's enlightening — that makes the difference between the godly and the ungodly. One group experiences the power of the Gospel; the other receives no fruit from it. And that enlightening itself is governed by God's eternal election. The complaint of Christ that they raise against this — 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling!' (Matthew 23:37) — does not help their case. I grant that Christ there speaks not only in His human nature but is also reproaching Jerusalem for having refused His grace throughout all ages. But we must be clear about which will of God is being discussed here. It is well known how diligently God worked to hold that people together, and how stubbornly they resisted from first to last, always running after their own desires and refusing to be gathered. But it does not follow from this that God's eternal counsel was overturned by human wickedness. They object that it is inconsistent with God's nature to have two conflicting wills. I grant this, provided they state it properly. But why do they not notice the many passages where God speaks of Himself using human emotions and condescends below His own majesty? He says He stretched out His

arms all day to a rebellious people, that He rose early and labored late to bring them back. If they take all such language literally without considering the figure of speech, endless false arguments arise. The one solution that resolves them all is this: human attributes are figuratively applied to God. But the solution I have offered elsewhere is more than adequate: although God's will appears to us to be varied and complex, in Himself He does not will different and conflicting things. Rather, by His wisdom — which Paul calls 'manifold' (Ephesians 3:10) — He confounds our understanding, until we are given to see that He marvelously wills what now appears to contradict His will. They also mock with the objection that since God is the Father of all, it is unjust for Him to disinherit anyone who has not first deserved such punishment by their own fault. As if God's generosity did not already extend even to pigs and dogs. But if they are speaking only of humanity, let them explain why God bound Himself to one people to be their Father — and why, even from within that people, He chose only a small number as a remnant. Their own eagerness to speak evil blinds these critics to the obvious: God causes His sun to shine on both the good and the evil, yet the inheritance is reserved for a few to whom it will one day be said, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom.' They also object that God hates nothing He has made. I grant this too — and yet what I teach still stands: the reprobate are hated by God, and rightly so, because destitute of His Spirit they produce nothing but cause for condemnation. They further argue that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Romans 9:24), and therefore that God's grace is offered equally to all — but only if they grant what Paul actually establishes: that God calls from both Jews and Gentiles according to

His good pleasure, so that He is bound to no one. In the same way, the other objection is answered: that God has locked everyone under sin so that He might have mercy on all (Romans 11:32). This means He wills that the salvation of all who are saved be credited to His mercy alone — but it does not mean this benefit is given to everyone. After everything that has been said on both sides, let this be our conclusion: to tremble with Paul at depths so great. And when reckless tongues attack, let us not be ashamed of Paul's words: 'O man, who are you who answers back to God?' (Romans 9:20) For Augustine rightly says that those who measure the righteousness of God by the standard of human righteousness have gone astray.

CHAPTER 25: OF THE LAST RESURRECTION



Christ, the Sun of righteousness, has conquered death and now shines through the Gospel, giving us the light of life — as Paul testifies. Through faith we have already passed from death to life; we are no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. He has seated us with His only-begotten Son in the heavenly realms, so that nothing is lacking for our complete happiness. Yet so that we are not crushed under this hard warfare as though we had no share in Christ's victory, we must hold to what Scripture teaches about the nature of hope. We hope for things that do not yet appear, and faith — as Scripture says — is the evidence of things not seen. As long as we are confined in the prison of the body, we are away from the Lord. For this reason Paul says elsewhere that we are dead, and that our life is hidden with Christ in God — and that when He who is our life appears, then we also will appear with Him in glory. This, then, is our calling: to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This waiting requires a singular patience so we do not grow weary and turn back from our course or abandon our post.

Everything taught so far about our salvation calls for minds lifted toward heaven — that we may love Christ whom we have not seen, and rejoice in Him with a joy too great for words as we press on toward the end of our faith, as Peter describes. In the same way, Paul says that the faith and love of the godly are anchored to the hope laid up in heaven. When our eyes are fixed on Christ and our hearts stretched toward heaven, no earthly pull is strong enough to keep us from moving toward the promised blessedness — and then the saying is truly fulfilled: 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' This is why genuine faith is so rare in the world — nothing is harder for our sluggish hearts than to press upward through countless steps toward the prize of our heavenly calling. On top of the great heap of troubles that nearly overwhelm us, we face the ridicule of ungodly people who mock our simplicity. They scoff because we voluntarily turn away from the pleasures of this life to chase after a blessedness we cannot yet see — as if we were chasing a vanishing shadow. From every direction — above, below, before, and behind — violent temptations surround us. Our courage would utterly fail against them unless it were freed from earthly entanglements and securely anchored to the heavenly life that seems, for now, so far away. Only the person who has cultivated a continual meditation on the blessed resurrection has truly grown in the Gospel.

The ancient philosophers debated at length about the highest good, and argued fiercely among themselves. Yet none but Plato acknowledged that humanity's highest good consists in being joined to God. But what that union actually meant, he could not grasp even in the smallest measure — which is no surprise, since he never knew the holy bond that makes it possible. We, however,

know our one and perfect happiness even in this earthly pilgrimage — a happiness that daily kindles greater desire in our hearts until its full enjoyment satisfies us completely. This is why I said that no one receives the benefits of Christ unless they lift their minds to the resurrection. Paul himself holds this out as the goal toward which he strains, forgetting everything else until he reaches it. All the more eagerly should we press on toward it — for if this world holds us back, we will suffer the bitter cost of our own laziness. Paul marks out the faithful with this defining trait: their citizenship is in heaven, from which they also look for their Savior. And to keep their courage from failing in this race, he gives them companions: all of creation. Since visible decay is everywhere, he says that all things in heaven and earth are groaning for renewal. When Adam fell, he shattered the perfect order of nature. All creation has been brought under bondage ever since — a painful subjection it bears not because it has feelings, but because it naturally longs for the perfect state from which it has fallen. Paul says creation groans and labors as though in childbirth — so that we, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, should be ashamed to waste away in our corruption and should at the very least follow the lead of the dead elements, which bear the pain of another's sin. To press us further, Paul calls the final coming of Christ our redemption. Every part of our redemption is already accomplished — yet because Christ was once offered for sins, He will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to bring salvation. Whatever miseries press upon us, let this coming redemption sustain us until its full arrival.

The weight of the matter itself should sharpen our eagerness. Paul does not say without reason that the entire Gospel is empty and false if the dead do not rise again. Without the resurrection,

our condition would be the most miserable of all — exposed as we are to the hatred and contempt of many, in danger every hour, treated like sheep led to slaughter. Without the resurrection, not just one part of the Gospel falls apart but the whole of it — including our adoption and the full effect of our salvation. So let us give this most serious matter our complete and unflagging attention. This is why I have saved this discussion for this point — so that readers, having received Christ as the author of their salvation, might press even higher and understand that He has been clothed with heavenly immortality and glory, so that the whole body might be conformed to the Head. The Holy Spirit frequently holds up Christ's resurrection as the pattern and example. It is difficult to believe that bodies, once consumed by decay, will rise again at their appointed time. Many philosophers acknowledged the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the flesh was accepted by very few. There is no excuse for this rejection, but it does remind us that drawing the human mind to believe this truth is an extraordinarily hard task. Scripture provides two supports for faith to overcome this obstacle: one is the example of Christ, and the other is the almighty power of God. Whenever the resurrection comes to mind, let the image of Christ appear before us. He took on our nature, ran the full course of mortal life, and having obtained immortality is now the pledge and guarantee of the resurrection to come. In the miseries that surround us we carry His dying in our flesh so that His life may be plainly displayed in us. We cannot separate Him from ourselves — to do so would be to tear Him apart. This is the basis for Paul's argument: if the dead do not rise, then Christ has not risen either. He takes it as a settled principle that Christ did not undergo death and rise victorious for His

own private benefit — but that what was begun in the Head must be completed in all the members, each in his proper rank and order. This does not mean they will be made equal with Him in every respect. The psalm says, 'You will not let Your Holy One see decay.' A portion of that confidence belongs to us according to the measure of our gift — but its full effect appeared only in Christ, who was entirely free from decay and received back His body whole. So that the fellowship of the blessed resurrection with Christ may be beyond doubt for us, and so that we may rest content with this pledge, Paul expressly states that Christ sits in heaven and will come at the last day as Judge to transform our humble and lowly bodies to be like His glorious body. Paul also teaches elsewhere that God raised His Son from the dead not merely to display His power but to extend that same powerful work of the Spirit toward those who believe. He calls Christ our life because He lives in us — and He was given precisely to make alive what is mortal in us. I have condensed into a brief summary what could be developed at much greater length and would be well worth fuller treatment. Yet I trust that godly readers will find in these few words enough to build and strengthen their faith. Christ rose so that we might be partners in the life to come. He was raised by the Father as the head of the church, from which He will never allow Himself to be separated. He was raised by the power of the Spirit, which He shares with us for the work of making us alive. Finally, He was raised so that He might be the resurrection and the life. As we have said, in this mirror we see a living image of the resurrection — and let it be solid ground for our hearts, even as we are called not to be lazy or weary in the long waiting. It is not for us to decide the timetable; we must patiently rest until God in His own proper time

restores His kingdom. This is the point of Paul's encouragement: Christ is the firstfruits; then, at His coming, those who belong to Christ — each in his own order. Now, so that no question should arise about Christ's resurrection — the foundation on which all our resurrection rests — consider how many varied and compelling ways God has given us to confirm it. Skeptics will laugh at the account the Evangelists give, treating it as childish nonsense. What weight can a message carry when frightened women first bring it and then disciples confirm it in a state of shock? Why did Christ not raise His victory banner in the middle of the temple or the marketplace? Why did He not appear with terror before Pilate? Why did He not prove to the priests and all Jerusalem that He was alive? As for the witnesses He chose, those who dismiss religion will hardly consider them sufficient. But I answer: even if the beginning seemed weak and easy to mock, the whole thing was governed by God's marvelous providence. The love of Christ and zeal for godliness — along with their own initial disbelief — drove the disciples in haste to the tomb shortly after they had been paralyzed by fear. They became not only eyewitnesses of the fact but also heard from the angels what they had already seen with their own eyes. How could we doubt the credibility of witnesses who themselves dismissed the women's report as a story — until they were brought face to face with the evidence itself? As for the crowds and rulers — once they had been thoroughly confronted with the evidence, it is no wonder that seeing Christ Himself and witnessing the other signs was not granted to them. The tomb was sealed, guards were posted, and on the third day the body was gone. The soldiers were bribed to spread the rumor that the disciples had stolen it. As if those frightened men had the power to raise a force,

gather weapons, or carry off a military operation. If the soldiers lacked the courage to drive them away at the time, why did they not pursue them and, with the crowd's help, capture some? Pilate's own seal authenticated the resurrection of Christ. The guards stationed at the tomb — whether by their silence or their lies — became unwitting publishers of that same resurrection. Meanwhile, the voice of the angels rang out: 'He is risen; He is not here.' Their radiant heavenly appearance made plain they were not men but angels. After that, if any doubt remained, Christ Himself removed it. The disciples saw Him more than once, touched His hands and feet, and their own stubborn disbelief served not a little to strengthen our faith. He explained the mysteries of the kingdom of God among them, and at last, as they watched, He ascended into heaven. And this was not seen only by the eleven apostles — He appeared at one time to more than five hundred brothers. When He then sent the Holy Spirit, He gave clear proof not only of His life but of His supreme power — just as He had said beforehand: 'It is good for you that I go; otherwise the Spirit will not come.' Paul was struck down on the road not by the strength of a dead man but felt for himself that the One he was persecuting held the highest power. To Stephen He appeared for another purpose — to fill him with such certainty of life that he could conquer the fear of death. To discredit witnesses of such quality is not merely skepticism — it is willful and perverse stubbornness.

What we said about directing our minds to the infinite power of God in believing the resurrection — Paul teaches this briefly when he says that Christ 'will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself'

(Philippians 3:20). Therefore, nothing is more misguided than to ask what nature can do here, when an incalculable miracle is set before us — one so great it overwhelms our senses entirely. Yet Paul, drawing on an example from nature, corrects the foolishness of those who deny the resurrection. 'You fool,' he says, 'that which you sow does not come to life unless it first dies' (1 Corinthians 15:36). He says that in a seed we see a picture of the resurrection — for out of decay, grain grows. Nor would it be so difficult to believe if we paid as much attention as we should to the miracles on display throughout every corner of the world. But let us remember: no one is truly persuaded of the coming resurrection unless he is so filled with wonder that he gives glory to the power of God. Isaiah, lifted up by this confidence, cries out: 'Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. Awake and shout for joy, you who dwell in the dust' (Isaiah 26:19). In a desperate situation he lifts himself to God the author of life, in whose hand are the keys of death — as the psalm declares. Job too, who looked more like a corpse than a living man, trusted in the power of God and did not hesitate to raise himself to that coming day as though he were whole and sound: 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; I myself shall behold Him, and no other' (Job 19:25-27). Although some twist these passages and argue they should not be understood as referring to the resurrection, they actually strengthen the very point they try to destroy — because these holy men in their suffering drew comfort from nothing other than the hope of the resurrection. This is even clearer in the passage from Ezekiel. When the Jews refused to believe the promise of their return from exile, arguing that a road being opened for them

was as impossible as the dead rising from their graves, the prophet was shown a vision of a field full of dry bones, which the Lord commanded to be clothed again with flesh and sinew (Ezekiel 37:8). Though that vision was raising the people's hope for their physical return, the basis of that hope was rooted in the resurrection — just as the resurrection is the foundation for all the deliverances the faithful experience in this world. In the same way, when Christ had taught that the voice of the Gospel gives life, and the Jews rejected this, He pressed further: 'Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth' (John 5:28). So following Paul's example, let us triumph joyfully even in the middle of our battles — for He who has promised the life to come is able to keep what has been entrusted to Him. Let us glory that a crown of righteousness is laid up for us, which the righteous Judge will award on that day (2 Timothy 4:8). In this way, whatever griefs we suffer will become to us a foretaste of the life to come — for it is consistent with God's nature to repay with affliction those who now afflict us, and to give us who are unjustly afflicted rest when Christ appears with His mighty angels in flaming fire. And we must hold on to what Paul adds immediately after: that He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because the Gospel was believed.

Although the minds of people ought to have been constantly occupied with thinking about the resurrection, they have instead — almost as if deliberately trying to wipe out all memory of it — treated death as the final boundary of all things and the complete destruction of a person. Solomon speaks of what was the common, widely accepted view when he says that a living dog is better than a dead lion. And elsewhere: 'Who knows whether the spirit of man

goes upward and the spirit of a beast goes down to the earth?' (Ecclesiastes 3:21). This brutish, senseless error has run through every age — and has even broken into the church itself, for the Sadducees boldly taught that there is no resurrection and that souls are mortal. But so that this gross ignorance leaves no one with an excuse, even unbelievers have always had some image of the resurrection before their eyes by sheer natural instinct. What other purpose did the universal and sacred custom of burial serve, if not as a pledge of new life? Nor can anyone claim this came from a mistaken tradition — for the practice of honorable burial was always observed among the holy fathers, and God allowed the same custom to continue among the Gentiles, so that the image of the resurrection set before them might shake them out of their dullness. Though that ceremony was largely wasted on those who failed to grasp its meaning, it is still profitable for us when we reflect carefully on its purpose — and it is no small refutation of unbelief that all humanity has universally practiced something whose meaning almost no one believed. But Satan has not only numbed people's minds so that they buried the memory of the resurrection along with the body — he has also worked to corrupt this part of doctrine with various false inventions, hoping to destroy it completely. I will pass over how in Paul's time Satan was already gnawing at it. But a little later came the Millenarians, who limited the reign of Christ to a thousand years. Their error is so childish it scarcely deserves a response. The book of Revelation does not support them, even though they colored their error with it — for in the passage where that number is mentioned, the writer is not speaking of the eternal blessedness of the church but only of the various trials that would come upon the church during its earthly pilgrim-

age. But all of Scripture declares plainly that the blessedness of the elect and the punishment of the reprobate will have no end. For all things that lie beyond our sight and surpass the capacity of our minds, we must either accept on the certain testimony of God's Word or reject entirely. Those who assign the children of God only a thousand years to enjoy the inheritance of the life to come fail to see how great a dishonor they are doing to both Christ and His kingdom. For if they will not be clothed with immortality, then neither is Christ Himself — into whose glory they will be transformed — received into immortal glory. If their blessedness will eventually end, then the kingdom of Christ — on whose permanence it depends — is only temporary. In the end, either these people are completely ignorant of all things relating to God, or they are deliberately working with crooked malice to overthrow the entire grace of God and the power of Christ — whose fulfillment is not complete unless sin is blotted out, death is swallowed up, and eternal life is fully restored. Even the blindest person can see the foolishness of those who fear they are making God too cruel by allowing the reprobate to be condemned to everlasting punishment. As if the Lord would be doing wrong by withholding His kingdom from those who by their own ingratitude have made themselves unworthy of it. They say the sins last only for a time. Granted — but the majesty and righteousness of God, which they have offended by sinning, is eternal. The memory of their sin therefore rightly does not die. The argument that the punishment exceeds the fault is a blasphemy that must not be tolerated — for it makes God's majesty so small, treating contempt for Him as worth no

more than the ruin of a single soul. But let us leave these foolish notions — lest, contrary to what we have already said, we appear to think their nonsense is worth refuting.

Beyond these, two more mistaken errors have been introduced by perversely curious people. The first group believed that the whole person dies — soul included — and that the soul will rise again together with the body. The second group, while granting that souls are immortal spirits, argued that they will be clothed with entirely new bodies at the resurrection — thereby denying the resurrection of the flesh. On the first error — I already touched on it when discussing the creation of humanity, so let me simply warn readers again what a brutish error it is to reduce a spirit made in the image of God to a vapor that does nothing more than animate the body during this brief life. It reduces the temple of the Holy Spirit to nothing. It strips that part of us where the divine image chiefly shines and where the marks of immortality appear — strips it, I say, of this gift entirely — so that the condition of the body would end up better and more excellent than the condition of the soul. Scripture teaches something entirely different. It compares the body to a tent from which we move out when we die, because it defines us by that part which sets us apart from animals. Peter, as he was being led to his death, said that the time had come for him to lay aside his tent. Paul, speaking of the faithful, says that when our earthly house is dissolved, we have a building from God in heaven — and that as long as we remain in the body we are away from the Lord, but we desire to be present with God in the absence of the body. If souls do not outlive bodies, what is it that is present with God when it is separated from the body? The apostle removes all doubt when he teaches that we share fellowship with the spirits

of righteous people. By this he shows that we are in fellowship with the holy fathers who, even in death, maintain the same godliness as we do — and that we cannot be members of Christ unless we are joined together with them. And unless souls, stripped of the body, still keep their substance and are capable of receiving blessed glory — Christ would not have said to the thief: 'Today you shall be with Me in paradise' (Luke 23:43). Since we have such clear testimonies, let us not hesitate at death — following Christ's example — to commit our souls to God, or following Stephen's example, to entrust them to Christ to keep. And He is fittingly called the faithful Shepherd and Guardian of souls. To inquire too deeply into their intermediate state is neither lawful nor profitable. Many busy themselves with debating what state the souls are in, and whether they now enjoy heavenly glory. But it is foolish and rash to press deeper into unknown things than God has given us permission to know. Scripture tells us that Christ is present with them and receives them into paradise so they may enjoy comfort — and that the souls of the reprobate suffer the pains they have deserved. Beyond that, Scripture does not go. What teacher or master can open to us what God has chosen to conceal? Questions about the location of souls are equally foolish and pointless — for the soul does not occupy space the way the body does. The blessed gathering of holy spirits is called the bosom of Abraham. It is enough for us, when this journey is over, to be received by the common father of the faithful, so that he may share with us the fruit of his faith. Meanwhile, since Scripture everywhere directs us to wait for Christ's coming and defers the crown of glory until that day — let us be content with the boundaries God has set. The souls of the godly, having finished the labor of their warfare, enter into a

blessed rest, where in joyful happiness they await the full enjoyment of the promised glory. Everything is held in suspension until Christ the Redeemer appears. As for the reprobate, there is no doubt that they are in the condition Jude assigns to the devils — held bound in chains until they are brought to the punishment for which they have been condemned.

Equally absurd is the error of those who imagine that souls will not receive the same bodies they now have, but will be given new and different ones. The Manicheans' reasoning was very weak: they claimed it was not fitting for flesh, which is unclean, to rise again. As though there were no uncleanness in souls! Yet they did not deny the hope of eternal life to souls. It was as if they were saying that whatever is infected with the stain of sin cannot be cleansed by God. I will pass over the foolish notion that flesh was naturally unclean because it was created by the devil. I simply want to show that whatever is now in us that is unworthy of heaven does not prevent the resurrection. First, since Paul commands the faithful to cleanse themselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, the judgment he pronounces elsewhere follows from this: that each person will receive through their body either good or evil. This agrees with what he writes to the Corinthians: that the life of Jesus Christ may be openly displayed in our mortal flesh. For this reason, in another place he prays that God would preserve their bodies whole until the day of Christ, no less than their souls and spirits. And no wonder -- it would be a great absurdity for the bodies God has dedicated as His temples to decay into dust without hope of rising again. What about the fact that they are also members of Christ? That God commands every part of them to be sanctified to Himself? That He wills His name to be praised

with tongues, pure hands lifted to Him, and sacrifices offered? What madness it is, then, for the part to which the heavenly Judge has granted such great honor to be reduced to dust by a mortal without any hope of restoration! Likewise, when Paul urges us to glorify the Lord in both body and soul because both belong to God, he surely does not allow what he claims for God as holy to be condemned to eternal decay. No teaching of Scripture is plainer than the resurrection of this very flesh we carry. "This corruptible," Paul says, "must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." If God were making new bodies, where would this change of quality be? If it had said we must be renewed, the ambiguous language might have given room for their objections. But now, pointing with his finger to the bodies we wear, he promises them incorruption. He is plainly enough denying that new bodies will be made. Indeed, as Tertullian said, he could not have spoken more plainly unless he had held his own skin in his hand. They cannot escape this either: where Paul says in another place that Christ will judge the world, he cites this testimony from Isaiah: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to Me." He clearly declares that those he is addressing will be made to give an account of their lives. This could not hold true if new bodies were brought before the judgment seat. In Daniel's words, there is no ambiguity: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt." He does not create new matter from the four elements to make people; he calls the dead out of their graves. Simple reason teaches this as well. If mortality, which originated from the fall, is accidental, then the restoration Christ brought applies to the same body that first became mortal. And truly, when the Athenians

laughed at Paul for proclaiming the resurrection, we can gather from this what kind of resurrection he preached. Their mockery actually helps strengthen our faith. Christ's saying is also worth noting: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." There would be nothing to fear unless the body we now have were subject to punishment. Equally clear is another saying of Christ: "The hour is coming when all who are in the graves will hear the voice of the Son of God and come out -- those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Shall we say that souls rest in graves, lying there to hear Christ? Is it not rather that at His command, the bodies will return to the vitality they had lost? Furthermore, if we are given new bodies, where is the conformity between the head and the members? Christ rose again. Was it by creating a new body for Himself? No. As He had said before: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He took back the same body He had previously borne as mortal. It would not have done us much good if a new body were substituted while the old one -- the one offered as a cleansing sacrifice -- was destroyed. We must also hold fast to the fellowship the apostle proclaims: we rise because Christ has risen. Nothing is less probable than that our flesh, in which we bear the dying of Christ, should be deprived of sharing in Christ's resurrection. This was clearly demonstrated by a notable example: at Christ's resurrection, many bodies of the saints came out of the graves. It cannot be denied that this was a foretaste -- indeed, a down payment -- of the final resurrection we hope for. It was similar to what happened earlier

with Enoch and Elijah, whom Tertullian calls early possessors of the resurrection, since they were received into God's keeping, delivered from corruption in both body and soul.

I am embarrassed to spend so many words on such a clear matter. But the readers will patiently bear this trouble with me, so that no opening is left for perverse and bold minds to deceive the simple. The wild spirits with whom I am now debating invent the fanciful idea that at the resurrection, entirely new bodies will be created. What leads them to think so, except that it seems unbelievable to them that a corpse consumed by long decay could return to its original state? So unbelief alone is the mother of this opinion. But on the other hand, the Spirit of God throughout Scripture calls us to hope for the resurrection of our flesh. For this reason, baptism (as Paul says) is a seal of the resurrection to come. Likewise, the holy Supper draws us to trust in it when we receive with our mouths the signs of spiritual grace. Paul's entire exhortation -- that we dedicate our bodily members as instruments for the obedience of righteousness -- would be pointless unless joined with what he adds next: "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies." What good would it do to apply our feet, hands, eyes, and tongues to God's service if they were not going to share in the fruit and reward? Paul explicitly confirms this in his own words: "The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." "He who raised up Christ will also raise us up by His power." Even more plain are the words that follow: that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ. In the meantime, we see how he connects the resurrection with chastity and holiness. Shortly after, he says that the price of redemption also applies to our bodies. Now, it would

hardly be reasonable for the body of Paul -- in which he bore the marks of Christ and in which he gloriously honored Christ -- to lose the reward of the crown. This is why he also boasts: "We await a Savior from heaven, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body." And if it is true that we must enter the kingdom of God through many afflictions, no sound reasoning would exclude the body from that entrance, since God both exercises it under the banner of the cross and honors it with the praise of victory. Therefore, on this matter there was no doubt among the saints. They hoped to be companions of Christ, who takes into His own person all the afflictions we face. He does this to teach us that afflictions lead to life. Indeed, even under the law, God trained the holy patriarchs in this faith through an outward ceremony. What was the purpose of burial, as we have already shown, except that they should know a new life is prepared for the bodies laid to rest? The spices and other signs of immortality served the same purpose, helping the dimness of faith under the law, just as the sacrifices did. This practice was not born of superstition, since we see that the Spirit carefully records burials just as He does the chief mysteries of faith. Christ commends the burial anointing as a special deed, for no other reason than that it lifts our eyes from the sight of the grave (which corrupts and destroys everything) to the vision of renewal. Furthermore, the careful attention to burial that is praised among the patriarchs shows it was for them a rare and precious support of faith. Abraham would not have been so careful to secure a burial site for his wife unless he had a religious purpose and a benefit higher than this world in view. By adorning his wife's dead body with the signs of resurrection, he strengthened his own faith and that of his household. A clearer proof appears in Jacob's

example. To show his descendants that the hope of the promised land had not died from his mind even in death, he commanded his bones to be carried there. I ask you: if he were going to be clothed with a new body, would he not have given a foolish command about dust that was going to become nothing? Therefore, if the authority of Scripture means anything to us, no teaching can be more clearly or more certainly proven than this. Even children understand from the words "resurrection" and "raising up" what is meant. We cannot call it the resurrection of something newly created for the first time. Nor would Christ's words hold true: "Everything the Father has given Me will not perish, but I will raise it up on the last day." The word "sleep" serves the same purpose, applying only to bodies. This is also why burial places were called coemeterium -- sleeping places. Now it remains for me to say something about the manner of the resurrection. I use this word because Paul, calling it a mystery, urges us to be sober and restrains the freedom to speculate about it like philosophers. First, we must hold, as we have said, that we will rise in the same flesh we now carry, as far as the substance is concerned, but the quality will be different. The same flesh of Christ that had been offered as a sacrifice was raised up, yet it excelled in other qualities as if it were altogether different flesh. Paul illustrates this with familiar examples. Just as all human flesh shares one substance -- distinct from that of animals -- and all stars are made of the same matter yet differ in brightness, so he teaches that although we will keep the substance of our body, there will be a change that makes it far more excellent. The body, then, will not perish or vanish away so that we may be raised. Rather, putting off corruption, it will put on incorruption. Since God has all the elements at His command, no

obstacle will prevent Him from commanding earth, water, and fire to return what seems to have been consumed by them. Isaiah also testifies to this, though with figurative language: "Behold, the Lord will come out from His place to punish the wickedness of the earth. And the earth will reveal its blood and will no longer hide its dead." But an important distinction must be noted between those who died long before and those who will be found alive on that day. "We will not all sleep," Paul says, "but we will all be changed." That is, it will not be necessary for there to be a gap between death and the beginning of the second life. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the sound of the trumpet will pierce through to raise the dead incorruptible and instantly transform the living into the same glory. In another place he comforts the faithful who must die: those remaining alive will not go before the dead. Rather, those who have fallen asleep in Christ will rise first. If someone objects with the apostle's statement that it is appointed for all people to die once, the answer is easy: when the state of nature is changed, it is a kind of death and can rightly be called that. So these things fit together well: everyone will be renewed through death when they put off their mortal body, yet it is not necessary for the body and soul to be separated where there is an instantaneous change.

But here a more difficult question arises: by what right is the resurrection, which is a unique benefit of Christ, shared with the wicked and those cursed by God? We know that in Adam all were condemned to death. Christ came as the resurrection and the life. Did He come to give life to all of humanity without distinction? What could be more unreasonable than for the stubbornly blind to receive through their obstinacy what the godly worshippers of God receive only through faith? Yet this remains certain: there will be

one resurrection to judgment and another resurrection to life, and Christ will come to separate the sheep from the goats. I answer that this should not seem strange, since we see a parallel in everyday experience. We know that through Adam we were deprived of the inheritance of the whole world, and that we are excluded from ordinary food just as much as from the tree of life. How then does it come about that God makes His sun rise on both the good and the evil, and that His extraordinary generosity continues to overflow abundantly for all people in the daily provisions of this present life? From this we learn that things properly belonging to Christ and His members also overflow to the wicked -- not as their rightful possession, but so they may be made all the more without excuse. The wicked often find God generous beyond ordinary measures. His proofs of kindness to them sometimes overshadow all the blessings of the godly. Yet these blessings only serve to deepen their condemnation. If someone objects that the resurrection cannot be properly compared to temporary, earthly blessings, I also answer: when they were first cut off from God, the fountain of life, they deserved the devil's death and utter destruction. Yet by God's marvelous plan, a middle state was found: they could live in death, even while being out of life. It should be no more strange that the resurrection happens to the wicked, dragging them against their will before Christ's judgment seat -- the Christ they now refuse to hear as their master and teacher. For it would be too light a punishment simply to be consumed by death. Rather, they must be brought before the Judge to suffer punishment for their stubbornness, having endlessly and immeasurably provoked His vengeance against themselves. But although we must maintain what we have said -- and what Paul's notable confession before Felix contains,

that he looks for the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked -- yet Scripture often mentions the resurrection together with the heavenly glory as belonging only to God's children. Christ properly came not for the world's destruction but for its salvation. Therefore, in the Creed, only the blessed life is mentioned.

Since the prophecy that death will be swallowed up in victory will only then be fulfilled, let us always keep in mind the eternal happiness that is the goal of the resurrection. No matter how much human language could express about its excellence, even the smallest part would scarcely be captured. Although we truly hear that the kingdom of God will be filled with radiance, joy, happiness, and glory, these descriptions remain far removed from our understanding. They stay wrapped in obscure language until the day when Christ Himself will reveal His glory to us face to face. "We know," says John, "that we are the children of God, but it has not yet appeared what we shall be." "But when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is." Because the prophets could not express spiritual blessedness in words, they portrayed it in rough, earthly terms. But since the passion of our desire must be kindled with some taste of that sweetness, let us focus mainly on this thought: if God, as a fountain that can never be drained, contains the fullness of all good things, nothing beyond Him should be desired by those who aim at the supreme good and the full perfection of happiness. As Scripture teaches in many places. "Abraham, I am your exceedingly great reward." David agrees: "The Lord is my portion; the lot has fallen very well for me." Again in another place: "I shall be satisfied with Your presence." Peter declares that the faithful are called for this purpose: to be made partakers of the divine nature. How is this? Because God

will be glorified in all His saints and made marvelous in those who have believed. If the Lord will share His glory, power, and righteousness with His chosen ones -- and indeed will give Himself to them to be enjoyed, and (which is even better) will in a certain sense become one with them -- let us remember that every kind of blessedness is contained in this benefit. And even when we have made much progress in this meditation, let us acknowledge that we are still at the very beginning, if the grasp of our mind is compared with the height of this mystery. We must therefore practice restraint in this area, so that the more boldly we try to soar upward -- forgetting our own limitations -- the more the brightness of heavenly glory will not overwhelm us. We also feel how the boundless desire to know more than is permitted tickles us. This gives rise to trivial and harmful questions. I call some trivial because no benefit can come from them. But the second kind is worse, because those who pursue them entangle themselves in dangerous speculations. What the Scriptures teach should be beyond all doubt for us: just as God distributes His gifts to the saints unequally in this world, enlightening them in different measures, so the degree of glory will not be equal in heaven. There God will crown His gifts. Paul's statement does not apply equally to all: "You are my glory and crown in the day of Christ." Nor does Christ's statement to the apostles: "You will sit judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Paul, who knew that just as God enriches the saints with spiritual gifts on earth He also adorns them with glory in heaven, had no doubt that a special crown was stored up for him in proportion to his labors. Christ, to honor the dignity of the apostolic office, tells them that its reward is stored up for them in heaven. Daniel also says: "The wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those

who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." And if you carefully examine the Scriptures, they promise the faithful not only eternal life in general but also a special reward for each one. This is why Paul says: "May the Lord grant him mercy on that day." Christ's promise confirms it: "You will receive a hundredfold in eternal life." In short, just as Christ begins the glory of His body in this world with a rich diversity of gifts and increases it by degrees, so He will perfect it in heaven.

All the godly will gladly accept this, since it is sufficiently taught by the word of God. On the other hand, they will leave aside difficult questions, knowing they would only hold them back. As for myself, I not only privately avoid searching into useless matters, but I also think I should be careful not to encourage others' frivolity by answering them. People hungry for useless knowledge ask how great the distance will be between the prophets and the apostles, between the apostles and the martyrs, and how many levels separate virgins from married people. They leave no corner of heaven unsearched. Then it occurs to them to wonder what purpose the renewal of the world will serve, since the children of God will need nothing from such vast, incomparable abundance. Instead, they will be like the angels, whose lack of eating is a sign of eternal blessedness. I answer that there will be such great delight and sweetness simply in beholding it, in the knowledge alone without any use, that this happiness will far surpass all the helps we currently rely on. Imagine ourselves placed in the wealthiest region in the world, where we would lack no pleasure. Yet who is there whose sickness does not sometimes prevent them from enjoying God's gifts? Who is there whose own excess does not occasionally disrupt their course? From this it follows that a pure, un-

blemished enjoyment, free from all defect -- even without the use of corruptible things -- is the perfection of happiness. Some go further and ask whether impurities and corruptions in metals are not contrary to this restoration. I grant this to some degree, yet with Paul I look forward to the healing of the defects that originated from sin, toward which creation groans and labors. Yet they push further and ask what better condition is prepared for humanity, since the blessing of childbearing will then be at an end. This question is also easy to answer. When Scripture so honorably describes that kind of blessing, it refers to the growth by which God continually advances the order of nature toward its goal. But in perfection, there is another way entirely. Since the unwary are easily caught by such allurements, and the maze draws them deeper in, and since there is no end to the arguing when everyone likes their own ideas -- let us take this as our short rule: to be content with the mirror and dim reflection until we see face to face. Few among many care about the way to get to heaven. But everyone wants to know ahead of time what is done there. Nearly all are sluggish and slow to enter the battle, yet they already paint for themselves imaginary triumphs.

Since no description can match the severity of God's vengeance on the reprobate, their torments and pains are pictured for us through physical images: darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth, unquenchable fire, and a worm endlessly gnawing the heart. Through such language the Holy Spirit clearly intended to strike all our senses with horror. When it says that a deep hell has been prepared from eternity, that its fuel is fire and much wood, and that the breath of the Lord, like a stream of sulfur, sets it ablaze. While such images must help us in some way to grasp the miser-

able state of the wicked, we should chiefly fix our thoughts on this: how wretched it is to be cut off from fellowship with God. Not only that, but to feel God's majesty so turned against you that you cannot escape it, and to be trapped by its grip. First, His displeasure is like a fierce fire that devours and swallows everything it touches. Then, all created things serve Him in executing His judgment. Those on whom the Lord displays His wrath will feel heaven, earth, and sea inflamed against them with cruel rage, as if armed for their destruction. Therefore, the apostle's statement is no small thing when he says that the unbelieving will suffer eternal punishment by being shut out from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His power. And whenever the prophets use physical imagery to put us in fear -- though their language is not excessive considering our dullness -- they add foreshadowings of the coming judgment in the sun, the moon, and the whole framework of the world. The unhappy consciences find no rest. They are tossed by a terrible whirlwind, feeling themselves torn apart by an angry God, pierced by deadly stings, trembling at God's lightning, and crushed under the weight of His hand. Going down into any bottomless pit would be far easier than standing for a single moment in those terrors. What a thing it is, then, to be pressed by His everlasting, never-ending siege! Psalm 90 contains a remarkable statement about this: although by His mere gaze He scatters all mortals and brings them to nothing, He drives His worshippers -- who are all the more fearful in this world -- loading them with the cross and pressing them forward, until He is all in all.

¶ THE FIRST CHAPTER. OF THE TRUE
CHURCHE WITH WHICH WE OUGHT
TO KEPE VNITIE, BECAUSE IT IS THE
MOTHER OF AL THE GODLY.



We have already shown in the preceding book that by faith in the Gospel, Christ has become ours, and we have been made partakers of the salvation He brings and of eternal blessedness. But because our weakness, laziness, and unreliable minds require outward aids — through which faith in us may be generated, and may grow and advance toward its goal — God has also provided them to help us in our frailty. To ensure that the preaching of the Gospel would flourish, He left this treasure with the church. He appointed pastors and teachers through whose voice He would teach His people, furnished them with authority, and left nothing undone that could contribute to the holy fellowship of faith and right order. Above all, He ordained the sacraments, which we find by experience to be more than useful helps for nourishing and confirming faith. Because we are enclosed in the prison of our flesh and have not yet attained the level of angels, God — in His wonderful providence — adapts Himself to our capacity and has appointed the means by which we, though far from

Him, might come to Him. Therefore the order of our teaching now requires that we address the church, its government, orders, and authority — then the sacraments — and finally the civil order. Along the way, we will call godly readers away from the corruptions by which Satan in the papacy has distorted everything God appointed for our salvation. I will begin with the church, into whose bosom God wills His children to be gathered — not only so that they may be fed and nourished while they are infants and young children, but also so that they may be guided by her motherly care until they reach maturity and at last come to the goal of faith. For it is not right to separate what God has joined: those to whom God is a Father must also have the church as their mother. This holds not only under the Old Covenant but also since the coming of Christ, as Paul testifies when he teaches that we are children of the new and heavenly Jerusalem.

When we confess in the Creed that we believe the church, this refers not only to the visible church we are now discussing, but to all the elect of God — including those who have already died. The word 'believe' is used there because the children of God often cannot be visibly distinguished from the ungodly, nor His own flock from those outside. Many people insert the word 'in' — 'I believe in the church' — but without good reason. I grant that this usage is more common and is supported by some ancient testimony, since even the Nicene Creed, as recorded in church history, includes the preposition 'in.' But the writings of the ancient fathers show that in early times it was universally accepted to say 'I believe the church' rather than 'I believe in the church.' Augustine, and that ancient writer whose work has come down under the name of Cyprian on the exposition of the Creed, not only spoke this way themselves but

expressly noted that adding the preposition would be improper speech — and they gave solid reasons for this view. We say 'I believe in God' because our mind rests on Him as one who is truthful, and our confidence is grounded in Him. That could not so fittingly be said of 'in the church,' any more than one would say 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins' or 'in the resurrection of the flesh.' Though I would not quarrel over words, I prefer to follow the manner of speaking that most clearly expresses the matter rather than seeking forms of speech that needlessly obscure it. The main point is this: we must know that although the devil tries every means to destroy the grace of Christ, and although God's enemies rush toward the same goal with fierce violence, this grace cannot be extinguished. The blood of Christ will not be made barren but will always bear fruit. Here both the secret election of God and His inward calling must be considered. He alone knows who are His, and He keeps them, as Paul says, sealed under His mark — by which they may be distinguished from the reprobate. But because a small and overlooked number is hidden within a vast multitude, and a few grains of wheat lie buried under a heap of chaff, the knowledge of His church must be left to God alone, for its foundation is His secret election. Yet it is not enough to think abstractly about the multitude of the elect — we must also think about such a unity of the church that we ourselves are genuinely persuaded we belong to it. Unless we are united under Christ our head together with all His other members, no hope of the inheritance to come remains for us. This is why the church is called catholic, or universal — because we cannot divide it into two or three churches without tearing Christ apart, which is impossible. All the elect of God are so united in Christ that, as they depend on one head, they grow to-

gether as into one body — joined with such a fitting of parts as the members of a single body — truly one, sharing one hope, one faith, one love, one Spirit of God, called not only to one inheritance of eternal life but also to one participation in one God and Christ. Therefore, even when visible desolation on every side seems to cry out that nothing is left of the church — let us know that Christ's death is fruitful, and that God marvelously preserves His church, as it were, in hidden corners. As He said to Elijah: 'I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal' (Romans 11:4).

Although this article of the Creed also applies in one sense to the outward church — in that each of us ought to hold ourselves in brotherly fellowship with all the children of God, give the church the honor it deserves, and behave as a sheep of the flock. For this reason the clause 'the communion of saints' is added. Though the ancient writers commonly omit this clause, it should not be neglected — for it expresses the character of the church very well. It is as if it said that the saints are gathered into fellowship with Christ on this condition: that whatever benefits God gives to any of them, they are to share freely with one another. This does not abolish the diversity of gifts, since we know the Holy Spirit distributes them differently to different people. Nor does it overthrow civil order, by which everyone is rightly permitted to enjoy their own private property — which is necessary for maintaining peace among people. Rather, it affirms a community of the kind Luke describes: that the whole company of believers was of one heart and one soul. And Paul urges the Ephesians to be one body, one Spirit, as they are called to one hope. For if they are truly persuaded that God is the common Father and Christ the common Head of them all, they

cannot help but be bound to one another in brotherly love and continually share what they have. Now it greatly matters to us to understand what benefit we receive from this. We believe the church for this purpose: to be firmly persuaded that we are members of it. By this, our salvation rests on sure and solid foundations — so that even if the whole framework of the world were shaken, it could not collapse. First, it stands on God's election, which can neither waver nor fail without His eternal providence also failing. Second, it is in a certain way bound to the steadfastness of Christ, who will no more allow His faithful to be torn from Him than He would allow His own members to be ripped apart. Beyond that, we are assured that truth will always remain with us as long as we are held in the bosom of the church. Finally, we feel these promises belong to us: 'There shall be salvation in Zion; God will dwell forever in Jerusalem, so that it will not be shaken.' Such is the power of fellowship with the church: it keeps us in fellowship with God. There is also great comfort in the very word 'communion' — because as long as it is certain that whatever the Lord gives to His people and to our fellow members also belongs to us, our hope is confirmed by all their blessings. To embrace the unity of the church in this way, it is not necessary — as we have already said — to see it with our eyes or touch it with our hands. Rather, since the church is grounded in faith, we are reminded that we should believe in its existence no less when it exceeds our understanding than when it is plainly visible. Nor does our faith suffer for conceiving of what is not yet seen. We are not commanded here to distinguish the reprobate from the elect — that is God's work, not ours. We are simply to settle it firmly in our minds that all who by God the Father's merciful grace, through the effectual working of

the Holy Spirit, have come into fellowship with Christ are set apart as Christ's own special possession — and that insofar as we are among that number, we share in so great a grace.

Since our purpose now is to treat of the visible church, let us learn from this one title — Mother — how necessary and profitable knowledge of it is for us. There is no other entry into life unless the church conceives us in her womb, brings us to birth, feeds us at her breast, and finally keeps us under her care and guidance until, stripped of mortal flesh, we become like angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from school until we have been students throughout our entire lives. Beyond that, outside her bosom there is no forgiveness of sins and no hope of salvation — as Isaiah and Joel testify, and Ezekiel agrees when he declares that those He excludes from the heavenly life are no longer counted among God's people. In contrast, those who turn to follow true godliness are said to have their names written among the citizens of Jerusalem. In the same way, a psalm says: 'Remember me, Lord, in Your favor toward Your people; visit me with Your salvation, that I may see the prosperity of Your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance' (Psalm 106:4-5). In these words, God's fatherly favor and the specific testimony of spiritual life are bound to His people — so that to depart from the church is always a damnable thing.

Let us now continue with what properly belongs to this discussion. Paul writes that Christ, in order to fill all things, gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers — for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, for the building up of the body of Christ — until we all reach the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,

to a mature person, to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). We see here how God — who could make His people perfect in an instant — wills that they grow into maturity only through the nurture of the church. We see the means He has appointed: pastors are charged with the preaching of heavenly doctrine. We see that everyone without exception is brought under one rule — that with a gentle and teachable spirit they submit themselves to the teachers appointed for this purpose. By this mark Isaiah had long before described the kingdom of Christ, when he said: 'My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring' (Isaiah 59:21). From this it follows that those who reject the spiritual food of the soul offered to them by God through the hands of the church deserve to perish from famine and starvation. God breathes faith into us — but through the instrument of His Gospel, as Paul says that faith comes by hearing. With God remains the power to save, but — as the same Paul testifies — He displays and exercises that power through the preaching of the Gospel. For this reason, in ancient times He commanded holy assemblies to gather at the sanctuary, so that the doctrine spoken by the mouth of the priest would nourish and preserve the unity of faith. The glorious titles given to the temple — called God's resting place, His sanctuary, the place where He sits enthroned between the cherubim — all serve the same purpose: to bring honor, love, reverence, and dignity to the ministry of heavenly doctrine, which the sight of a mortal and ordinary person might otherwise diminish. Therefore, so that we might know that priceless treasure is brought to us in clay vessels, God Himself comes forward — and as He is the author of this ar-

rangement, He wills to be acknowledged as present in His institution. So after forbidding His people to follow divination by birds, soothsaying, magic, necromancy, and other superstitions, He immediately adds that He will give them what should take the place of all these things — that they will never be without prophets. Just as He did not send the ancient people to angels but raised up teachers from the earth to carry out the office of angels in truth — so today also He wills to teach us through human beings. And just as in ancient times He was not content with the law alone but added priests as its interpreters, at whose lips the people were to seek the true meaning — so today He not only wants us to read attentively but also appoints teachers over us, through whose labor we are aided. This yields a double benefit. On one hand, it tests and proves our obedience when we hear His ministers speaking as though it were God Himself. On the other hand, it also accommodates our weakness — for in a way suited to our humanity, He prefers to speak to us through interpreters to draw us to Himself, rather than to thunder at us and drive us away. How necessary this kind, familiar way of teaching is for us — all the godly feel this in the awe that God's majesty rightly strikes into them. Those who think the authority of doctrine is diminished by their contempt for the men called to teach it betray their ingratitude. Among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned humanity, this is a singular honor: that He condescends to consecrate the mouths and tongues of people for Himself, so that His own voice might sound through them. Let us therefore not be reluctant to embrace obediently the doctrine of salvation set forth by His command and through His own mouth. Although God's power is not bound to outward means, He has bound us to an ordinary way of teaching —

and those who recklessly refuse to follow it wrap themselves in many deadly traps. Many are moved by pride, disdain, or envy to persuade themselves that they can grow sufficiently on their own through private reading and study — and so they despise public assemblies and treat preaching as unnecessary. But since they do as much as they can to cut or tear apart the holy bond of unity, no one escapes the just punishment of this separation without being deceived by poisonous errors and the most destructive foolishness. Therefore, so that the pure simplicity of faith may flourish among us, let us not be reluctant to use this practice of godliness, which God by His institution has shown to be necessary and so earnestly commends to us. No one has ever been found — not even among the most reckless scoffers — who would openly say we should stop our ears to God. Yet in every age the prophets and godly teachers have had hard battles against the wicked, whose stubbornness can never bend under this requirement to be taught through the mouth and ministry of human beings. To reject this is to blot out the face of God that shines upon us in doctrine. In ancient times the faithful were commanded to seek God's face in the sanctuary, and the law repeats this so often for one reason only: the doctrine of the law and the exhortations of the prophets were a living image of God for them — as Paul declares that in his preaching the glory of God shines in the face of Christ. How much more detestable, then, are those apostates who greedily set out to divide churches — as if driving sheep from their folds and throwing them into the mouths of wolves. We must hold to what we have drawn from Paul: the church is built by nothing other than outward preaching, and the saints are held together by no other bond than when, through learning and growing together, they maintain the order

God has appointed for the church. To this end above all, as I have said, the faithful under the law in ancient times were commanded to go to the sanctuary. When Moses speaks of the dwelling place of God, he also calls it 'the place of the name' where God has established the memorial of His name. By this he plainly teaches that without the doctrine of godliness, the place serves no purpose. It is beyond doubt that David, for the same reason, complains with great anguish of spirit that his enemies' tyrannical cruelty keeps him from entering the tabernacle. To many it seems like childish grief — after all, to lack entry to the temple would seem a small loss, hardly worth mourning when so many other comforts remain. But David mourns that he is consumed and nearly destroyed by this one grief, this anguish and sorrow. Nothing is more precious to the faithful than this help, by which God lifts His own upward step by step. It should also be noted that in the mirror of His doctrine, God always showed Himself to the holy fathers in such a way that their knowledge was spiritual. Therefore the temple is called not only His face but also — to remove all superstition — His footstool. This is that blessed gathering into unity of faith, as from the greatest to the least, all press toward the Head. All the temples that the Gentiles ever built to God for any other purpose were nothing but a desecration of His worship — and the Jews, though not with equal crudeness, fell into something similar. For this Stephen, quoting Isaiah, reproaches them, saying that God does not dwell in temples made with human hands. For God alone sanctifies temples to Himself for their lawful use through His Word. And if we rashly attempt anything without His command, new inventions immediately attach themselves to the evil beginning, and the evil spreads without limit. Even Xerxes, when he burned or demol-

ished all the temples of Greece on the advice of the Magi, spoke foolishly when he said that the gods, to whom all things should be freely open, were being enclosed within walls and tiles. As if it were not within God's power — in order to be near us — to condescend to us in a certain way, without changing place or tying us to earthly things, but rather to carry us upward by certain vehicles to His heavenly glory, which by its immeasurable greatness fills all things and in height surpasses even the heavens.

There has been great controversy in our time about the effectiveness of the ministry — some excessively magnifying its dignity, others insisting that what properly belongs to the Holy Spirit is wrongly attributed to mortal men if we think that ministers and teachers can penetrate minds and hearts to correct blindness and hardness. It is fitting that we settle this question properly. Everything both sides contend for can easily be reconciled by carefully noting two kinds of passages: those where God, as the author of preaching, joins His Spirit to it and promises fruit from it — and those where, setting aside outward means, He claims for Himself alone both the beginning of faith and its entire course. It was the office of the second Elijah — as Malachi testifies — to enlighten minds and to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and unbelievers to the wisdom of the righteous. Christ declares that He sends the apostles to bear lasting fruit from their labor. Peter briefly defines what that fruit is, saying that we have been born again of incorruptible seed. Therefore Paul boasts that he fathered the Corinthians through the Gospel, that they were the seal of his apostleship, and that he was not a merely outward minister — one who only beat on people's ears with sound — but that power of the Spirit was given to him so that his teaching would not be without

effect. In the same sense he says elsewhere that his Gospel came not in word only but in power. He also says that the Galatians received the Spirit of faith through hearing. And in many places he makes himself not only a co-worker with God but also claims for himself a role in the giving of salvation. But he never brought all of this forward to claim anything at all for himself apart from God — as he plainly says elsewhere: 'Our labor was not in vain in the Lord, according to His power working mightily in me.' And again: 'He who was at work in Peter for the circumcised was also at work in me for the Gentiles' (Galatians 2:8). But how he leaves nothing to ministers apart from God is clear from other passages: 'He who plants is nothing, and he who waters is nothing, but God who causes the growth' (1 Corinthians 3:7). And again: 'I labored more than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me' (1 Corinthians 15:10). We must hold firmly to those passages where God, attributing to Himself the enlightening of the mind and the renewing of the heart, declares that it would be robbery against God if any person claimed any part of either for himself. Meanwhile, if anyone comes to the ministers God has ordained and is willing to learn, he will know by the fruit that this manner of teaching was not in vain pleasing to God, and that the yoke of humility laid on the faithful was not without purpose.

As for the visible church — the one within our range of knowledge — I think what we have already said makes clear enough what judgment should be formed about it. For we have said that Scripture speaks of the church in two ways. Sometimes by 'the church' it means that church which exists truly before God, into which no one is received except those who are both the children of God by the grace of adoption and the true members of Christ by

the sanctification of the Spirit. In this sense it includes not only the holy ones living on earth but all the elect throughout all ages from the beginning of the world. But more often by 'the church' it means the whole body of people scattered throughout the world who profess to worship one God and Christ, who enter His faith through baptism, who testify their unity in true doctrine and love through participation in the Supper, who agree with the Word of God, and who maintain the ministry Christ ordained for the preaching of it. In this church many hypocrites are mixed in, who have nothing of Christ except the name and outward appearance. Many are ambitious, greedy, envious, slanderous, or immoral in their lives. These are tolerated for a time — either because they cannot be convicted by the lawful process of discipline, or because the severity of discipline that ought to exist is not always consistently practiced. Therefore, just as we must believe that the church which is invisible to us is seen by God's eyes alone — so we are commanded to give respect to this church which is called a church in a human sense, and to maintain communion with it.

Therefore, as much as we need to know about it, the Lord has marked it out for us with certain signs. This is indeed the unique prerogative of God Himself — to know who are His, as we have already drawn from Paul. And to keep human presumption from going too far in this, the very course of events constantly reminds us how far His secret judgments surpass our understanding. For even those who seemed most hopeless and beyond all recovery are by His goodness called back to the right path. And those who seemed to stand firm compared with others often fall. Therefore, according to God's secret predestination — as Augustine says — there are many sheep without the fold and many wolves within. For He

knows and has marked those who know neither Him nor themselves. But of those who openly bear His name, only His eyes can see who are genuinely holy without pretense, and who will endure to the end — which is the very heart of salvation. Yet on the other side, since He saw it was somewhat necessary that we should know who are to be counted His children, He has accommodated Himself to our capacity in this matter. And because certainty of the deepest kind was not necessary here, He has placed in its stead a judgment of love — by which we are to recognize as members of the church those who, through confession of faith, example of life, and participation in the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ as we do. As for knowing the full extent of the church's body — the more He knew this was necessary for our salvation, the more clearly He has marked it out for us.

Here, then, is the visible form of the church as it appears to our eyes. Wherever we see the word of God being purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there it cannot be doubted that a church of God exists — since His promise cannot deceive: 'Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am among them' (Matthew 18:20). But to understand this clearly, we must proceed step by step. The universal church is a multitude gathered out of all nations — separated and scattered across great distances, yet united in one true doctrine of godliness and bound together by the bond of one religion. Under this universal church are contained all the particular churches established in towns and neighborhoods according to the practical needs of people. Each of these rightfully carries the name and authority of a church. And all individuals who by profession of godliness are counted members of such churches — even if in real-

ity they are strangers to the church — belong to it in a certain sense until they are formally expelled by public judgment. Yet there is a somewhat different standard for judging individuals and for judging churches. It may happen that we encounter people we do not consider fully worthy of fellowship with the godly — yet because the church in its common judgment tolerates them and bears with them as part of Christ's body, we must treat them as brothers and count them among the faithful. We are not by this testifying that we approve them as true members of the church — we are simply leaving them in the place they hold among God's people until it is lawfully taken from them. But about the congregation as a whole we must think differently: if it has and honors the ministry of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, it without question deserves to be recognized and honored as a church, since it is certain those things are not without fruit. In this way we also preserve the unity of the universal church — which devilish spirits have always worked to tear apart — while not robbing legitimate congregations, properly ordered in their various places, of their rightful authority.

We have established the Word preached and the sacraments observed as the marks by which the church is to be recognized. These marks, wherever they exist, cannot fail to bear fruit and be blessed by God. I am not saying that fruit springs up immediately wherever the word is preached. But I am saying that wherever it is received and has a settled home, it will produce its effect. Where the preaching of the Gospel is reverently heard and the sacraments are not neglected — however things may look — there appears for that time a real and undeniable face of the church. No one may with impunity despise its authority, refuse its warnings, resist its

counsel, or mock its corrections — much less depart from it and tear apart its unity. For the Lord so highly values the communion of His church that He counts as a traitor and deserter of religion anyone who stubbornly withdraws from any Christian fellowship that has the true ministry of Word and sacraments. He so honors the church's authority that when it is violated, He considers His own majesty diminished. Nor is it a small thing that the church is called the pillar and foundation of the truth and the household of God. By these words Paul declares that the church is the faithful guardian of God's truth, so that it will not perish from the world. For God willed that the preaching of His word be kept pure, and He shows Himself our Father through the church's ministry and labor — feeding us with spiritual nourishment and providing everything that serves our salvation. Nor is it a small honor that she has been chosen and set apart by Christ to be His bride — spotless and without wrinkle — the body and fullness of Him who fills all in all. It follows from this that departing from the church is a rejection of God and of Christ. All the more, then, must we guard against such wicked division. For when we set about, as far as in us lies, to bring about the ruin of God's truth, we deserve that He send down His lightning with the full force of His wrath to destroy us. No fault can be imagined more serious than defiling with wicked betrayal the marriage that the only begotten Son of God has condescended to contract with us.

Therefore let us diligently keep these marks impressed on our minds and value them as the Lord wills. For nothing does Satan strive harder to do than to take away or destroy one or both of these marks — sometimes erasing and blotting them out so that the true identity of the church is lost — other times driving them

into contempt so that he can drag us away from the church through open apostasy. By his scheming it has come about that in certain past ages the pure preaching of the word has disappeared entirely. And now he works with equal persistence to overthrow the ministry, which Christ has so firmly established in the church that when it is removed, the building up of the church ceases. How dangerous — indeed how deadly — is the temptation when the thought enters our minds to separate from a congregation where the signs and marks by which the Lord has described His church are visibly present. We see, therefore, how much care is required on both sides. So that we are not deceived by a false title to the name of the church — every congregation that claims the name must be tested, as with a touchstone. If it has the Word and sacraments in the order appointed by the Lord, it will not deceive us. Let us then confidently grant it the honor due to churches. But on the other side, if it boasts itself without the Word and sacraments, we must be no less afraid of such deceptions than we must flee from rashness and pride on the other extreme.

When we say that the pure ministry of the word and the proper administration of the sacraments are a sufficient pledge and guarantee — so that we may safely embrace as a church any fellowship where both are present — this extends so far that the church should never be abandoned as long as these two things remain, even if it is full of many other faults. Some faultiness may creep in — either in the teaching of doctrine or in the administration of the sacraments — but this should not separate us from communion with it. Not all points of true doctrine are equally essential. Some are so necessary that they must be certain and beyond question for everyone, as the fundamental principles of religion. Among these

are: that there is one God; that Christ is God and the Son of God; that our salvation rests on God's mercy; and things of that kind. There are others that may be disputed between churches without breaking the unity of faith. For example, if two churches differ on one point — one holding that souls fly up to heaven immediately at death, while the other dares to determine nothing about the location but holds with certainty that they live to the Lord — this need not break their fellowship, provided there is no contentious arguing or stubborn insisting. The apostle's words are: 'Let all of us who are mature think the same way. But if you think differently about anything, God will also reveal that to you' (Philippians 3:15). Does he not clearly show that diversity of opinion on matters not essential to salvation should not be a cause of division among Christians? It is indeed the ideal that we agree on all things. But since no one is entirely free from some cloud of ignorance, we must either abandon all churches, or we must forgive error in matters that can be mistaken without destroying the heart of religion or losing salvation. I am not defending errors, however small, or suggesting they should be coddled with flattery and willful blindness. I am saying we should not rashly desert the church for every minor disagreement, as long as the doctrine on which salvation rests remains safe and sound, and the sacraments are maintained as the Lord instituted them. In the meantime, if we work to correct what troubles us, we are doing our duty. This is the point of Paul's instruction: 'If something better is revealed to one who is sitting, let the first one be silent' (1 Corinthians 14:30). This makes clear that every member of the church is charged, according to the measure of their grace, with contributing to public edification — but in

a fitting and orderly way. That means neither abandoning the communion of the church nor, while remaining in it, disturbing its peace and ordered discipline.

In bearing with the weakness of people's lives, our patience must go much further. This is a very slippery place to fall, and here Satan lays traps for us with great cunning. There have always been some who, filled with a false confidence in their own perfect holiness — as if they had already become pure spiritual beings — despised the company of all other people in whom they saw any trace of human weakness. Such in ancient times were the Cathari, and the Donatists who were equally fanatical. Such today are some of the Anabaptists, who think they have advanced beyond all others. There are others who err not from mad pride but from an indiscriminating zeal for righteousness. When they see that the fruit of a changed life does not match the Gospel preaching among those who have heard it, they immediately conclude that no church exists there. This is indeed a most just grievance, and one we in this deeply troubled age give far too much cause for. Our disgraceful laziness is not excusable — and the Lord will not leave it unpunished, as He has already begun to discipline it with severe strokes. Woe to us, then, who by our dissolute and wicked behavior wound the consciences of the weak. But those I have been describing also err — because they cannot moderate their displeasure. Where the Lord requires gentleness, they abandon it and give themselves over to a boundless severity. Because they believe no church exists where there is not complete purity of life, their hatred of sin drives them to depart from the legitimate church, thinking they are escaping from a company of the wicked. They argue that the church of Christ is holy. But let them hear what Christ Himself says: the

church is like a net in which fish of every kind are gathered together, and they are not sorted until they are laid out on shore. Let them hear that it is like a field sown with good grain which the enemy secretly sows with weeds — and it is not cleared until the harvest is brought to the threshing floor. Finally, let them hear that it is like a threshing floor, where the wheat lies hidden under the chaff until it is cleaned by the winnowing fork and stored in the barn. If the Lord declares that the church will be troubled until the day of judgment by this problem — the mixing in of evil people — then seeking a church completely free from every stain is a futile pursuit.

But they cry out that it is intolerable for the plague of vice to spread so widely. What if the apostle's own words answer them here? Among the Corinthians, not just a few had gone astray — the infection had in a sense taken over the whole body. There was not one kind of sin but many. These were not minor offenses but horrible and outrageous acts. And the corruption affected not just their behavior but also their doctrine. What does the holy apostle — the instrument of the Holy Spirit, by whose testimony the church stands or falls — say in this situation? Does he demand separation from them? Does he expel them from the kingdom of Christ? Does he strike them with the harshest curse imaginable? He does none of these things. He both acknowledges and calls it a church of Christ and a fellowship of the saints. If a church can remain among the Corinthians — where factions, divisions, and bitter rivalries were boiling over; where quarreling and greed were commonplace; where a sin was openly tolerated that was considered shameful even among pagans; where Paul's name was being slandered by those who should have honored him as their father; where some

were denying the resurrection of the dead, the collapse of which would bring down the entire Gospel; where the gifts of God were being used to feed pride rather than love; where many things were done indecently and out of order — if even there a church remains because the ministry of Word and sacraments was not rejected, then who dares to strip the name of church from those who cannot even be charged with a tenth part of these faults? Those who deal so harshly and rigidly with the churches of today — what would they have done with the Galatians, who had nearly altogether abandoned the Gospel, yet among whom the same apostle still recognized churches?

They also object that Paul sharply rebukes the Corinthians for tolerating a flagrant sinner in their midst, and then pronounces a general verdict that it is not even lawful to eat a meal with someone living in open dishonor. They cry out: if it is not lawful to share a common meal, how can it be lawful to share the Lord's table with such people? I grant that it is a serious disgrace for pigs and dogs to have a place among the children of God, and a far greater disgrace for the holy body of Christ to be given to them. If churches are well ordered, they will not tolerate openly wicked people in their fellowship, and will not indiscriminately admit both the worthy and the unworthy to that holy feast. But pastors do not always watch as diligently as they should — sometimes they are more lenient than they ought to be, or are hindered in applying the discipline they would like to apply. As a result, even those who are openly wicked are not always removed from the company of the saints. I grant that this is a fault, and I will not minimize it, since Paul rebukes it so sharply in the Corinthians. But even when the church falls short in its duty, it does not immediately become the

right of every private individual to take judgment into their own hands and make the separation themselves. I do not deny that it is proper for a godly person to withdraw from the personal company of evil individuals and not to entangle themselves in willful familiarity with them. But there is a difference between avoiding the company of evil people and abandoning the communion of the church out of hatred for them. And when they say it is sacrilege to share the Lord's bread with unworthy people, they are being far more rigorous than Paul himself is. For when Paul calls us to partake in a holy and pure manner, he does not require us to examine one another, or for each person to examine the whole church — only that each person examine himself. If it were unlawful to share communion with any unworthy person, Paul would surely have told us to look carefully around the assembly to check whether anyone's uncleanness might defile us. But since he only calls each person to examine himself, he shows that we are not harmed if some unworthy person thrusts themselves in among us. This is precisely the meaning of what Paul says next: 'He who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself' (1 Corinthians 11:29). He says 'to himself' — not 'to others.' And rightly so. For it is not the decision of any individual to determine who is to be received and who rejected. That knowledge belongs to the whole church and cannot be exercised without proper order, as we will discuss more fully later. Therefore it would be wrong for any private person to be tainted by another's unworthiness, when he neither can nor should have kept that person from coming.

Although this temptation of indiscriminating zeal for righteousness sometimes enters into genuinely good people — we will find that, more often, excessive strictness grows from pride, con-

tempt for others, and a false opinion of one's own holiness, rather than from true holiness and genuine zeal. Therefore those who lead the charge and become standard-bearers for separation from the church usually do so for no other reason than to boast of their own superiority by despising everyone else. Augustine speaks wisely and well on this point: 'Godly order and manner of church discipline ought above all else to have regard for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace — which the apostle commanded to be kept by bearing with one another. When this is not kept, the medicine of rebuke is proved not only unnecessary but also harmful, and therefore no medicine at all. These troublesome children — who are not moved by hatred of others' wickedness but by love of their own quarreling, who greedily work to draw away or at least divide the weak common people by boasting of their own name — are swollen with pride, mad with stubbornness, treacherous in slander, and troublesome with their rebellions. To avoid looking as though they lack the light of truth, they put on a show of harsh severity. And the things that Scripture commands to be done with a gentler kind of healing — preserving the sincerity of love and keeping the unity of peace, for the correction of a brother's faults — they twist into the sacrilege of schism and into occasions for cutting off.' But to the godly and peaceable he gives this counsel: mercifully correct what you can, patiently bear what you cannot, and groan and mourn with love until God either amends them or at the harvest uproots the tares and fans out the chaff. Let the godly arm themselves with these weapons — otherwise, while they imagine themselves to be bold and courageous avengers of righteousness, they may find themselves departing from the kingdom of heaven, which is the only kingdom of true righteousness. For since God

wills the communion of His church to be maintained in this outward fellowship, whoever breaks the sign of that fellowship out of hatred for evil people sets their foot on a path that leads to a slippery fall from the communion of the saints. Let them consider that in any large gathering there are many truly holy and innocent people before the Lord's eyes that they themselves cannot see. Let them consider that even among those who are sick in their lives, many take no pleasure or comfort in their sins, but are periodically awakened by a genuine fear of God and press toward a greater uprightness. Let them consider that a person should not be judged by a single act, since even the holiest sometimes fall in the most grievous way. Let them consider that in forming a church, the ministry of the Word and participation in the holy sacraments carry more weight than can be undone by the fault of a few wicked people. Finally, let them consider that in judging the church, God's judgment carries more weight than human judgment.

When they also claim that the church is not wrongly called holy, it is fitting to weigh carefully what kind of holiness it possesses — otherwise, if we will accept no church except one that is perfect in every respect, we will be left with no church at all. It is true, as Paul says, that Christ gave Himself for the church to sanctify it, cleansing it with the washing of water through the word of life, so as to present it to Himself as a glorious bride without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25-27). But it is equally true that the Lord is daily at work smoothing her wrinkles and wiping away her spots. It follows from this that her holiness is not yet complete. Therefore the church is holy in the sense that she is daily making progress, not yet perfect — daily moving forward, not yet arrived at the goal of holiness. This will be discussed more fully elsewhere. When the

prophets prophesy of a holy Jerusalem through which no outsider will pass, and a holy temple into which no unclean person will enter — we should not take this to mean there is no spot in the members of the church. Rather, because with their whole effort they press toward holiness and pure integrity, God by His goodness credits them with the cleanness they have not yet fully attained. And although clear marks of such sanctification may often be rare among people, we must be certain of this: there has been no time since creation when the Lord has not had His church, and there will be no time until the very end of the world when He will not have it. For although from the very beginning the whole human race is corrupted and defiled by Adam's sin — out of this polluted mass God always sanctifies certain vessels for honor, so that no age is left without some experience of His mercy. This He has confirmed through certain promises: 'I have made a covenant with My chosen one; I have sworn to David My servant: I will establish your descendants forever' (Psalm 89:3-4). Again: 'The Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling. This is My resting place forever' (Psalm 132:13-14). Again: 'This is what the Lord says, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and stars for light by night. If this fixed order departs from before Me, then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever' (Jeremiah 31:35-36).

Christ Himself, the apostles, and nearly all the prophets have given us examples of this. The descriptions are devastating in which Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Habakkuk, and others lament the sickness of the church in Jerusalem. Among the common people, the rulers, and the priests, everything was so corrupt that Isaiah did not hesitate to compare Jerusalem with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Religion was partly despised and partly corrupted. Their way of life was marked by theft, extortion, betrayal, murder, and similar evils. Yet even so, the prophets did not set up new churches for themselves or build new altars where they might offer separate sacrifices. Whatever the character of the people around them, the prophets recognized that God had left His word among them and had ordained the ceremonies by which He was worshipped there — and so in the midst of the assembly of the wicked they lifted up pure hands to Him. Truly, if they had thought they were contracting any defilement from this, they would sooner have died a hundred deaths than allowed themselves to be brought to it. Nothing, then, kept them from leaving except their desire to preserve unity. If the prophets thought it a violation of conscience to separate from the church on account of many great and widespread wickednesses — not of one or two individuals but of almost the entire people — then we are going far beyond our authority if we dare to immediately depart from the communion of the church merely because not everyone's conduct satisfies our judgment or even the standard of the Christian profession.

What kind of world existed in the time of Christ and the apostles? The desperate ungodliness of the Pharisees and the widespread moral licentiousness of that age could not prevent Christ and the apostles from sharing the same ceremonies with the people and gathering with the rest in the temple for public worship. Why? Because they knew that fellowship with evil people did not defile them when they participated in the same ceremonies with a pure conscience. If someone is little moved by the example of the prophets and apostles, let him at least obey the authority of Christ. Cyprian says it well: even when tares or unclean vessels are visible

in the church, there is no reason to depart from it. We should instead labor to be wheat. We should strive as much as we can to be vessels of gold or silver. But smashing the earthen vessels belongs to the Lord alone, to whom the iron rod has been given. Let no one claim for himself what belongs properly only to the Son — to winnow the threshing floor alone, to separate the chaff, and to judge out all the tares by human decision. That is arrogant stubbornness and sacrilegious presumption, which a perverse spirit takes upon itself. Therefore let both of these stand firm. First: whoever willfully forsakes the outward communion of a church where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments administered has no excuse. Second: the faults of a few or even of many are not a sufficient reason to prevent us from rightly professing our faith in the ceremonies God has instituted. A godly conscience is not hurt by the unworthiness of any other person — whether pastor or layperson — and the sacraments remain pure and wholesome to a holy and upright person even when handled alongside unclean ones.

But their strictness and contempt go even further. They acknowledge no church unless it is entirely free from any spot or blemish, however small. They are even angry with good teachers for encouraging the faithful throughout their lives to press forward, to groan under the burden of their remaining sins, and to flee to God's pardon. They claim that this kind of teaching leads people away from perfection. I grant that we should not press slowly or coldly toward perfection, let alone be idle in the pursuit. But to fill our minds with the confidence of having already arrived while we are still running the race — that, I say, is a devilish invention. Therefore in the Creed the forgiveness of sins is fittingly placed right after the church. For only those who are citizens and

members of God's household receive it, as the prophet declares. The building of the heavenly Jerusalem must therefore come first, so that God's mercy may operate within it — so that whoever comes to it may have their iniquity removed. I say it must come first not because the church can exist without forgiveness of sins, but because the Lord has promised His mercy only within the communion of the saints. The first entry for us into the church and kingdom of God is therefore the forgiveness of sins — without which we have no covenant or fellowship with God. For thus God says through the prophet: 'In that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and the creeping things of the ground. I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land, and will let them lie down in safety. I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion' (Hosea 2:18-19). We see here how by His mercy the Lord reconciles us to Himself. And so in another place, when foretelling the gathering again of the people He had scattered in His wrath, He says: 'I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me' (Jeremiah 33:8). Therefore we enter the fellowship of the church through the sign of washing — which teaches us that there is no entry into the household of God for us unless our filthiness is first wiped away by His goodness.

But through the forgiveness of sins the Lord does not merely receive and adopt us into the church once — He also preserves and maintains us in it by the same means. What good would such a pardon be if it served no ongoing purpose? Every godly person knows in his own conscience that God's mercy would be empty and meaningless if granted only once — for there is no one who

throughout his whole life is not privately aware of many weaknesses that need God's mercy. And it is not without reason that God promises this grace specifically to those of His own household, and not without reason that He commands the message of reconciliation to be offered to them daily. Therefore, as long as we carry the remnants of sin throughout our lives, unless we are sustained by the Lord's continual grace in forgiving our sins, we would scarcely remain in the church for a single moment. But the Lord has called His own to eternal salvation. They should therefore know that pardon is always ready for their sins. We must hold firmly that by God's generosity — through Christ's merit and the sanctification of the Spirit — sins have been and continue to be daily forgiven to us who have been called and grafted into the body of the church.

The keys were given to the church to distribute this benefit to us. For when Christ gave the apostles authority to forgive sins, He did not mean only that they should absolve those who converted from unbelief to faith in Christ — He meant that they should continually exercise this office among the faithful. Paul teaches this when he writes that the ministry of reconciliation was entrusted to the ministers of the church, so that they might frequently urge the people in Christ's name to be reconciled to God. Therefore in the communion of saints, sins are continually forgiven through the ministry of the church itself — when the pastors and bishops entrusted with this office confirm the consciences of the godly in hope of pardon through the promises of the Gospel. This takes place both publicly and privately, as the need arises. For there are many who in their weakness need a more personal form of assurance. Paul reports that he testified faith in Christ and individually

instructed each person in the doctrine of salvation not only in public preaching but also in people's homes. Three things, then, are to be noted here. First: however great the holiness with which God's children may excel, as long as they dwell in a mortal body they are always in such a condition that without forgiveness of sins they cannot stand before God. Second: this benefit is so proper to the church that we cannot enjoy it apart from remaining in its communion. Third: it is distributed to us through ministers and pastors, either by preaching of the Gospel or by administering the sacraments. It is here above all that the power of the keys — which the Lord has given to the fellowship of the faithful — appears most clearly. Therefore let each of us understand it to be our duty to seek forgiveness of sins nowhere except where the Lord has placed it. We will speak of public reconciliation as it belongs to church discipline in the proper place.

But since those fanatical spirits I have spoken of are trying to tear away from the church this one anchor of salvation, consciences must be all the more strongly guarded against such a poisonous opinion. The Novatians troubled the church in ancient times with this teaching. And our own age has produced many among the Anabaptists who are not much different from the Novatians and fall into the same folly. They imagine that God's people are regenerated at baptism into a pure and angelic life, completely free from the corruption of the flesh. But if someone sins after baptism, they leave him nothing but the inescapable judgment of God. In short, they grant no hope of pardon to a sinner who falls after receiving grace — for they acknowledge no forgiveness of sins other than the one by which we are first regenerated. Although no error is more plainly refuted by Scripture, these

people still find some whom they can deceive — just as Novatus in ancient times had many followers. Let us briefly show what madness this is, both for themselves and for those they deceive. First: by the Lord's command, the holy ones daily repeat this prayer: 'Forgive us our debts.' In doing so they are confessing themselves to be debtors. They do not ask in vain, because the Lord has always appointed to be asked only what He Himself is willing to give. And though He promised that the whole prayer would be heard by His Father, He has also confirmed this particular petition with a special promise. What more do we need? The Lord requires from His holy ones a continual confession of sins throughout their entire lives — and promises pardon. What arrogance, then, either to declare them free from sin or, if they have stumbled, to shut them out entirely from grace? Whom does He tell us to forgive seventy times seven times? Is it not our brothers? And why did He command this except that we should follow His own example of mercy? He forgives, therefore, not once or twice — but as often as, crushed under the weight of their sins, His people turn to Him and cry out.

But to begin, in a sense, from the very cradle of the church — the patriarchs were circumcised, drawn into the covenant, and without question instructed in righteousness and innocence by their fathers' diligence. Yet they conspired to murder their brother Joseph — a wickedness that even the most hardened criminals would abhor. They were eventually persuaded by Judah's arguments to sell him instead — but that too was a monstrous crime. Simeon and Levi took wicked vengeance on the Shechemites, an act condemned even by their own father's judgment. Reuben defiled his father's bed with the most shameful lust. Judah, when he sought to commit fornication — even against the law of nature —

went in to his son's wife. Yet far from being cut off from the chosen people, these men were elevated to become its heads. And what of David? When he was a ruler who was supposed to uphold justice, with what terrible wickedness did he shed innocent blood to satisfy his blind desire? He was already regenerate, and among the regenerate he had been adorned with outstanding praises from the Lord. Yet he committed that terrible offense that is shocking even among unbelievers — and still he obtained pardon. And to avoid dwelling on individual examples — how many promises are there in the law and the prophets of God's mercy toward the Israelites, proving again and again that the Lord shows Himself willing to be appeased over the sins of His people. What does Moses promise will happen when the people, having fallen into apostasy, return to the Lord? 'The Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where He has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there He will gather you' (Deuteronomy 30:3-4).

But I will not begin a recounting that would never end, for the prophets are full of such promises that hold out mercy to people covered in endless wickedness. What sin is more shameful than faithless rebellion? It is described as a kind of divorce between God and the church. But even this is overcome by God's goodness. What man, God asks through Jeremiah, if his wife gave herself to adulterers, would take her back again? Yet you have played the harlot with many lovers. All the roads have been polluted with your fornications. The earth has been filled with your shameless loves. 'But return to Me and I will receive you. Return, you wayward one — I will not turn My face from you, for I am gracious and will not be angry forever' (Jeremiah 3:1,12). And He could not be

otherwise minded, since He has declared that He takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner but desires that he turn and live. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he appointed it for precisely this use — that prayers for forgiveness of sins would be heard from there. 'If Your sons sin against You,' he prayed, 'for there is no man who does not sin — and You are angry with them and deliver them to their enemies, and they take it to heart in the land where they are taken captive, and repent and implore You in their captivity saying, We have sinned, we have done wrong — if they pray toward the land You gave to their fathers and toward this temple, then hear their prayer from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people who have sinned against You' (1 Kings 8:46-50). And it was not without purpose that the Lord in the law ordained daily sacrifices for sins. For if the Lord had not foreseen that His people would be continually troubled by the disease of sin, He would never have appointed these remedies for them.

Was this benefit taken away from the faithful by the coming of Christ — in whom the fullness of grace was displayed — so that they dare no longer pray for the forgiveness of sins? So that if they offend the Lord they can obtain no mercy? What would this be but to say that Christ came for the destruction of His own, not their salvation — if the mercy of God in pardoning sins, which throughout the Old Testament was continually available to the holy ones, is now said to have been completely taken away? But if we believe the Scriptures, which cry out plainly that in Christ alone the grace and kindness of the Lord has fully appeared — that an abundance of mercy has been poured out and the reconciliation of God and humanity has been accomplished — then we should not doubt that an even richer mercy flows to us from the heavenly Father, not cut

off or diminished. And examples are not lacking. Peter had heard that whoever denied Christ before men would be denied before the angels of God — and yet he denied Him three times in a single night, with curses. Yet he was not cut off from pardon. Those who had been living disorderly among the Thessalonians are rebuked — but still gently called to repentance. Even Simon the Magician himself is not left in despair, but is rather urged to hope for better when Peter counsels him to turn to prayer.

Indeed, the most shameful sins have at times taken hold of entire churches — and Paul gently drew them out of these sins rather than pronouncing them cursed. The falling away of the Galatians was no small offense. The Corinthians were even less excusable, having committed more numerous and no lighter sins — yet neither was excluded from God's mercy. Even those who had sinned most openly in impurity, fornication, and unchastity are specifically called to repentance. For the covenant of the Lord remains, and will remain forever inviolable — the covenant He solemnly made with Christ the true Solomon and His members in these words: 'If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, if they violate My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not remove My lovingkindness from him' (Psalm 89:30-33). Finally, the very order of the Creed teaches us that in the church of Christ there remains continual forgiveness of sins — for after the church is established, forgiveness of sins is immediately added.

Some who are somewhat wiser, seeing how plainly Scripture refutes the teaching of Novatus, do not make every sin unforgivable — only deliberate transgressions of the law, those committed

knowingly and willingly. Those who say this grant pardon only to sins committed in ignorance. But when the Lord in the law commanded one kind of sacrifice for cleansing the willful sins of the faithful and another kind for cleansing sins of ignorance — how great an outrage is it to grant no cleansing for willful sin? Nothing is more plain, I say, than that the one sacrifice of Christ avails to forgive the willful sins of the saints — for the Lord testified this through the carnal sacrifices as through signs. And besides — who can excuse David by ignorance, when it is obvious he was thoroughly instructed in the law? Did David not know how serious were the crimes of adultery and murder, when he was punishing those same offenses in others every day? Did the patriarchs think killing their brother was permissible? Had the Corinthians profited so little from their teaching that they thought lust, impurity, sexual immorality, hatred, and quarreling pleased God? After being warned so carefully, did Peter not know what a serious thing it was to deny his master? Therefore let us not, by our own harsh spirit, shut the door against the mercy of God that so generously offers itself to us.

I am aware that the ancient writers explained the sins that are daily forgiven to the faithful as the minor failings that creep in through the weakness of the flesh — and they held that the solemn repentance once required for serious crimes could no more be repeated than baptism could be. This should not be understood as if they were either pushing those who fell again after their first repentance into despair, or minimizing those other sins as though they were trivial before God. They knew full well that the saints sometimes stumble through unbelief, that careless oaths sometimes slip from them, that they are sometimes stirred to anger,

that they even break out into open insults — and that besides these they are troubled by other evils that the Lord does not take lightly. But they used this distinction to differentiate these failings from the public crimes that came to the church's attention with great scandal. When they were so reluctant to grant restoration to those who had committed something worthy of church discipline, they did not do this because they thought such people could barely obtain pardon from the Lord. Rather, they used this severity to deter others from recklessly rushing into wicked conduct, for which they might be cut off from the communion of the church. However, the Word of God — which ought to be our only rule here — calls for a greater moderation than this. For it teaches that the rigor of discipline should never be stretched so far that the one it is meant above all to help is instead overwhelmed with grief — as we have already explained more fully elsewhere.

CHAPTER 2: A COMPARISON OF THE FALSE CHURCH WITH THE TRUE CHURCH



We have already shown how highly we must value the ministry of Word and sacraments — and how far our reverence for it must extend — so that it may serve as a permanent mark by which the church is recognized. That is: wherever this ministry remains whole and uncorrupted, no faults or weaknesses of character can prevent it from bearing the name of a church. And the ministry itself is not so corrupted by minor errors that it can no longer be regarded as legitimate. We have also shown that the errors to be tolerated are those that do not damage the core doctrine of religion, do not destroy those essential points that the faithful must hold in common, and — in the case of the sacraments — do not abolish or undermine the institution as the Lord ordained it. But as soon as falsehood breaks into the central stronghold of religion, as soon as the sum of necessary doctrine is corrupted, and as soon as the proper use of the sacraments breaks down — then the destruction of the church follows. Just as a person's life ends when his throat is cut or his heart fatally pierced. This is clearly proven by Paul's words when he teaches that the

foundation of the church is laid on the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself as the cornerstone. If the foundation of the church is the doctrine of the prophets and apostles — by which the faithful are commanded to rest their salvation in Christ alone — then remove that doctrine, and how can the building stand? The church must inevitably fall when the core of religion that alone holds it up collapses. If the true church is the pillar and foundation of truth, it is certain that no church exists where lies and falsehood have seized control.

Since this is precisely the condition under the papacy, we may understand how much of the church remains there. In place of the ministry of the Word, a corrupt government of mingled lies now reigns — partly extinguishing and partly smothering the pure light. In place of the Lord's Supper, the most disgraceful sacrilege has been introduced. The form of worship toward God is disfigured by a countless and intolerable heap of superstitions. The doctrine without which Christianity cannot stand has been altogether buried and driven out. The public assemblies have become schools of idolatry and ungodliness. There is therefore no danger that in departing from such a ruinous fellowship we are being torn away from the church of Christ. The communion of the church was not established to be a chain binding us to idolatry, ungodliness, ignorance of God, and every kind of evil — but rather to hold us firm in the fear of God and obedience to the truth. They do indeed display their church before us in the most glorious terms, as if no other church in the world existed. Then, as if victory were already theirs, they declare as schismatics all who dare withdraw from obedience to their church, and as heretics all who dare raise even a murmur against its doctrine. But by what proofs do they establish that they

have the true church? They appeal to ancient chronicles to show what once existed in Italy, France, and Spain. They say they trace their beginning from those holy men who founded and built up churches with sound doctrine, and confirmed that same doctrine and the building of the church with their blood. They claim the church was thus consecrated among them with spiritual gifts and the blood of martyrs, and preserved through an unbroken succession of bishops so that it might never fall away. They cite how highly Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, and others valued this succession. But how hollow these claims are — how thoroughly empty — I will show easily to anyone willing to weigh them with me. I would also urge those men earnestly to consider this if I had any hope of making headway with them through teaching. But since they have abandoned all concern for truth and are bent only on defending their own cause by every means available, I will say only what is needed for good people who love the truth to untangle themselves from these clever evasions. First, I ask them: why do they not cite Africa, Egypt, and all of Asia? Simply because in all those regions this so-called holy succession of bishops — through which they claim the churches have been preserved — has long since ceased. It comes down to this, then: they claim to have the true church because, from the beginning, they have never been without bishops succeeding one another in a continuous line. But what if I point to Greece? I ask again: why do they say the church is lost among the Greeks, when that succession of bishops was never interrupted among them — the same succession they regard as the sole preserver of the church? They call the Greeks schismatics. But by what right? Because in departing from the apostolic see they have forfeited their privilege. But do those who depart from

Christ Himself not deserve to forfeit it far more? The claim of succession is therefore worthless unless the descendants continue to hold fast and abide in the truth of Christ that they received from their fathers, handed down from generation to generation.

The Romanists of today are doing nothing other than what the Jews plainly did in ancient times when the Lord's prophets reproved them for blindness, ungodliness, and idolatry. The Jews boasted gloriously of the temple, the ceremonies, and the priesthood — treating these things as the definitive measure of the church. In the same way, the Romanists hold up certain outward appearances that often have little to do with the church, and without which the church can stand perfectly well. We need no other argument to refute them than the one Jeremiah used against the foolish pride of the Jews: they must not boast in deceptive words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, this is the temple of the Lord!' (Jeremiah 7:4). For the Lord acknowledges nothing as His unless His word is heard and reverently obeyed there. When the glory of God sat enthroned between the cherubim in the sanctuary, and He had promised it would be His permanent dwelling place — yet when the priests corrupted His worship with perverse superstitions, He withdrew elsewhere and left the place stripped of all holiness. If even that temple — sanctified to be God's permanent dwelling — could be forsaken by God and become unholy, then there is no reason for these men to pretend that God is so bound to particular persons or places, or so tied to outward forms, that He must remain wherever there is only the title and outward appearance of the church. This is the very point Paul argues in Romans, from chapter 9 through chapter 11. It was deeply troubling to weak consciences that the Jews — who ap-

peared to be the people of God — not only rejected the teaching of the Gospel but actively persecuted it. After setting out his doctrine, Paul removes this stumbling block by denying that those Jews who are enemies of the truth constitute the church — even though they had everything that might otherwise be required for the outward form of the church. His reason for denying it is simple: they did not embrace Christ. In the letter to the Galatians, even more plainly, he compares Ishmael with Isaac and says that many hold a place in the church to whom the inheritance does not belong, because they are not born of the free mother. From there he moves to the comparison of the two Jerusalems. Just as the law was given at Mount Sinai but the Gospel came out of Jerusalem — so many who are born and raised in slavery boast without hesitation that they are children of God and of the church, and in their arrogance they actually despise the true children of God, while they themselves are only illegitimate offspring. On the other side, when we hear the word pronounced from heaven, 'Drive out the slave woman and her son' (Galatians 4:30), let us, standing on this inviolable decree, boldly disregard their empty boasting. If they are proud because of their outward profession — Ishmael too was circumcised. If they plead antiquity — he was the firstborn. Yet we see that he was driven out. The reason? Paul gives it: only those are counted as children who are born from the pure and lawful seed of doctrine. Accordingly, God denies that He is bound to wicked priests by His covenant with their father Levi, in which He promised that Levi should be His messenger and interpreter. In fact, God turns their very boasting against them — the boasting by which they used to rise up against the prophets, claiming that the dignity of the priesthood was to be held in the highest honor. God grants this freely —

and holds them to it — for He is ready to keep His covenant. But since they fail to fulfill their part of it, they deserve to be rejected. So much for the claim of succession — unless it is matched by a faithful following and an unbroken continuation of truth: meaning that successors, the moment they are shown to have departed from their origin, are stripped of all honor. Unless perhaps — because Caiaphas succeeded many godly bishops, and there was from Aaron to him an unbroken line of succession — that wicked assembly deserved to be called a church. But this would not be tolerated even in earthly governments — no one would call the tyranny of Caligula, Nero, or Heliogabalus a true republic simply because they succeeded the Brutuses, Scipios, and Camilluses. How much more foolish, then, in the government of the church, to abandon doctrine and place all weight of succession on persons alone. Nor did the holy doctors these men falsely invoke mean anything of the sort — they were not arguing that succession of bishops in an unbroken line is what makes a church. At that time it was beyond dispute that doctrine had been unchanged from the beginning. Their point, therefore, was simply that against newly arising errors, the doctrine that had been consistently and unanimously handed down from the apostles should prevail. There is no reason, therefore, for them to continue deceiving others by hiding under the false cover of the name of the church — a name we do rightly revere. But when they come to define what the church actually is, they find themselves not just muddled but completely mired down — for they put a shameless harlot in place of the holy bride of Christ. So that this substitution does not deceive us, among other warnings let us also remember this from Augustine, who speaks of the church: 'It is sometimes darkened and covered over with a

multitude of offenses as by a cloud. Sometimes, in times of peace, it appears calm and free. Sometimes it is hidden and tossed about by waves of tribulation and temptation.' He gives examples showing that the strongest pillars of the church have at times either bravely endured exile for the faith or remained hidden throughout the world.

In the same way, the Romanists intimidate us and frighten the uninstructed with the name of the church, while being the deadly enemies of Christ. Though they display the temple, the priesthood, and other such outward appearances — this empty glitter, which dazzles the eyes of the simple, should not move us for a moment to grant that there is a church where the Word of God does not appear. For this is the permanent mark by which God has distinguished His own. 'Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice' (John 18:37). Again: 'I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me.' 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.' Just before this He had said that the sheep follow their shepherd because they know his voice, but they will not follow a stranger — they run from him because they do not recognize his voice. Why then should we be willfully blind in judging what constitutes the church, when Christ has marked it with a sure sign that wherever it appears cannot deceive, but unmistakably shows that the church is there — and where it is absent, nothing remains that can truly indicate the church? For Paul says the church was built not on human authority or priestly offices, but on the doctrine of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20). Jerusalem must therefore be distinguished from Babylon, and the church of Christ from the assembly of Satan, by that very distinction by which Christ has separated them. 'He who is of God hears the

words of God,' He says. 'The reason you do not hear them is that you are not of God' (John 8:47). In short — since the church is the kingdom of Christ, and He reigns only by His word — can anyone still doubt that claims that set up His kingdom without His scepter, that is, without His holy word, are simply lies?

Now they accuse us of schism and heresy because we preach a doctrine contrary to theirs, do not submit to their laws, and hold our own assemblies for prayer, baptism, the administration of the Supper, and other holy exercises, separately from them. This is indeed a serious accusation — but one that requires neither a long nor a laborious defense. Heretics and schismatics are those who, by causing division, break apart the communion of the church. That communion is held together by its true bonds: agreement in sound doctrine and brotherly love. On this point Augustine draws this distinction between heretics and schismatics: heretics corrupt the purity of faith with false doctrines, while schismatics — sometimes even where the faith is the same — break the bond of fellowship. But it must also be noted that this bond of love depends so entirely on the unity of faith that faith ought to be its beginning, its end, and its only governing rule. Let us remember, therefore, that whenever we are called to the unity of the church, what is required is this: that while our minds agree in Christ, our wills should also be joined together in mutual goodwill in Christ. When Paul calls us to that goodwill, he grounds it on the fact that there is one God, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). And whenever he urges us to be of one mind and one will, he immediately adds the phrase 'in Christ' or 'according to Christ' — making clear that any gathering not grounded in the word of the Lord is a faction of the wicked, not the fellowship of the faithful.

Cyprian, following Paul, traces the entire source of the church's unity back to the sole sovereignty of Christ. He then adds: 'The church is one, which spreads more widely into a multitude by the fruitfulness of its increase — just as there are many sunbeams but one light, many branches on a tree but one trunk rooted in the ground. When many streams flow from one spring, though the abundance of the overflow seems to scatter widely, the unity remains at the source. Cut off a ray from the body of the sun, and the unity allows no division. Break a branch from the tree, and the broken branch cannot bud. Cut off a stream from its spring, and what is cut off dries up. So also the church, flooded with the light of the Lord, extends its rays over the whole world — yet it is one light that is spread everywhere.' Nothing could express more fittingly that indissoluble union which all the members of Christ have with one another. We see how consistently he calls us back to the true Head. He therefore declares that heresies and schisms arise when people do not return to the source of truth, do not seek the Head, and do not keep the doctrine of the heavenly Master. Now let them go and cry that we are heretics who have departed from their church — when the only reason for our separation was that they could not in any way endure the pure profession of truth. I will not even mention how they drove us out with curses and violent condemnations. That very act more than sufficiently acquits us — unless they are also willing to condemn the apostles as schismatics, since our cause is one with theirs. Christ Himself foretold to His apostles that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues for His name's sake. And those synagogues He spoke of were at that time recognized as lawful churches. Since it is evident that we have been driven out, and we are ready to

show that this happened for the sake of Christ's name — the cause ought to be investigated before any verdict is rendered against us. In any case, if they insist, I am content to let this point go. It is enough for me that it was necessary for us to depart from them in order to come to Christ.

What judgment we should make of all the churches that have come under the tyranny of that Roman idol will become even clearer when we compare them with the ancient church of the Israelites, as the prophets describe it. There was a true church among the Jews and Israelites as long as they continued in the observance of the covenant — for God granted them the things on which the church depends. They had the truth of doctrine in the law. The ministry of that doctrine was among the priests and prophets. Through circumcision they entered into religion. Through other sacraments they were exercised and confirmed in faith. Without doubt the honorable titles with which the Lord dignified His church rightly belonged to their fellowship. After that — having forsaken the Lord's law and given themselves over to idolatry and superstition — they partly lost those privileges. For who would dare to strip the name of church from those with whom God still left the preaching of His word and the observance of His sacraments? But equally — who would dare to call it the church without qualification, where the word of the Lord is openly and freely trampled underfoot, where the ministry of the word — the chief sinew, indeed the very soul of the church — has been destroyed?

What then? Will someone ask: was there therefore no remnant of the church among the Jews after they fell away into idolatry? The answer is straightforward. First, I say that even within the fall-

ing away there were degrees. We will not say that Judah and Israel fell in exactly the same way when they both first departed from the pure worship of God. When Jeroboam made golden calves in open defiance of God's command and dedicated an unlawful place for worship, he utterly destroyed religion. The Jews first defiled themselves with wicked and superstitious practices before they wrongly altered the outward form of religion. For although under Rehoboam they had already adopted many corrupt ceremonies, because the doctrine of the law, the priesthood, and the religious ceremonies as God had ordained them still remained in Jerusalem, the godly there had a tolerable condition of church. Among the Israelites, from the reign of Ahab onward, there was no improvement, and from there they fell from bad to worse. Those who followed — right up to the destruction of the kingdom — were either like Ahab or, when they tried to be somewhat better than he was, followed the example of Jeroboam. But all of them, every one, were wicked and idolatrous. In Judah there were periodic changes: some kings corrupted the worship of God with false and invented superstitions, while others restored religion that had fallen into decay — until the very priests themselves defiled God's temple with profane and abominable practices.

Now let the papists, if they can — however much they minimize their own faults — deny that the condition of religion among them is as corrupt and defiled as it was in the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. In fact, their idolatry is grosser than his, and in doctrine they are not one drop purer — if indeed they are not even more impure. God — and indeed all who have even ordinary good judgment — will bear witness with me, and the facts themselves show that I am saying nothing but the truth. Now when they drive

us to the communion of their church, they require two things of us. First, that we share in all their prayers, sacraments, and ceremonies. Second, that whatever honor, power, and jurisdiction Christ gives to His church, we should give to theirs. As for the first point — I grant that all the prophets who were in Jerusalem, even when things there were deeply corrupted, did not sacrifice separately or pray in separate assemblies from other people. They had a commandment from God to gather at Solomon's temple. They knew that the Levitical priests — however unworthy of the honor — had been ordained by the Lord as ministers of the holy ceremonies and had not been formally removed from office, so they still legitimately held that position. But — and this is the main point — the prophets were not compelled to engage in any superstitious worship. They did nothing except what God had ordained. But what resemblance is there among these men — the papists? We can hardly attend any gathering with them without defiling ourselves with open idolatry. The chief bond of their communion is the mass, which we abhor as the greatest sacrilege. Whether we are right or wrong in this will be examined in another place. For now, it is enough to show that our situation is different from that of the prophets, who — though present at the ceremonies of the wicked — were not compelled to witness or participate in any ceremonies except those instituted by God. And if they need a directly comparable example, let them take one from the kingdom of Israel. After Jeroboam's ordinance, circumcision remained, sacrifices were still offered, the law was still held sacred, and the same God their fathers had known was still called upon — but because of the invented and forbidden forms of worship, God rejected and condemned everything done there. Show me one prophet, or one

godly person, who ever worshipped or sacrificed at Bethel. They knew they could not do so without defiling themselves with some sacrilege. We have established this much, then: the communion of the church should not have such a hold on the godly that if it descends into profane and wicked practices, they are therefore required to follow it.

The second point is even more serious. For if the church is considered to be the body whose judgment we must reverence, whose authority we must respect, whose warnings we must obey, whose discipline must move us, and whose communion we must faithfully maintain in all things — then we cannot grant them the name of church without being obligated to full subjection and obedience to it. Yet we are perfectly willing to grant them what the prophets granted to the Jews and Israelites of their own time — when things there were in an equally good or even better condition. But we see how everywhere the prophets cried out that those assemblies were unholy, and that consenting to them was no more permissible than denying God. And truly, if those assemblies were churches, it follows that in Israel, Elijah, Micah, and others like them — and in Judah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and their kind, whom the prophets, priests, and people of that time hated and despised more than any uncircumcised outsider — were strangers to the church of God. If those were churches, then the church was not the pillar of truth but the support of lies — not the tabernacle of the living God but the den of idols. It was therefore necessary for them to depart from agreement with those assemblies, which were nothing other than wicked conspiracies against God. In the same way, if anyone today acknowledges the assemblies defiled with idolatry, superstition, and corrupt doctrine as bodies in whose full communion a

Christian ought to remain — even extending to agreement in doctrine — he is making a serious mistake. For if they are churches, they hold the power of the keys. But the keys are inseparably bound to the word — which has been completely driven out from among them. Again, if they are churches, then Christ's promise has force among them: 'Whatever you bind...' But in fact they expel from their communion all who sincerely profess to be servants of Christ. Therefore either Christ's promise is meaningless — or at the very least they are not churches in this respect. Finally, in place of the ministry of the word they have schools of ungodliness and a cesspool of every kind of error. Therefore either they are not churches — or there will no longer remain any mark by which the lawful assemblies of the faithful can be distinguished from the gatherings of unbelievers.

But just as certain marks of the church still remained among the Jews in ancient times, so today we do not strip the papists of those marks that the Lord was pleased to preserve among them after the church was devastated. The Lord had once made His covenant with the Jews. That covenant survived in spite of their wickedness — maintained by its own steadfastness rather than being preserved by them. Therefore — such was the certainty and constancy of God's goodness — the Lord's covenant remained. Their faithlessness could not blot out His faithfulness. They could not so defile circumcision with their unclean hands as to make it cease to be the sign and sacrament of that covenant. Accordingly, the Lord called the children born from them His own — which, apart from His special blessing, they had no right to claim. In the same way, since He has left His covenant in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and England — though those countries have been

crushed under the tyranny of antichrist — He has worked to keep that covenant inviolable. First, He preserved baptism there, the testimony of His covenant, which — consecrated by His own mouth — retains its power regardless of human wickedness. Beyond that, in His providence He has ensured that other remnants survive, so that the church would not be utterly destroyed. Just as buildings that are torn down still leave foundations and ruins behind — so He has not permitted His church to be completely overthrown and leveled from its very foundation by antichrist. Though in punishment for the ingratitude of those who despised His word He has allowed terrible shaking and devastation, He has still willed that even after the wasting, the half-demolished building should remain.

When we refuse to grant the papists the title of church without qualification, we are not therefore denying that there are any churches among them. We are only contending about the true and proper ordering of the church — which is required both in the communion of the sacraments as signs of profession, and especially in doctrine. Daniel and Paul foretold that antichrist would sit in the temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Daniel 9:27). We regard the bishop of Rome as the captain and standard-bearer of that wicked and abominable kingdom. When it is said that his throne is placed in the temple of God, it means that his kingdom will be of such a nature that it cannot abolish the name of Christ or of His church. From this it is clear that we do not deny that even under his tyranny, churches remain — but churches that he has profaned with ungodliness full of sacrilege, afflicted with outrageous domination, corrupted and nearly killed with evil and damnable doctrines as with poisoned drinks. Churches in which Christ lies half

buried, the Gospel is smothered, godliness is banished, and the worship of God has been largely abolished. Churches, in short, in which everything is so disordered that they present more the face of Babylon than of the holy city of God. In summary: I say they are churches in the sense that the Lord marvelously preserves among them the remnants of His people, however dispersed and scattered, and in the sense that certain marks of the church remain — marks whose power neither the cunning of the devil nor the wickedness of people can destroy. But on the other side, because the marks to which we must give chief attention in this discussion have been erased — I say that every one of their congregations, and the whole body together, lacks the legitimate form of a church.

¶ THE .III. CHAPTER. ¶ OF THE TEACHERS AND MINISTERS OF THE CHIRCHE, AND OF THEYR ELECTION AND OFFICE.



It is now fitting to speak of the order by which the Lord has willed to govern His church. For although He alone must rule and reign in His church, holding all authority and supremacy, and although this government is exercised and carried out by His word alone — yet because He does not dwell among us in visible form so that He can declare His will to us directly from His own mouth, we have said that in this He uses the ministry of human beings, and as it were the labor of deputies. He is not transferring His right and honor to them — but only that through their mouths He might do His own work, just as a craftsman uses a tool to do his work. I am compelled to repeat what I have already said. He could indeed do it either directly and without any instrument, or by means of angels. But there are many reasons why He preferred to do it through human beings. First, He declares His favor toward us by drawing some people from the human race to carry His message in the world — to be the interpreters of His secret will, and ultimately to represent His own person. He thereby proves by expe-

rience that it is not meaningless when He commonly calls us His temples — for from the mouths of men, as from His sanctuary, He gives His answers to humanity. Second, this is the best and most profitable exercise in humility — accustoming us to obey His word as it is preached through people like ourselves, and sometimes our inferiors in social standing. If He spoke from heaven Himself, it would be no wonder if His holy words were immediately received with reverence by everyone. For who would not be filled with awe at the direct presence of His power? Who would not be prostrated at the first sight of such majesty? Who would not be overwhelmed by His infinite brightness? But when a humble man, risen from the dust, speaks in the name of God — we give the clearest possible evidence of our godliness and reverent obedience to God Himself when we willingly submit to learn from His minister, who in himself excels us in nothing. For this reason also He has hidden the treasure of His heavenly wisdom in fragile earthen vessels — to have the more certain proof of how highly He is valued by us. Moreover, nothing is better suited to nurturing mutual love than that human beings should be bound to one another through this bond — that one is made a pastor to teach the rest, and those appointed as students receive one and the same doctrine from one mouth. For if every person were entirely self-sufficient and needed no one else's help, the natural pride of humanity would cause each person to despise others and be despised in return. Therefore the Lord has bound His church together with the knot He foresaw would most strongly hold unity — by leaving with human beings the doctrine of salvation and eternal life, so that through their hands He might communicate it to others. This was Paul's intent when he wrote to the Ephesians: 'One body and one Spirit, just as

also you were called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men. He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things. And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine — but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love' (Ephesians 4:4-16).

By these words Paul shows that the ministry of human beings, which God uses to govern His church, is the chief bond by which the faithful are held together in one body. He also shows that the church cannot otherwise be kept safe unless it is upheld by these supports, in which the Lord has been pleased to place its salvation. Christ has gone up on high, Paul says, so that He might fill all things. The way He fills all things is this: through His ministers — to whom He has committed the office and given the grace to carry it out — He distributes His gifts to the church, and in a certain

manner gives Himself present, extending the power of His Spirit through this institution so that it should not be empty or idle. This is how the saints are equipped. This is how the body of Christ is built up. This is how we grow in all things into Him who is the Head, and grow together with each other. This is how we are all brought into the unity of Christ — when prophecy flourishes among us, when we receive the apostles, when we do not refuse the doctrine ministered to us. Therefore, anyone who works to abolish this order and kind of government — or who diminishes its importance as though it were unnecessary — is working toward the scattering, and indeed the ruin and destruction, of the church. For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are as necessary for sustaining this present life as the office of apostles and pastors is necessary for preserving the church on earth.

I have therefore urged above that God has commended the dignity of this ministry to us with every possible title of honor, so that we might hold it in the highest esteem as the most excellent thing of all. He testifies that He gives humanity a singular gift when He raises up teachers for them — where He commands the prophet to cry out that beautiful are the feet and blessed is the coming of those who bring tidings of peace (Isaiah 52:7). And when He calls the apostles the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Nor could this office be honored more highly than in the words: 'He who listens to you listens to Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me' (Luke 10:16). There is no plainer passage on this than what Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, where he treats the subject as if on purpose. He declares that nothing in the church is more excellent or glorious than the ministry of the Gospel — since it is the administration of the Spirit, of righteousness, and of eter-

nal life. These and similar passages serve this purpose: that the order of governing and preserving the church through ministers, which the Lord has established permanently, should not lose its value in our eyes and through sheer neglect gradually fall out of use. God has declared how necessary it is not only by words but by examples. When He willed to shine more fully on Cornelius with the light of His truth, He sent an angel from heaven — to send Peter to him. When He willed to call Paul to the knowledge of Himself and graft him into the church, He did not speak to him with His own voice but sent him to a human being, from whom he was to receive both the doctrine of salvation and the consecration of baptism. If it was not without purpose that an angel — himself an interpreter of God — refrained from declaring God's will and instead directed that a human being be sent to declare it — and if it was not without purpose that Christ, the only true Teacher of the faithful, committed Paul to the instruction of a human being (that very Paul whom He had determined to take up to the third heaven and grant miraculous revelations of unspeakable things) — then who would dare despise this ministry, or dismiss it as unnecessary, when God has been pleased to confirm its value by such examples?

Those who hold ruling authority in the church according to Christ's institution are named by Paul in this order: first apostles, then prophets, third evangelists, fourth pastors, and last teachers. Of these, only the last two hold permanent office in the church. The other three the Lord raised up at the beginning of His kingdom's establishment, and He still raises them up from time to time as the need of the times requires. The apostles' office is clear from the command: 'Go, preach the Gospel to every creature.' No fixed boundaries are assigned to them — the whole world is their

field, to bring all peoples into obedience to Christ, planting His kingdom everywhere through the spread of the Gospel. So when Paul set out to prove his apostleship, he pointed not to one city he had won for Christ, but to the broad spread of the Gospel across many lands — and to the fact that he had not built on another man's foundation but had planted churches where the name of the Lord had never been heard. The apostles were therefore sent to bring the world back from its departure from God to true obedience, and to establish His kingdom everywhere through Gospel preaching — or, if you prefer, as the first builders of the church, to lay its foundations throughout the world. By 'prophets' Paul does not mean all interpreters of God's will of whatever kind, but those who excelled through special revelation — people who may no longer exist today, or are at least far less prominent. By 'evangelists' I understand those who, while lower in rank than the apostles, were next to them in office and in effect occupied their place. Luke, Timothy, Titus, and others like them belonged to this category — and perhaps also the seventy disciples whom Christ appointed in the second tier after the apostles. According to this interpretation — which seems to me consistent with both Paul's words and intent — those three offices were not established in the church to be permanent, but only to serve for the time when churches needed to be founded where none had previously existed, or at least when the transition was being made from Moses to Christ. This said, I do not deny that the Lord has at times since then also raised up apostles, or at least evangelists in their place, as has happened in our own time — for it was necessary to have such people to bring the church back from antichrist's corruption. Yet I still call the office itself extraordinary, because it has no place

in churches that are already well established. After these come pastors and teachers, which the church can never do without. The difference between them, as I understand it, is this: teachers are not appointed to govern discipline, administer sacraments, or give warnings and exhortations — but only to expound Scripture, so that pure and sound doctrine is maintained among the faithful. The pastoral office, by contrast, includes all of these.

We have now seen which ministries in the church were temporary and which were ordained to continue permanently. If we join the evangelists with the apostles, we are left with two pairs that in a certain way correspond to each other. Our teachers are to the ancient prophets as our pastors are to the apostles. The prophets' office was more excellent on account of the special gift of revelation they possessed, but the teachers' office follows a similar order and serves essentially the same purpose. In the same way, the twelve whom the Lord chose to proclaim the new message of the Gospel to the world were superior in rank and dignity to the rest. For although in the general sense and meaning of the word all ministers of the church may rightly be called apostles — since they are sent by the Lord as His messengers — yet because it was essential that those who brought something new and unheard of should be distinguishable, it was necessary for those twelve (to whose number Paul was later added) to carry a specific title above the others. Paul himself in one place applies this name to Andronicus and Junias, whom he says were notable among the apostles — but when he speaks precisely, he reserves the term for that primary rank. This is consistent with common scriptural usage. Yet pastors, except

that each governs the particular churches assigned to them, share the same charge as the apostles. Let us now hear what that charge actually involves.

When the Lord sent the apostles, He gave them the command — as we have already noted — to preach the Gospel and to baptize believers for the forgiveness of sins. He had previously commanded them to distribute the holy signs of His body and blood, as He Himself had done. Here is the holy, inviolable, and permanent law laid on those who succeed to the apostles' place: they are commanded to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. From this we conclude that those who neglect both of these things falsely claim to bear the apostles' role. And what of pastors? Paul speaks not only of himself but of them all when he says: 'Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God' (1 Corinthians 4:1). And elsewhere: 'An overseer must hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict' (Titus 1:9). From these and similar passages found throughout Scripture, we can gather that in the apostolic office the two principal duties are preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. As for the ministry of teaching, it includes not only public sermons but also personal instruction and private admonition. So Paul calls the Ephesians as witnesses that he never held back anything that would be for their good, but taught them both publicly and in every household, testifying to Jews and Greeks alike about repentance and faith in Christ. And shortly after he adds that he did not cease warning every one of them with tears. It is not my purpose here to describe all the qualities of a good pastor, but only to point out what those who

call themselves pastors are professing: that they are appointed to govern the church not to hold an empty title, but to instruct the people in true godliness through Christ's teaching, to administer the holy sacraments, and to maintain and exercise sound discipline. For to whoever is set as a watchman in the church, the Lord declares that if anyone perishes through ignorance on account of their negligence, He will require that person's blood from their hands. What Paul says of himself also applies to all of them: 'Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel, for I am entrusted with a stewardship' (1 Corinthians 9:16). Finally, what the apostles performed for the whole world, every pastor ought to perform for the flock to which he has been appointed.

Although we assign each pastor to a particular church, we do not thereby deny that one who is bound to one church may assist other churches if something troubling arises that requires his presence, or if he is consulted on a difficult question. But for the sake of the church's peace and order, this arrangement is necessary: that each person knows what they are responsible for, so that everything is not thrown into confusion, with people running about without a calling or rashly crowding into one place. It also prevents those more concerned for their own interests than the building up of the church from freely abandoning their congregations at will. As a general rule, therefore, this order ought to be maintained as closely as possible: each person should be content within his own boundaries and not intrude into another's charge. This is no human invention but an ordinance of God Himself. We read that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in the individual churches in Lystra, Antioch, and Iconium — and Paul himself commands Titus to appoint elders in every town. In one place he speaks of the bishops at

Philippi, and in another of Archippus as bishop of the Colossians. And there remains his notable farewell address in Luke to the elders of the church at Ephesus. Whoever, therefore, takes on the governance and responsibility of one church, let him know that he is bound by the law of God's calling. This does not mean he is shackled to the soil — as lawyers say — so that he may never move, when the common good genuinely requires otherwise and it is done in an orderly way. But one who is called to a particular place ought not on his own initiative to think about leaving, or seek to be released simply because it seems advantageous to him. And if it is expedient that someone be moved to another place, he ought not to act on his own private judgment, but to wait for public authority.

When I have used the terms bishop, elder, pastor, and minister interchangeably for those who govern churches, I have done so in keeping with the usage of Scripture, which uses these words without distinction. Whoever executes the ministry of the word, Scripture gives him the title of bishop. So in Paul, immediately after commanding Titus to appoint elders in every town, he adds: 'For the overseer must be above reproach...' (Titus 1:7). And in another place he greets multiple bishops in one church. In Acts it is recorded that he called together the elders of Ephesus, whom in his own address to them he calls bishops. At this point it should be noted that we have so far only cited offices connected to the ministry of the word — and Paul mentions no others in that fourth chapter of Ephesians we have been using. But in the letter to the Romans and in 1 Corinthians he lists other offices: miracles, the gift of healing, interpretation, governance, and care for the poor. Of these I have passed over the temporary ones, since dwelling on

them serves no useful purpose. But two remain permanently: governance and care for the poor. By 'governors' I understand the elders chosen from the people, who together with the bishops were to exercise oversight over conduct and apply discipline. This is the only way to make sense of Paul's instruction: 'He who leads, let him lead with diligence' (Romans 12:8). From the beginning, therefore, every church had its council of godly, serious, and holy men who held the same jurisdiction over the correction of vices that we will discuss later. Experience itself shows that this was the practice for more than one generation. The office of governance is therefore also necessary for every age.

The care of the poor was entrusted to deacons. However, in the letter to the Romans Paul sets out two kinds. He says: 'He who gives, let him do it with generosity; he who shows mercy, let him do it with cheerfulness' (Romans 12:8). Since Paul is clearly speaking about public offices of the church, there must have been two distinct roles. Unless I am mistaken, by the first he means deacons who distributed the charitable funds; by the second he means those who devoted themselves to caring directly for the poor and sick — of which kind were the widows Paul mentions to Timothy. Women could hold no other public office in the church except to devote themselves to service of the poor. If this is granted — and it must be granted — then there are two kinds of deacons: those who serve by distributing aid to the poor, and those who care for the poor of the church directly. Although the word 'diakonia' (ministry/service) has a broader range, Scripture specially calls by the name of deacons those to whom the church has given the charge of distributing alms and caring for the poor, appointing them as stewards of the common treasury for the needy. Their ori-

gin, institution, and office is described by Luke in Acts. When a complaint arose among the Greek-speaking believers that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution to the poor, the apostles excused themselves by saying they could not adequately serve both the preaching of the word and the ministry of tables — and so they asked the congregation to choose seven qualified men to whom this work could be entrusted. This was the kind of deacons the apostolic church had — and the kind it is fitting for us to have, following their example.

Since in the holy assembly everything must be done decently and in order, there is nothing in which this principle needs more diligent attention than in establishing church governance — for nowhere is the danger greater if things are done in disorder. Therefore, to prevent restless and ambitious people from rashly thrusting themselves forward to teach or to rule — which would otherwise happen — it is expressly required that no one take up a public office in the church without a calling. For a person to be recognized as a true minister of the church, he must first be duly called, and then he must respond to that calling by taking up and carrying out the duties it entails. This we can observe repeatedly in Paul — whenever he means to affirm his apostleship, he almost always cites both his faithfulness in executing his office and the calling that authorized it. If so great a minister of Christ did not dare claim authority to be heard in the church except on the grounds that he was both appointed to it by the Lord's command and faithfully carrying out what was entrusted to him — how shameful it is when someone lacking both or either of these lays claim to such honor. But since we have already touched on the necessity of executing the office, let us now address only the calling.

This subject breaks down into four questions: what kind of ministers ought to be appointed, how they ought to be appointed, by whom, and with what ceremony or rite they are to be admitted. I am speaking of the outward and formal calling, which belongs to the public order of the church. The inner and secret calling — of which each minister is privately conscious before God, though the church has no witness of it — I set aside here. It is a good testimony of our heart that we receive the office offered to us not from ambition, greed, or any self-seeking desire, but from a pure fear of God and zeal for the church's edification. This inner calling is indeed — as I have said — necessary for each of us, if we wish our ministry to be acceptable before God. Yet a person may be outwardly and rightly called in the presence of the church even if he comes to it with a wicked conscience — as long as that wickedness is not publicly known. It is also common to say that even private individuals are in a sense called to the ministry when they are seen to be fit and capable for it — since learning combined with godliness and the other qualities of a good pastor is a kind of preparation for the office itself. For those whom the Lord has appointed to so great an office, He first equips with the tools needed to fulfill it, so that they do not come to it empty or unprepared. For this reason Paul, when addressing the Corinthians about the offices themselves, first listed the gifts that those who hold such offices ought to have. But since this is the first of the four points I have proposed, let us move forward to it.

What kind of bishops it is fitting to choose, Paul explains at length in two passages — but the sum is this: no one is to be chosen except those with sound doctrine and holy lives, not marked by any vice that would damage their credibility or bring disgrace on

their ministry. The same standard applies to deacons and elders. It must always be ensured that those chosen are not unable or unfit to bear the burden placed on them — that is, they must be equipped with the gifts and abilities necessary to fulfill their office. When Christ was about to send out His apostles, He furnished them with the tools they would need. And Paul, after portraying the character of a true and good bishop, warns Timothy not to defile himself by appointing anyone who falls short of that standard. When I say 'how' ministers ought to be chosen, I am referring not to the ceremony of the choosing but to the reverent care that must be maintained throughout the process. This is the reason for the fasting and prayers that Luke records when the faithful appointed their elders. Knowing they were engaged in a most serious matter, they dared attempt nothing without great reverence and deliberate care. Above all they gave themselves to prayer, seeking from God the Spirit of counsel and discernment.

The third point in our division was: by whom ministers are to be chosen. On this question, no firm rule can be drawn from the calling of the apostles, since their situation differed from the ordinary calling of other ministers. Because theirs was an extraordinary office, it required a more visible mark — and so it was fitting that those appointed to it be called and commissioned directly by the Lord's own word. They therefore took up their work not by any human election but solely by the command of God and of Christ. This is why, when the apostles were choosing someone to take Judas's place, they did not dare name one person on their own authority — instead they put forward two, and let the Lord indicate by lot which one He wanted. Paul's statement that he was made an apostle not by men nor through a man, but through Christ and

God the Father, must be understood in the same way. The first part — 'not by men' — was something he shared with all faithful ministers of the word, for no one may rightly take up that role without being called by God. But the second part — 'not through a man' — was unique to him. When he boasts of this, therefore, he is not merely claiming what every true and legitimate pastor has, but presenting his apostolic credentials. For there were those among the Galatians who worked to undermine his authority by portraying him as a minor disciple placed in office by the senior apostles. To defend the dignity of his preaching — which he knew was being attacked through those subtle maneuvers — he needed to show himself in every way equal to the other apostles. He therefore declares that he was chosen not by human judgment, like an ordinary bishop, but by the direct word and unmistakable calling of the Lord Himself.

No reasonable person will deny that it is consistent with the order of a lawful calling that bishops should be appointed by human beings — Scripture provides ample testimony of this. Nor does Paul's statement that he was not sent 'by men nor through a man' argue against this, since he is not there speaking of the ordinary appointment of ministers but is claiming what was unique to the apostles. In any case, even when God appointed Paul directly by His own singular prerogative, He still employed the discipline of an ecclesiastical calling. Luke records it this way: while the apostles were fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Paul and Barnabas for the work to which I have called them' (Acts 13:2). What was the purpose of that formal setting apart and the laying on of hands — given that the Holy Spirit had already declared His own choice — except to preserve the church's discipline

of appointing ministers through proper human means? The Lord could not have given a clearer endorsement of this order than He did by first declaring that He had ordained Paul as apostle to the Gentiles, and yet still requiring him to be commissioned through the church. We see the same thing in the choosing of Matthias. Because the office of apostle was of such extraordinary importance that they did not dare appoint anyone to it on their own judgment, they put forward two men and let the lot fall — so that the election might have an unmistakable testimony from heaven, while the church's proper process was still observed.

The question now arises: should a minister be chosen by the whole church, or only by the other ministers and elders who exercise discipline, or can he be appointed by the authority of one man? Those who give this authority to one man cite Paul's words to Titus: 'For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city' (Titus 1:5). And to Timothy: 'Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily' (1 Timothy 5:22). But they are mistaken if they think either Timothy at Ephesus or Titus in Crete held something like kingly power — that each could dispose of everything at his own will. They held a leading position above the others in order to guide the people with sound and wholesome counsel, not to act independently of everyone else. And lest I seem to be inventing this, I will make it plain from a comparable example. Luke records that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in various churches — but he also states the manner in which it was done, saying it was done by the raising of hands: 'having appointed elders for them in every church' (Acts 14:23). The two of them formally appointed them — but the whole congregation, following the Greek custom in elections, indicated

by a show of hands whom they wanted. Roman histories similarly say that the consul who presided over the assembly 'created' the new officers — meaning only that he received the votes and guided the people in the election. It is also hardly likely that Paul granted more authority to Timothy and Titus than he claimed for himself. We see that he himself was accustomed to appointing bishops through the votes of the people. The passages above must therefore be understood in a way that takes nothing away from the common right and freedom of the church. Cyprian therefore speaks well when he declares it is grounded in God's authority that a priest should be chosen in the presence of the people and before the eyes of all, and should by public examination and testimony be approved as worthy and fit. We see that this was the Lord's commandment for the Levitical priests — that before their consecration they were to be presented before the people. Matthias was added to the fellowship of the apostles in this same way — as were the seven deacons — with the people present and giving their approval. 'These examples show,' says Cyprian, 'that the ordination of a priest ought not to be done without the knowledge of the people standing by — for the ordination to be just and lawful, it must be confirmed by the witness of all.' We have arrived, therefore, at this conclusion: by the word of God, a lawful calling of a minister is one in which those who appear fit are appointed with the consent and approval of the people — with other pastors guiding the election to ensure that the congregation does not act rashly, out of emotional passion, or in disorder.

There remains the form of ordination, which we placed last in our discussion of the calling. It is clear that the apostles used no other ceremony for admitting someone to ministry than the laying

on of hands. I believe this practice came from the Hebrew custom of presenting something to God by laying hands on it as a gesture of dedication and blessing. When Jacob was about to bless Ephraim and Manasseh, he laid his hands on their heads. Our Lord followed this same practice when He prayed over the children. In the same sense — as I understand it — the Jews under the law laid hands on their sacrifices. By laying on hands, the apostles were therefore signifying that they were offering to God the one they were admitting to ministry. They also used it when they imparted the visible gifts of the Spirit. However it may be taken, this was the solemn practice whenever they commissioned anyone to a church office. They consecrated pastors and teachers this way, and deacons as well. Although there is no explicit command about the laying on of hands, the fact that it was consistently practiced by the apostles means their careful observance of it should carry the weight of a command for us. It is truly beneficial: through such a sign, the dignity of the ministry is commended to the people, and the one being ordained is reminded that he is no longer his own — but has been bound to God and to the church. Restored to its true meaning, this will not be an empty sign. For if the Spirit of God has established nothing in the church without purpose, we must regard this ceremony — having proceeded from Him — as genuinely useful, provided it is not perverted into a superstitious abuse. Finally, it must be noted that it was not the whole congregation that laid hands on ministers, but only the pastors. Whether many pastors always laid on hands together, or only one, is not entirely certain. But it is clear that in the case of the deacons, and of Paul and Barnabas, more than one participated. In another place, however, Paul writes that he alone — not many others — laid hands on

Timothy: 'I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands' (2 Timothy 1:6). As for what Paul says in the other letter about the laying on of hands by the body of elders — I do not take this to mean that Paul is speaking of a council of elders, but that by that expression he refers to the rite of ordination itself. It is as if he said: 'Let the grace you received through the laying on of hands when I ordained you as an elder not be allowed to lie dormant.'

CHAPTER 4: OF THE STATE OF THE OLD CHURCH, AND OF THE MANNER OF GOVERNING THAT WAS IN USE BEFORE THE PAPACY



We have so far treated the order of church governance as delivered to us from the pure word of God, and the ministries as they were instituted by Christ. Now, to open all of this more clearly and make it stick more firmly in our minds, it will be helpful to look at the practice of the ancient church, which presents us with a visible picture of God's institution. For although the bishops of those times published many canons that seemed to go beyond what Scripture expressly stated, they shaped their entire order so carefully according to the rule of God's word alone that one can easily see they had virtually nothing in this area that conflicted with it. And although some aspects of their ordinances may have been lacking, their sincere zeal to preserve God's institution — from which they did not stray far — makes it very profitable to briefly survey what their practice looked like. Just as we have shown that Scripture commends to us three kinds of ministers, so the ancient church organized all its ministers into three orders. From the order of elders, some were chosen to be pastors and

teachers; the rest exercised oversight in matters of conduct and discipline. The deacons were charged with the care of the poor and the distribution of charitable funds. As for readers and acolytes, these were not names of established offices — rather, those called 'clergy' were trained from youth in certain duties of church service, so they would better understand the purpose they were being prepared for, and in time come better equipped to their office, as I will explain more fully shortly. Therefore when Jerome enumerated five orders of the church, he listed bishops, priests, deacons, believers, and catechumens — and assigned no proper place to the rest of the clergy or to monks.

All those appointed to the office of teaching were called priests. In each city they chose one from their number and gave him specifically the title of bishop — to prevent the conflicts that arise from strict equality. Yet the bishop was not so elevated above the others in honor and dignity that he exercised dominion over his colleagues. Rather, he held the same role among the assembly of priests that a consul held in the senate — to introduce matters for discussion, to call for opinions, to lead the others through counsel, admonition, and exhortation, to govern the whole proceeding with his authority, and to carry out what was decided by common council. The ancient writers themselves acknowledge that this arrangement was introduced by human agreement out of practical necessity. Jerome, commenting on the letter to Titus, says: "The one who was a bishop was the same as one who was a priest. And before divisions were stirred up by the devil and people were saying, "I am of Paul, I am of Cephas," churches were governed by the common council of elders. Then, in order to uproot the seeds of division, all authority was committed to one person. Therefore, just as the

priests know that by the custom of the church they are subject to him who is set over them, so let the bishops know that they are above the priests more by custom than by the Lord's actual appointment, and that they ought to govern the church together in common.' In another place Jerome shows how ancient this institution was, saying that in Alexandria, from Mark the Evangelist through to Heraclas and Dionysius, the priests always chose one from their own number and placed him in a higher position, calling him a bishop. Every city therefore had a company of priests who served as pastors and teachers. They all exercised among the people the work of teaching, exhorting, and correcting that Paul assigns to bishops — and to raise up the next generation, they labored in training younger men who had committed themselves to service in the Lord's cause. Each city was assigned a surrounding district, which drew its priests from that church and was considered part of its body. Each company, as I have said, was for the sake of order and peace placed under one bishop, who was elevated above the rest in dignity while remaining subject to the assembly of his fellow priests. If the territory under a bishop's oversight was so large that he could not personally discharge all his episcopal duties in every part of it, priests were assigned to serve in certain rural locations and carry out his authority in minor matters. These were called country-bishops, because they represented the bishop in the surrounding territory.

As far as the duties of this office were concerned, both bishops and priests were obligated to distribute the word and administer the sacraments. The restriction against priests preaching to the people was instituted only at Alexandria — because Arius had troubled the church there — as Socrates records in Book 9 of the

Tripartite History. Jerome himself confesses he does not approve even of that restriction. It would have been considered monstrous for any man to present himself as a bishop without actually proving himself a true bishop in deed. Such was the rigor of those times that all ministers were pressed to fulfill the very office the Lord requires of them. Nor am I describing the practice of only one era — even in Gregory's time, when the church had already nearly decayed (certainly it had greatly declined from its ancient purity), it would have been intolerable for any bishop to refrain from preaching. Gregory writes in one place: 'The priest dies if no voice of his is heard — for he invites against himself the wrath of the hidden judge when no sound of preaching goes forth from him.' And in another place: 'When Paul testifies that he is clean from the blood of all, this saying convicts us, binds us, and shows us guilty — we who are called priests — for beyond the evils of our own sins, we add the deaths of others; for we kill as many as we, being lukewarm and silent, daily see going to destruction.' He called himself and others 'silent' because they were less diligent in their work than they ought to have been. When he did not spare those who were only half performing their duty — what do you think he would have said about someone who was idle altogether? It was therefore long held in the church that the chief duty of a bishop was to feed God's people with the word and to build up the church with sound doctrine, both publicly and privately.

Each province had among its bishops an archbishop, and the Nicene Synod also ordained patriarchs who ranked above the archbishops in degree and dignity — all of this was for the maintenance of discipline. Yet in this discussion the most important feature must not be omitted. These ranks were established primarily so

that if anything arose in any church that could not be properly settled by a few, it could be referred to a provincial synod. If the magnitude or difficulty of the matter required broader deliberation, the patriarchs were called together with the synods — and from their judgment there was no further appeal except to a general council. Some called this form of governance a 'hierarchy' — a term I consider improper, and one that is genuinely absent from Scripture. The Holy Spirit purposely avoided any language that might conjure up images of principality or dominion when speaking of the governance of the church. But if we set aside the word and look at the thing itself, we will find that the ancient bishops intended to establish no form of church governance that differed from what the Lord appointed in His word.

The order of deacons at that time was no different from what it had been under the apostles. They received the daily offerings of the faithful and the church's annual revenues, and administered them to their proper uses — distributing them partly to support the ministers and partly to care for the poor — under the direction of the bishop, to whom they also rendered yearly accounts of their distributions. When the canons everywhere name the bishop as the one in charge of all church goods, this does not mean he personally discharged this care himself — rather, it was his role to direct the deacon in determining who should be received into the church's common assistance, what should be given from the remainder, and how much should go to each person, and to oversee whether the deacon was faithfully carrying out his duties. The canons attributed to the apostles state it this way: 'We command that the bishop have the goods of the church in his own charge. For if he is entrusted with souls, which are more precious, how much more is it

fitting that he have charge of money — so that through his authority all things may be distributed to the poor through the elders and deacons, ministered with all fear and care.' The Council of Antioch decreed that bishops should be restrained from handling church goods without the knowledge of the elders and deacons. This point needs no lengthy debate, since many of Gregory's letters make clear that even in his time — when church ordinances were otherwise greatly corrupted — the practice continued that deacons, under the bishop's oversight, served as stewards for the poor. As for subdeacons, they were most likely originally joined to the deacons to assist in work among the poor, though this distinction gradually blurred. Archdeacons began to be appointed when the volume of church property required a more careful system of administration — though Jerome says this was already in place in his own time. The archdeacons were responsible for revenues, properties, stores, and the collection of daily offerings. Gregory accordingly told the archdeacon of Salon that he would be held accountable if any church goods were lost through his fraud or negligence. The privilege given to archdeacons of reading the Gospel to the people, exhorting them to prayer, and presenting the cup at the holy Supper was given to dignify their office — reminding them by such signs that theirs was no secular stewardship but a spiritual function dedicated to God.

From this we can also judge what the practice was — and what the standard of distribution — for church goods. In synod decrees and among the ancient writers everywhere, it is established that whatever the church possessed, in land or in money, was the patrimony of the poor. Therefore bishops and deacons were constantly reminded that they were not handling their own property, but

goods designated for the needs of the poor — and that if they faithlessly suppressed or wasted these goods, they would be guilty of bloodshed. This awareness was meant to lead them to distribute with great fear and reverence before God, without partiality, to those who truly had need. From this come those solemn declarations of personal integrity by Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and other bishops of that caliber. But since it is both equitable and established by the Lord's law that those who serve the church should be supported from the church's common funds — and since many priests of that age voluntarily consecrated their own inheritances to God and embraced poverty willingly — the distribution was such that neither the ministers went without sustenance nor the poor were neglected. Yet it was also ensured that the ministers themselves — who ought to set an example of modest simplicity — were not given so much that they could indulge in riotous excess or luxury, but only enough to meet their genuine needs. 'Those clergy,' says Jerome, 'who are capable of living from their parents' property, if they take what belongs to the poor, commit sacrilege — and by such abuse they eat and drink judgment upon themselves.'

At first the administration was free and voluntary — bishops and deacons served from a willing conscience, and integrity of life served in place of written laws. Afterward, when the greed and disordered desires of some produced bad examples that needed correction, canons were drawn up dividing the church's revenues into four parts: one assigned to the clergy, one to the poor, one to the maintenance and repair of church buildings and other holy structures, and one to the poor — both local and visiting strangers. Where other canons give this fourth portion to the bishop, this does not conflict with my division above. The intent was not that it

should be his personal property to consume or distribute as he pleased, but that it should be enough to maintain the hospitality that Paul requires of that office. This is how Gelasius and Gregory explain it. Gelasius gives no other reason for the bishop to retain anything for himself except to give it to prisoners and strangers. Gregory speaks even more plainly: 'It is the custom of the apostolic see to direct that when a bishop is ordained, the revenues should be divided into four portions: one for the bishop and his household for hospitality and reception of guests, one for the clergy, one for the poor, and one for the repair of churches.' The bishop, therefore, was permitted to take for his own use only enough for modest, ordinary food and clothing. If any bishop began to exceed these limits — whether through extravagant spending or ostentatious display — he was immediately rebuked by his colleagues. If he refused to listen, he was removed from office.

As for what was spent on adorning sacred things, at first it was very little. As the church grew somewhat wealthier, a measure of restraint was still maintained even in this area. And whatever was spent on such adornments remained, in cases of greater necessity, available for the poor. So when famine struck the province of Jerusalem and there was no other way to relieve the need, Cyril sold the sacred vessels and vestments and used the proceeds to feed the poor. Similarly, Acacius, bishop of Amida, when a great crowd of Persians were nearly starving, called together the clergy and made that memorable speech: 'Our God needs neither dishes nor cups, for He neither eats nor drinks' — and then melted down the sacred vessels to provide both food and ransom for people in misery. Jerome also, when condemning the excessive splendor of churches, speaks with honor of Exuperius, bishop of Toulouse in

his own time — who carried the Lord's body in a wicker basket and His blood in a glass vessel, yet let no poor person go hungry. What Acacius did, Ambrose recounts of himself as well. When the Arians accused him of breaking sacred vessels to ransom prisoners, he offered this most godly defense: 'He who sent the apostles without gold gathered the churches without gold. The church has gold, not to keep it, but to spend it and to give relief in time of need. What is the point of hoarding what helps no one? Do we not know how much gold and silver the Assyrians carried away from the temple of the Lord? Does not the priest do better to melt it for the sustenance of the poor, when no other relief is available, than for an enemy and a robber of God to carry it away? Will not the Lord say: Why did you let so many in need die of hunger, when you had gold with which you could have provided for them? Why were so many led away captive and not ransomed? Why were so many killed by the enemy? It would have been better to preserve the vessels of living men than those of metal. To all this you will have no answer. What will you say? I feared that God's temple should lack its adornment. He will answer: Sacraments need no gold, and things that are not bought with gold are not made more pleasing by gold. The ransoming of captives is the true adornment of the sacraments.' In short, we see how true is what Ambrose himself says elsewhere: that whatever the church possessed was the treasury of the needy — and that a bishop has nothing that does not belong to the poor.

The ministries we have described were those of the ancient church. The others mentioned by ecclesiastical writers were more like exercises and preparation than properly established offices. Those holy men, to ensure a future supply of trained workers for

the church, accepted young men into their care, governance, and instruction — young men who, with their parents' consent and approval, had professed themselves soldiers of the spiritual calling. They shaped these young men from their earliest years so they would not come unprepared and inexperienced to the duties of their office. All who were trained under this system were called 'clergy.' I wish some other term had been given them, for this name arose from an error or misunderstanding — since Peter uses the word 'clergy' for the whole church, meaning the Lord's own inheritance. But the institution itself was excellent and profitable: those who would consecrate themselves and their service to the church were raised up under the bishop's oversight, so that no one would minister to the church without thorough preparation. From earliest youth they absorbed holy doctrine, through strict discipline developed a settled disposition of gravity and holy living, were weaned from worldly concerns, and were formed in spiritual duties and studies. Just as young soldiers are trained in practice skirmishes before being sent into real combat, so there were certain preparatory exercises in which the clergy were trained before being advanced to actual offices. First, the care of opening and closing the church was entrusted to the clerks — these were called 'ostiarii,' or doorkeepers. Then came those called 'acolytes,' or attendants, who accompanied the bishop in his household duties and remained in constant company with him — partly for the honor it conferred, partly to prevent any grounds for suspicion. So they would gradually become known to the people and earn a good reputation, and would learn to stand before others and speak in public without being overwhelmed by embarrassment when they eventually came forward to teach as priests — a place was assigned

to them to read from the pulpit. In this way they were advanced step by step, each demonstrating diligence in all these preparatory exercises, until they reached the rank of subdeacon. My point is simply this: these were training stages and preparatory roles rather than recognized offices within the proper ministry of the church.

We said that the first and second points in calling ministers concern the kind of men to be chosen and the careful reverence with which the process is to be conducted. In these matters, the ancient church followed Paul's prescribed order and the apostles' example. They customarily gathered to choose pastors with great reverence and earnest calling on the name of God. They also had a formal examination by which they tested the life and doctrine of candidates according to Paul's standard. Their only misstep in this regard was a somewhat excessive strictness — they required more of a bishop than Paul required, and in later times especially insisted on celibacy. But in other respects their practice conformed to Paul's description. As for the third point — who ought to appoint ministers — they did not always maintain a consistent order. In ancient times no one was received into the order of clergy without the consent of all the people. Cyprian labored to justify an exception when he appointed one Aurelius as a reader without first consulting the church, acknowledging it was irregular, however not without reason. He wrote: 'In ordaining the clergy, dear brothers, we are accustomed first to seek your advice and by common counsel to weigh the character and conduct of each candidate.' But because in these lesser preparatory roles the risk was minimal — since they were chosen for a long period of proof rather than for a significant office — the practice of seeking the people's consent for

them gradually lapsed. In the higher orders as well, apart from the bishopric, the people generally left the assessment and selection to the bishop and priests, who examined who was suitable and worthy — except perhaps when new priests were being assigned to particular parishes, where it was proper for the local congregation to give its approval. It is no wonder the people were not vigilant in pressing their right in this matter — for no one was made a sub-deacon who had not already given long proof of himself as a clerk under the strict discipline then practiced. After being tested in that role, he was advanced to deacon. From there he moved to the honor of the priesthood, if he had served faithfully. So no one was promoted without having been genuinely tested over many years before the eyes of the people. Many canons governed the punishment of misconduct, so that the church need not be troubled by wicked priests or deacons if it made use of the remedies available. For priests, moreover, the consent of the people of the same city was always required — as the very first canon in the sixty-seventh distinction, attributed to Anacletus, confirms. Finally, all ordinations were performed at certain appointed times of the year — so that no one could slip in quietly without the knowledge of the faithful, or be hastily advanced without proper witnesses.

In the selection of bishops, the people long enjoyed a protected freedom — no one was to be imposed on them against their will. The Council of Antioch therefore forbade forcing an unwanted bishop on any congregation. Leo I strongly affirmed this same principle. From this came such sayings as: 'Let him be chosen whom the clergy and the people, or the greater number, desire.' And: 'He who will rule over all must be chosen by all — for one who is made a ruler while unknown and unexamined is thrust in

by force.' And further: 'Let him be chosen who is both selected by the clergy and desired by the people, and let him be consecrated by those of the province, with the judgment of the metropolitan.' The holy fathers guarded this people's freedom so carefully that when the general synod assembled at Constantinople ordained Nectarius, they would not proceed without the approval of the entire clergy and people — as they testified in a letter to the synod at Rome. Therefore when any bishop appointed his own successor, the appointment was not valid unless the whole people confirmed it. Augustine's account of the naming of Eradius provides not only an example but the very procedure used. And when Theodoret records that Athanasius named Peter as his successor, he immediately adds that the order of priests confirmed it, and the magistrate, the nobility, and the people approved it with their acclaiming voice.

I grant that it was also very reasonably established in the Council of Laodicea that the election should not be left to the crowds. It rarely happens that so many people can reach sound agreement together, and it is generally true that the uncommitted masses are pulled in opposite directions. But a very good remedy was employed to address this risk. First, only the clergy made the selection. Those they had chosen were then presented to the magistrate, or to the senate and the leading citizens. These leaders, after deliberation, confirmed the selection if they thought it good — or, if not, chose another whom they preferred. The matter was then brought to the whole congregation, who, while not strictly bound by these prior judgments, were less likely to be disorderly because of them. Or the process could begin with the congregation — but only to learn whom they most wanted. Once the people's

wishes were heard, the clergy would then make their choice. In this way neither the clergy could appoint whoever they wished without accountability, nor were they required to follow the crowd's foolish desires. Leo sets out this order in another place, saying: 'The desires of the citizens are to be sought, the testimonies of the people, the judgment of the leading men, and the election of the clergy.' Again: 'Let the testimony of the leading men be obtained, the signature of the clergy, the consent of the order and the congregation — no reason allows it to be done otherwise.' The decree of the Laodicean synod means nothing other than this: that the clergy and the leading people should not allow themselves to be swept away by the undisciplined crowd, but rather with wisdom and calm gravity should restrain the people's misguided passions whenever the need arose.

This method of election was still in force in Gregory's time, and likely persisted long after. Many of his letters remain that give clear testimony of this. Whenever he had to deal with the appointment of a new bishop, he wrote to the clergy, to the order, and to the people — and sometimes to the civil authority as well, depending on the governance of the city. Even when — due to the disordered state of the church — he entrusted an adjoining bishop with overseeing the election, he always required a formal decree confirmed by the signatures of all. When Constantius was being made bishop of Milan, and many of the Milanese had fled to Genoa due to barbarian invasions, Gregory held that the election could not be valid unless those refugees were also summoned and gave their consent. Less than five hundred years ago, Pope Nicholas himself decreed concerning the election of the bishop of Rome that the cardinal bishops should begin the process, then bring in the rest of

the clergy, and finally that the election should be confirmed by the consent of the people. He then cited the decree of Leo I that I mentioned earlier and ordered it to be observed from that point forward. And even if, through the wickedness of wicked men, the clergy were compelled to leave the city to conduct a valid election, Nicholas still required that some of the people be present with them. As for the emperor's consent, as far as I can determine, it was required only in the two churches of Rome and Constantinople — because those were the seats of imperial government. When Ambrose was sent to Milan with authority from Valentinian to oversee the election of a new bishop, that was an exceptional measure due to the bitter factional conflicts then raging among the citizens. At Rome in ancient times the emperor's authority carried great weight in the appointment of the bishop. Gregory himself says he was placed in the governance of the church by imperial command, even though by normal custom the people formally requested him. The procedure was this: once the clergy and people had designated a bishop, the clergy would bring the matter to the emperor, who would either confirm the election by his approval or void it by his disapproval. The decrees that Gratian compiles do not conflict with this custom — they simply say that the canonical election must not be set aside in favor of a king appointing a bishop according to his own pleasure, and that metropolitans must not consecrate anyone so installed by naked force. For there is a difference between robbing the church of its right so that everything is transferred to one man's preference, and giving an emperor or king the honor of confirming a legitimate election with his authority.

We must now address the form by which ministers of the church were admitted into their office after election. The Latins called this 'ordination' or 'consecration.' The Greeks called it 'cheirotomia' — literally, raising of hands — and sometimes also 'cheirothesia,' laying on of hands. Strictly speaking, 'cheirotomia' referred to the kind of election in which consent was expressed by the raising of hands. A decree of the Nicene Council required the metropolitan to gather all the bishops of the province to ordain the one who had been chosen. If some were prevented from attending by distance, illness, or some necessity, at least three were still required to be present, and those absent were to testify their consent in writing. This canon, after falling out of use through neglect, was renewed by many subsequent synods. All bishops — or at least all who had no valid excuse — were commanded to be present so that the learning and character of the one being ordained could receive a more thorough examination, for the proceedings were not carried out without such testing. Cyprian's words indicate that in ancient times the bishops were accustomed not to be summoned after the election but to be present at the election itself, and to serve as overseers so that nothing disorderly would happen among the crowd. Where he said the people have the power to choose worthy priests or refuse unworthy ones, he adds shortly after: 'Therefore, in accordance with the tradition of God and the apostles — which is still maintained among us and throughout virtually all provinces — all the neighboring bishops of the same province should come together to the people for whom a leader is being ordained, and the bishop should be chosen in the presence of the people.' But when bishops were sometimes slow to gather and there was a risk that someone would exploit the delay to campaign for the position,

it was decided that it would be sufficient for the bishops to assemble after the election and, following a lawful examination and approval, perform the consecration.

When this became the universal and unquestioned practice, a different custom gradually developed: those who had been chosen would travel to the metropolitan city to receive their ordination. This came about more through ambition and the corruption of the original practice than from any sound reason. Not long after, as the authority of the see of Rome grew, an even worse custom took hold: bishops from nearly all of Italy began to receive their consecration from Rome. This can be seen in the letters of Gregory. Only a few cities that did not readily surrender their rights preserved their ancient privilege — Milan being a notable example. Perhaps the only metropolitan cities kept their full privilege intact. All the bishops of a province were still accustomed to gather together in the chief city to consecrate the archbishop. The ceremony itself was the laying on of hands. I read of no other ceremony being used, except that at the solemn assembly the bishops wore a distinctive garment by which they could be identified as separate from the other priests. Priests and deacons were also ordained by the laying on of hands alone. Each bishop ordained his own priests, together with the company of priests around him. Though all participated together, because the bishop presided and the whole act was conducted under his direction, the ordination was said to be his. This is why the ancient writers so frequently say that a priest differs from a bishop in nothing except that he does not have the power to ordain.

¶THE .V. CHAPTER. THAT THE OLDE FORME OF GOUVERNEMENT IS VT- TERLY OUERTHROWEN BY THE TYRANNY OF THE PAPACIE.



It is now worth setting before everyone's eyes the order of church governance that the see of Rome and all its defenders maintain today — the full image of that 'hierarchy' they constantly invoke — and comparing it with the order of the early and ancient church we have just described. The comparison will make clear what kind of church they actually have, and what weight their title of authority really carries against us. But it is best to begin with the calling, so we can see who is called to this ministry, what kind of men they are, and through what process. After that we will examine how faithfully they carry out their office. We will give first place to bishops — and I wish to God that this position of first in our discussion could be an honor for them. But the facts do not allow me to touch this subject even lightly without bringing great shame upon them. I will nonetheless remember what kind of writing I am engaged in, and I will not allow my discussion — which should be limited to straightforward teaching — to overflow its bounds. But let any one of them who has not entirely lost all shame

answer me: what kind of men are commonly chosen as bishops today? It has now become almost unheard of for any examination of learning to take place. And if learning is considered at all, they choose some lawyer who is better at arguing in court than preaching in a church. It is certain that over the past hundred years, hardly one in a hundred men chosen understood anything of holy doctrine. I do not cite the earlier ages as much better — I mention them only because our present question is about the church as it now stands. If their character is examined, we find that few or almost none would have been judged worthy by the ancient canons. Those who were not drunkards were whoremongers. Those who were free from those vices were either gamblers, hunters, or dissolute in some other way. These are already among the lesser offenses that would exclude a man from the episcopate under the old canons. Most outrageous of all is the fact that, by papal grant, children barely ten years old are being made bishops. They have reached such a level of shamelessness and deadened conscience that they are not afraid of this extreme — indeed this monstrous wickedness — which is repulsive even to basic human decency. The carelessness of their elections shows exactly how religious the process has become.

As for the election itself, all the people's rights have been stripped away. Their desires, their approval, their signatures — all of this has vanished. The entire power has been transferred to the canons alone. They award the bishopric to whoever they choose and then present him before the people — not to be examined, but to be revered. But Leo on the contrary side cries out that no reason permits this and declares such an imposition to be an act of violence. Cyprian, when he testifies that it is grounded in the law of

God that it should not be done without the people's consent, shows that the opposite practice is contrary to the word of God. The decrees of so many synods most severely forbid it to be otherwise done, and command that if it is done, it is null and void. If these things are true, then no canonical election — by God's law or by ecclesiastical law — remains in the papacy. But even setting aside all other evils, how will they be able to excuse the way they have robbed the church of her right? They say: the corruption of the times required it — since in appointing bishops, personal favoritism and partisan passions prevailed over right judgment among the people and magistrates, it was necessary to transfer control to a few. Very well. Suppose that was the last resort in a desperate situation. But since the medicine itself has proved more harmful than the disease, why is this new evil not also corrected? They say: the canons precisely prescribe what is to be followed in elections. But do we doubt that the people of ancient times also knew they were bound by the most sacred laws — when they saw that God's own word gave them the rule they were to follow when they came to choose a bishop? That single voice of God, by which He describes the true character of a bishop, ought to outweigh thousands of canons. And yet the people, corrupted by their worst impulses, paid no attention to law or equity. So today, though excellent laws are written down, they lie buried in papers. For the most part it is common practice — indeed accepted as perfectly normal — that drunkards, whoremongers, and gamblers are routinely advanced to this honor. And I am saying this mildly — bishoprics are given as rewards for adultery and prostitution. When they go merely to hunters and falconers, it is considered well spent. There is no way to excuse so outrageous an injustice. The

people in ancient times, I say, had a very good canon: God's word itself prescribed that a bishop must be above reproach, able to teach, not violent, and so on. Why then was the authority to choose taken from the people and given to these men? Because, supposedly, God's word was not being heard amid the tumult and factional strife of the people. Why then should it not now be taken back from these men, who not only break all laws but, having cast aside all shame, shamelessly, greedily, and ambitiously throw together both divine and human matters without any distinction?

But they lie when they say this was devised as a remedy. We read frequently of tumults breaking out in ancient churches during the election of bishops — yet no one ever dared to think of stripping the authority from the people. They had other means by which such faults could be prevented, or corrected after the fact. Here is what actually happened: when the people became negligent about making elections and let that responsibility drift to the priests as though it did not concern them, the priests seized on this opportunity to usurp a tyranny for themselves — which they then entrenched with new canons. As for their ordination process, it is nothing but a hollow charade. The examination they stage there is so empty and meaningless that it lacks even a pretense of substance. Therefore, where some princes have obtained from the bishops of Rome the right to nominate bishops themselves, the church suffered no new loss — for the election was only taken from the canons, who had seized it by force without any right in the first place. It is a disgraceful practice, to be sure, that bishops are dispatched from the royal court to take possession of churches — and it would be the work of godly rulers to refrain from this corruption. For it is a wicked robbery of the church to thrust upon any congre-

gation a bishop they have not desired, or at least not freely approved. But the long-standing disorder in the churches gave princes the opening to take the presentation of bishops into their own hands — for they preferred it to be their gift rather than that of men to whom it belonged no more, and who abused it just as wrongfully.

This, then, is that noble calling on the basis of which bishops boast of being successors of the apostles. They claim that the authority to create priests belongs to them alone. But in this they most wickedly corrupt the ancient institution — for by their ordination they do not create pastors to govern and feed the people, but sacrificers to offer sacrifice. Similarly, when they consecrate deacons, they perform nothing belonging to the true and proper diaconal office — they only ordain them to serve at certain ceremonies around the chalice and the paten. But the Council of Chalcedon decreed the opposite: ordinations were not to be absolute — that is, a specific place was to be assigned to those ordained, where they would actually exercise their office. This decree was useful for two reasons. First, so the church would not be burdened with the costs of unnecessary personnel — so that what should go to the poor would not be consumed by idle men. Second, so those ordained would understand that they were not being elevated to an honor but entrusted with a duty, to which they bound themselves by solemn commitment. But the Roman authorities — who think nothing in religion matters except their bellies — define 'title' to mean simply the revenue sufficient to support someone, whether from personal wealth or from a benefice. So when they ordain a deacon or priest without any regard for where he ought to serve, they confer the order on him as long as he is wealthy enough to

support himself. Who could accept the idea that the 'title' the council requires should be merely a yearly income for personal upkeep? Later canons tried to curb the bishops' careless ease of admission by penalizing them if they ordained someone without a sufficient title. In response, a clever workaround was devised: the person being ordained names whatever title he likes and promises to be satisfied with it, thereby forfeiting his right to claim support from his ordaining bishop. I will pass over the thousand frauds connected with this: some naming fictitious titles of benefices worth barely anything per year; others privately borrowing benefices on the understanding they will promptly return them — though sometimes they never do. And so on with other such games.

But even if all these grosser abuses were removed — is it not always absurd to appoint a priest and assign him no place? And they ordain no one except to offer sacrifice. But the true purpose of a priest's ordination is to be called to govern and shepherd the church, and a deacon's is to be called to gather and distribute alms. They do indeed dress up their proceedings with great pomp and ceremony, so that the sheer spectacle may impress the simple-minded. But for those with sound judgment, what can such theatrical displays amount to if there is no substance or truth beneath them? The ceremonies they use are either borrowed from Jewish sources or invented by themselves — and it would be better to do without them. Of genuine examination — for I care nothing for the shadow of it they still maintain — of the people's consent, and of other necessary elements, they make no mention. What I call a shadow is the absurd pantomiming, fit to draw laughter, contrived as a cold and empty imitation of antiquity. The bishops have their

deputies who may inquire into the candidates' learning before ordination. But what do they ask? Whether they can read their masses. Whether they can decline a common noun they come across while reading, conjugate a verb, or identify the meaning of a single word. Understanding a verse is not required. And yet those who fail even at these elementary skills are not turned away from the priesthood, as long as they bring money or letters of favor. In the same spirit, when candidates are brought to the altar for ordination, three times the question is asked in a language no one understands: whether they are worthy of this honor. Someone answers — someone who has never laid eyes on them, but who is playing his assigned part in the performance so that the required form is observed — 'They are worthy.' What can one say about these reverend fathers, except that in mocking sacrilege so openly, they shamelessly laugh in God's face and in everyone else's? But because they have been doing this for so long, they think it is now their established right. For anyone who dares open his mouth against these so obvious and so outrageous crimes is immediately dragged by them to punishment of death — as if he were someone in ancient times who had divulged the sacred mysteries of Ceres. Would they do this if they truly believed there was a God?

And how much better do they behave themselves in the awarding of benefices? — something that was once tied to ordination but is now entirely separate. Among them there are various methods. The bishops alone do not confer all benefices, and even those they are said to confer, they do not hold full authority over — others hold the right of presentation, while the bishops retain only the title of collation for the sake of appearances. There are also nominations from schools, resignations whether simple or for exchange,

letters of commendation, preventions, and everything else of that sort. And they conduct themselves in such a way that none of them can throw stones at the others. I will state plainly that scarcely one benefice in a hundred is awarded today in the papacy without simony, as the ancient writers defined the term. I do not say they all purchase them with ready cash — but show me one in twenty who obtains a benefice without some form of behind-the-scenes patronage. Some are advanced by family connections or marriage ties, some by their parents' influence, some by rendering favors and cultivating goodwill. In short, benefices are given not to provide for churches, but to benefit those who receive them. They call them 'benefices' — a word that says enough: they treat them as nothing more than the generous gifts of princes, used either to win the loyalty of their soldiers or reward their services. I will not even mention that such rewards are handed out to barbers, cooks, stable-keepers, and other such lowly characters. The law courts today ring with nothing so much as disputes over benefices — one could say benefices are simply prey thrown before dogs to fight over. Is it even tolerable to hear them called pastors — men who have broken into the possession of a church as into the property of an enemy they have seized? Who obtained it by legal wrangling? Who bought it with money? Who earned it through shameful services? Or who received it as children scarcely old enough to speak, as an inheritance from uncles and relatives, or — in the case of some — from their own fathers as illegitimate sons?

Would the people themselves, however corrupt and lawless they might have been, ever have gone so far? But this is even more monstrous: that one man — I will not say what kind of man, but certainly one who cannot govern himself — is set to govern five or

six churches. In the courts of princes today one can see young men holding three abbacies, two bishoprics, and one archbishopric. And it is common for canons to hold five, six, or seven benefices, over which they exercise no care at all except to collect the revenues. I will not press the point that the word of God cries out against this everywhere — for it has long since ceased to carry any weight with them at all. I will not press the point that many councils have issued the most severe penalties against this wickedness — for they boldly disregard those whenever they please. I simply say that both of these things are monstrous wickedness, utterly contrary to God, nature, and the proper governance of the church: that one plunderer oppresses many churches at once, and that a man who cannot even be present with his flock — even if he wanted to — is called a pastor. And yet — such is their shamelessness — they cover such abominable filthiness with the name of the church, to escape all blame. And this, God help us, is the holy succession by whose merit they boast the church is preserved from perishing.

Now let us examine — as the second mark of a legitimate pastor — how faithfully they exercise their office. Among the priests they create, some are monks and some are what they call secular clergy. The first of these two groups was unknown to the ancient church, and it is so contrary to the monastic profession to hold such a place in the church that in ancient times, when monks were chosen from monasteries to serve in the clergy, they ceased to be monks. Even Gregory — whose time was already much corrupted — would not allow this confusion. He directed that those made abbots must be removed from the clergy, for no one can properly be both a monk and a cleric at the same time, since each hinders the

other. Now if I ask how someone who, by the canons themselves, is declared unfit can properly fulfill his office — what, I ask, will they say in reply? They will of course produce for me those ill-conceived decrees of Innocent and Boniface, by which monks were received into the honor and power of the priesthood while being permitted to remain in their monasteries. But what kind of reasoning is this — that any ignorant man, the moment he occupies the see of Rome, can with a single word overturn all of antiquity? But we will speak of this elsewhere. Let it be enough for now that in the purer church it was considered a great absurdity for a monk to exercise the priestly office. For Jerome says that while he lives among monks, he does not exercise the priest's office, but places himself among the common people to be governed by the priests. But even granting them this concession — what do they actually do with their responsibilities? Of the mendicants, some preach. All other monks either sing or mumble their way through masses in their cloisters. As though Christ ever intended, or the nature of the office allows, priests to be made for this purpose. When Scripture plainly testifies that it is the priest's office to govern his own church, is it not a wicked profanation to redirect that office — indeed to completely transform the holy institution of God? For when these monks are ordained, they are expressly forbidden to do the very things God commands of all priests. The charge is sung to them: 'A monk, content with his cloister, may not presume to administer the sacraments or to perform anything belonging to public office.' Let them deny, if they can, that it is a plain mockery of God for any priest to be ordained for the express purpose of abstaining from his true and proper duty — so that a man may bear the name while having nothing of the thing.

I come now to the secular priests, who are partly what they call 'beneficed men' — that is, they have benefices to live from — and partly those who hire out their daily labor for pay in saying masses or singing, living on the wages they collect from this. Benefices are either those with cure of souls — such as bishoprics and parish cures — or they are the comfortable incomes of men who make their living by singing, such as prebends, canonships, rectories, dignities, chaplaincies, and the like. As things now stand, abbeyes and priories are given to mere boys by privilege — that is, as a matter of common and established custom. As for the day-laborers who live from one day to the next — what else are they supposed to do but what they do? — which is to offer themselves for hire in a servile and shameful way, especially given that there is such a swarm of them in the world today. Since they dare not openly beg, or think they would get little that way, they go around like hungry dogs — and with their persistent pestering, like barking, they force something out of unwilling people to stuff into their bellies. If I tried to put into words how great a disgrace it is to the church that the honor and office of priesthood has come to this point, I would never finish. So the reader should not expect from me a full account proportional to such outrageous indignity. Briefly: if it is the office of priesthood — as God's word prescribes and the ancient canons require — to feed the church and govern the spiritual kingdom of Christ, then all these sacrificers who have no other work or wages beyond running a mass market are not only idle in their office, they have no office at all to exercise. They have been assigned no place to teach, no flock to govern — nothing remains to them but the altar on which to sacrifice Christ, which is not offering to God but to demons, as we will show in another place.

I am not addressing here the outward abuses, but only the deep-rooted internal corruption of their institution. I will add a word that will sting their ears, but since it is true I must say it: canons, deans, chaplains, provosts, and all who live off idle benefices must be counted in the same category. For what service can they render to the church? They have set aside the preaching of the word, the oversight of discipline, and the administration of the sacraments as burdens too heavy to bear. What then remains to them by which they can claim to be true priests? Singing and the pomp of ceremonies. But what does that amount to? If they appeal to custom, usage, and long-established practice — I counter with Christ's own definition, by which He has shown us both what true priests are and what those must have who would be so counted. If they cannot bear so demanding a standard as submitting to Christ's rule, let them at least be willing to have this question decided by the authority of the primitive church. But their case will be no better if judged by the ancient canons. Those who have degenerated into canons ought to have been what canons were in ancient times: priests who governed the church jointly with the bishop and served as his partners in the pastoral office. The so-called 'chapter dignities' have nothing at all to do with governing the church — still less chaplaincies and the other dregs of similar titles. What account shall we make of all of them? Both the word of Christ and the practice of the church exclude them from the honor of priesthood. Yet they stubbornly insist they are priests — but we must pull off their mask. Beneath it we will find that their entire occupation is utterly foreign and far removed from the office of priests — both as the apostles describe it and as the primitive church required it. All such orders, under whatever titles they are

named — being innovations supported neither by the institution of God nor by the ancient usage of the church — ought to have no place in the account of the spiritual governance that the church has received from the Lord's own mouth. Or, to put it more plainly: since chaplains, canons, deans, provosts, and the other idle bellies of the same sort do not so much as lift a finger toward any part of the office necessarily required of priests, they must not be allowed to break the holy institution of Christ by wrongfully claiming for themselves an honor that is not theirs.

There remain bishops and parish rectors — and I would to God they were striving to retain their office. We would willingly grant that theirs is a godly and excellent office, if they were actually carrying it out. But when they insist on being called pastors while abandoning the churches entrusted to them and dumping the care of them on others, they behave as if the pastor's duty were to do nothing. If a moneylender who had never left the city were to claim he was a farmer or a vineyard keeper; if a soldier who had spent his whole career in battle and on campaign and had never opened a law book were to boast of being a lawyer — who could stomach such ridiculous impostures? But these men do something even more absurd: they insist on being seen and called the legitimate pastors of the church, and yet have no intention of actually being so. For how many of them even go through the motions of governing their church? Many spend their entire lives consuming the revenues of churches they have never even visited. Others come once a year — or send their steward — simply to make sure nothing is slipping through the cracks in the leasing of the income. When this corruption first crept in, those who wished to enjoy this kind of absence bought themselves exemptions through privileges. Now it is

rare to find anyone resident in his own church. They treat their churches no differently from farms, over which they install their vicars as overseers or tenant managers. But simple common sense rejects the idea that a person can be the pastor of a flock he has never once laid eyes on.

It appears that even in Gregory's time, the seeds of this problem were already sprouting — the rulers of churches were beginning to be negligent in teaching — for he complains of it bitterly in one place. 'The world is full of priests,' he says, 'and yet at harvest time, workers are seldom found — because we take on the office of priest but do not fulfill the work of the office.' Again: 'Because they have no heart of compassion, they want to be lords rather than fathers. They exchange the posture of humility for the elevation of lordship.' Again: 'But what are we doing, O pastors, who receive the reward but do no work? We have fallen into external business, we take one thing in hand and perform another. We abandon the ministry of preaching — and to our own punishment, as I see it, we are called bishops: we keep the name of honor, not the virtue it requires.' Since Gregory used such sharp language against those who were merely less consistent and less diligent than they should have been — what, I ask, would he say if he saw that among the bishops almost none, or truly very few, and among the rest scarcely one in a hundred, had ever mounted a pulpit in their entire life? For people have reached such a level of absurdity that it is now commonly considered beneath the dignity of a bishop to preach to the people. In Bernard's time things had already declined somewhat further — yet we see how fiercely he also lashes out against the entire order, which was in his day likely still far purer than it is now.

But let a person carefully examine the outward form of church governance that exists today under the papacy, and he will find that there is no den of thieves where robbers range more freely without law or limit. Truly, all things there are so unlike the institution of Christ — so contrary to it — they have so far departed from the ancient ordinances and practices of the church, they are so repugnant to nature and reason, that there can be no greater injury done to Christ than when they invoke His name as a defense of such disordered governance. 'We,' they say, 'are the pillars of the church, the chief bishops of religion, the vicars of Christ, the heads of the faithful — because the power of the apostles has come to us by succession.' They are forever boasting of these things as though they were speaking to wooden posts. But whenever they boast of this, I will ask them what they have in common with the apostles. We are not speaking of some hereditary dignity that can be conferred on sleeping men — but of the office of preaching, which they flee from at every turn. Likewise, when we assert that their kingdom is the tyranny of antichrist, they immediately reply that it is that 'venerable hierarchy' so often praised by great and holy men. As though the holy fathers, when they commended the ecclesiastical hierarchy — the spiritual government handed down from the apostles — were dreaming of this misshapen and chaotic wreck. In it, the bishops are for the most part either ignorant fools who do not know the most basic and common articles of the faith, or mere children barely out of the nursery. And if any among them is more learned — a rare sight indeed — he regards a bishopric as nothing but a title of glory and grandeur. The officers of churches think no more about feeding their flocks than a cobbler thinks about plow-

ing a field. Everything is thrown into a confusion greater than Babylon's, so that not one step of the fathers' ordinances remains intact.

What if we descend to their personal conduct? Where is that light of the world that Christ requires? Where is the salt of the earth? Where is that holiness that ought to serve as a perpetual standard of judgment? No rank of men today is more notorious for excess, licentiousness, self-indulgence, and every kind of depravity. In no rank are men more skilled or more accomplished in every form of deceit, fraud, treachery, and breach of trust. Nowhere is there greater cunning or boldness in doing harm. I pass over their arrogance, pride, extortion, and cruelty. I pass over the unbridled licentiousness that runs through every aspect of their lives. The world is so exhausted from enduring these things that there is no risk I am exaggerating. I say this one thing, which they themselves cannot deny: that among the bishops there is almost none, and among parish clergy not one in a hundred, whose conduct — if judged by the ancient canons — would not result in excommunication or at least removal from office. I realize this sounds incredible — so completely has that ancient discipline fallen out of use which required a more thorough examination of the clergy's character. But it is the truth. Now let them carry on, fighting under the banner and guidance of the see of Rome, and boasting among themselves of the order of the priesthood. As for the order they have — it is evident that it comes neither from Christ, nor from His apostles, nor from the fathers, nor from the ancient church.

Now let the deacons come forward, along with that supposedly holy distribution of church goods they maintain. But they do not now create deacons for that purpose at all — they assign them

nothing except ministering at the altar, reading or chanting the Gospel, and performing various other meaningless rituals. Nothing about alms, nothing about caring for the poor, nothing about any of the functions they carried out in ancient times. I am speaking of the institution itself. For if we look at what deacons actually do, the deaconate is not even an office — it is merely a stepping stone to the priesthood. In one respect those who occupy the deacon's place at the mass do retain an empty image of antiquity. They receive the offerings before the consecration. The ancient practice was this: before the communion of the Supper, the faithful exchanged a kiss of peace with one another and brought their alms to the altar — first expressing their love by a sign, and then by actual generosity. The deacon, who served as the steward of the poor, received what was offered and distributed it. Now of those alms, not a penny reaches the poor — it might as well be thrown into the sea. So they make a mockery of the church with this fraudulent deaconate. In truth it has no resemblance to either the institution of the apostles or the practice of the ancient church. As for the actual distribution of church goods, they have rerouted it entirely, and arranged it in a manner that could not be more disordered. For just as thieves, after cutting men's throats, divide the plunder among themselves — so these men, after extinguishing the light of God's word and slaughtering the church as it were, treat everything dedicated to sacred uses as open spoil and plunder. And so, making a division, each has seized for himself as much as he could.

All the ancient orders we have described are not merely disordered here — they have been utterly wiped out and erased. The bishops and priests of the cities — enriched by this plunder and transformed into canons — seized the lion's share among them-

selves. That the division was disorderly is evident from the fact that they still fight over the boundaries today. Whatever the outcome, the division has been arranged so that not a penny of the church's goods reaches the poor — who were entitled to at least half. The canons specifically assign one quarter to the poor. The other quarter they designate for the bishops, on the understanding that they would spend it on hospitality and other works of charity. I will not press here what the clergy ought to do with their portion, or how they ought to spend it. We have already shown sufficiently that the portion assigned to buildings, maintenance, and other expenses ought to be opened for the poor in times of need. I ask: if they had a single spark of the fear of God in their hearts, could they bear the weight of conscience that everything they eat and wear comes from theft — indeed from sacrilege? But since they are little moved by God's judgment, they should at least consider that those they are trying to persuade — that their church has such an excellent and well-ordered structure, as they love to boast — are human beings endowed with reason and common sense. Let them answer me plainly: is the deaconate a license to steal and plunder? If they deny it, they will also be compelled to admit they have no deaconate left — since among them all the administration of church goods has been openly turned into sacrilegious plunder.

But here they offer a fine-sounding justification. They say that the dignity of the church is fittingly upheld by such splendor. And some among them are so shameless that they dare openly boast that the prophecies in which the ancient prophets describe the glory of Christ's kingdom are fulfilled only when that kingly magnificence is seen in the priestly order. 'Not in vain,' they say, 'has God promised these things to His church: kings shall come and

worship in your presence, they shall bring you gifts. Arise, arise, clothe yourself with your strength, O Zion; clothe yourself with your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem. All shall come from Sheba, bringing gold and incense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you.' If I were to spend much time refuting this foolishness, I fear I would myself appear foolish. I will not waste words on it. But I ask: if a Jew were to use these passages in the same way, what answer would they give him? They would rebuke his dullness for applying in a fleshly, worldly sense what is spiritually spoken of Christ's spiritual kingdom. For we know that the prophets painted for us in earthly images the heavenly glory of God that ought to shine in the church. The church never had less of the material abundance these words literally describe than in the time of the apostles — and yet everyone agrees that the power of Christ's kingdom flourished most gloriously then. What then do these sayings mean? They mean that whatever is anywhere precious, high, and excellent ought to be brought into submission to the Lord. Where they speak specifically of kings — that they shall lay their scepters at Christ's feet, cast their crowns before Him, and dedicate their wealth to the church — when was this ever more fully and beautifully fulfilled than when Theodosius, casting aside his royal purple, stripped of imperial ornaments, humbled himself before God and the church like a common citizen to undergo solemn penance? Or when he and other godly princes devoted their energy and care to preserving pure doctrine in the church and supporting and defending sound teachers? But how modest the priests of that time were in their wealth is sufficiently shown by that one declaration of the Synod of Aquileia, where Ambrose presided: 'Glorious is poverty in the

priests of the Lord.' The bishops of that time did have some wealth, with which they could have displayed the church's splendor — if they had thought such things were the true adornments of the church. But knowing that nothing was more contrary to the pastoral office than to glitter and show themselves proudly in sumptuous food, gorgeous clothing, great retinues of servants, and palatial residences — they embraced and maintained the humility, modesty, and indeed the very poverty that Christ has sacredly appointed among His ministers.

To avoid spending too much time on this point, let us gather into a brief summary how far the current management — or rather mismanagement — of church goods differs from the true diaconate that both God's word commends to us and the ancient church practiced. As for what is spent on adorning church buildings: it is spent wrongly if the measure is not observed that both the nature of holy things requires and the apostles and other holy fathers have prescribed by both teaching and example. But what resemblance of that measure is seen in today's churches? Anything built in even a modest, honest style — far less the austere simplicity of the ancients — is rejected. Nothing is approved unless it reeks of excess and the corruption of the age. And yet, while spending lavishly on buildings, they show no concern at all for the living temples — the poor — preferring to let thousands starve than to break the smallest chalice or cruet to meet their need. Rather than making any harsher judgment of my own, I would ask godly readers to consider this: if Exuperius, the bishop of Toulouse whom we just mentioned — or Acacius, or Ambrose, or any like them — were raised from the dead, what would they say? They would certainly never allow that in the midst of such desperate need among the

poor, wealth that amounts to surplus should be diverted elsewhere. I will not even press how these uses — even apart from the poor entirely — are harmful in many ways and profitable in none. But I leave that aside. These goods are dedicated to Christ, and therefore they must be distributed according to His will. They cannot claim that any portion is given to Christ when it has been wasted in ways He never commanded. And yet, to tell the truth, not much of the church's regular revenue actually goes to these expenses. For there are no bishoprics wealthy enough, no abbeys fat enough — and neither numerous nor large enough benefices — to satisfy the gluttony of priests. But to spare themselves, they persuade the people through superstition to redirect what should go to the poor toward building churches, erecting images, buying jewels, and purchasing costly garments. And so the daily alms are swallowed up by this bottomless pit.

As for the revenues they receive from their lands and properties, what more can I say beyond what I have already said and what is plain for everyone to see? We see with what faithfulness those who call themselves bishops and abbots manage the largest share. What madness is it to look here for any church order? Was it fitting that men whose lives should have been outstanding examples of frugality, modesty, self-control, and humility should compete with princes in the number of their possessions, the grandeur of their houses, and the richness of their food and clothing? And how completely contrary to their office that those whom God's eternal and unbreakable command forbids to pursue dishonest gain — and commands to be content with simple provision — should not only seize towns and castles but forcibly claim the greatest lordships and even entire territories? If they despise God's

word, what will they say to the ancient decrees of the councils, which require that a bishop live in a modest dwelling near his church, with plain food and simple furnishings? What will they say to that commendation from the Synod of Aquileia, where poverty is declared glorious in the priests of the Lord? Perhaps they will dismiss as too strict what Jerome advises Nepotianus — that poor men and strangers, and among them Christ as a guest, should know his table. But they will be ashamed to deny what Jerome immediately adds: that it is the glory of a bishop to provide for the needs of the poor, and the shame of all priests to pursue their own wealth. They cannot accept this without condemning themselves. But there is no need to speak more sharply here — my only purpose was to show that the lawful order of the diaconate has long since been abolished among them, and that they can no longer boast of this title as a commendation of their church. I believe I have already shown this sufficiently.

THE .VI. CHAPTER. ¶OF THE SUPREMICIE OF THE SEE OF ROME.



U p to this point we have reviewed those church orders that existed in the governance of the ancient church — orders that were gradually corrupted over time, and have since been further and further abused, until today in the Roman church they retain only their names and are nothing but disguises. The purpose of this review was to give godly readers a basis for comparison, so they could judge what kind of church the Romanists actually have — the church for whose sake they call us schismatics because we have separated from it. But we have not yet touched the head and summit of their entire system: the supremacy of the see of Rome, by which they claim to be the sole holders of the catholic church. This supremacy was not traced back to Christ's institution or to the practice of the ancient church, as those earlier orders were. We showed that those orders, however much they degenerated under the wickedness of the times, at least had genuine roots in antiquity. Yet they try to persuade the world that this supremacy is the chief — and almost the only — bond of the church's unity: that to cling to the see of Rome and remain in obedience to it is what holds the church together. This is their main line of defense when they try to strip the church from us and claim

it for themselves — they say they hold the head upon which the church's unity depends, and without which the church must inevitably collapse and break apart. Their view is that the church is like a crippled and headless body unless it is subject to the see of Rome as its head. And so whenever they speak of their hierarchy, they begin from this principle: that the bishop of Rome, as the vicar of Christ who is head of the church, presides in His place over the universal church — and that the church cannot be properly ordered unless that see holds supremacy over all others. This claim must also be examined, so that we leave nothing untouched that belongs to a proper understanding of church governance.

Let this, then, be the central question: whether the true form of what they call hierarchy — or ecclesiastical order — requires one see to stand above all others in dignity and power, as the head of the whole body. But if we impose this requirement on the church without God's word, we subject the church to unjust laws. So if our opponents want to prove what they claim, they must first show that this arrangement was ordained by Christ. For this purpose they appeal to the high priesthood in the Old Testament law, and to the supreme court of judgment that God established at Jerusalem. But the answer is easy — and answerable in several ways, if one way does not satisfy them. First, there is no reason to extend to the whole world what was useful for a single nation. In fact, the proper ordering of one nation and of the whole world will be very different. The Israelites were surrounded on every side by idolaters. To prevent the people from being pulled in different directions by a variety of religions, God appointed the place for worshipping Him in the center of the land, and over the people He set one high priest toward whom all looked, so that unity could be bet-

ter maintained. Now that religion has spread throughout the whole world, who does not see it is completely absurd to place the governance of East and West in the hands of one man? It would be like arguing that the whole world should be governed by one ruler just because a single region has only one. There is yet another reason why this should not be used as a model. Everyone knows that the high priest was a figure of Christ. Now that the priesthood has been fulfilled and removed, that right must also be removed. But to whom has it passed? Certainly not to the pope — though he shamelessly claims this title for himself — but to Christ. Christ alone holds this office, without any vicar or successor, and He hands its honor to no one else. For the priesthood consists not only in teaching, but in making peace with God — which Christ fully accomplished by His death — and in the intercession He now makes with His Father.

There is therefore no reason they should bind us by this example as a permanent rule, since we have seen that it was only temporary. From the New Testament they can produce nothing to support their view except that one statement addressed to Peter: 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.' And again: 'Peter, do you love Me? Feed My sheep.' But even granting these were strong proofs, they would still need to show first that the one commanded to feed Christ's flock was given authority over all churches — and that to bind and to loose simply means to rule over the entire world. But Peter himself, having received this charge from the Lord, goes on to urge all other elders to feed the church in the same way. From this we can conclude that either Christ's words gave Peter nothing more than He gave the others, or that Peter shared equally with the others whatever authority he

had received. But to avoid fruitless dispute, Christ Himself provides a plain explanation elsewhere of what it means to bind and to loose: namely, to retain and to forgive sins. And the manner of binding and loosing is shown throughout all of Scripture, and Paul explains it well when he says that ministers of the Gospel are commissioned to reconcile people to God, and also have authority to discipline those who refuse this benefit.

How shamelessly they twist those passages about binding and loosing I have already briefly noted, and I will have occasion to show more fully a little later. For now it is enough to look at what they actually derive from Christ's famous answer to Peter. He promised Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and said that whatever Peter bound on earth would be bound in heaven. If we could agree on what 'keys' means and what 'binding' involves, the entire controversy would end immediately. The pope himself would gladly surrender the charge given to the apostles — a charge full of labor and grief that would strip away his pleasures without bringing any profit. Since heaven is opened to us through the Gospel's teaching, it is well expressed by the image of keys. And people are bound and loosed in no other way than this: faith reconciles some to God, while unbelief binds others. If the pope were willing to take on only this, I think no one would envy him or dispute it. But because this succession is burdensome and brings no gain, and is therefore unappealing to the pope, here is where the dispute begins — over what exactly Christ promised Peter. I conclude from the matter itself that nothing is meant by the dignity of the apostolic office that can be separated from its actual duties. For if the definition I have described is accepted — and to reject it would be shameless — then nothing was given to Peter that was

not equally shared by his fellow apostles. Otherwise, not only would wrong be done to the other persons, but the very majesty of the teaching would be undermined. Our opponents object: what good does it do to press this point? They cannot deny that the preaching of the same Gospel was charged to all the apostles equally, and that they were all equally equipped with power to bind and loose. They say: Christ appointed Peter as prince of the whole church when He promised him the keys. But what He promised to one in that place, He gave to all the rest in another place — delivering it into all their hands. If the same power was granted to all that was promised to one, in what way does Peter stand above his colleagues? Here is their answer: he excels because he received it both in common with the others and separately by himself — which was not the case for the others. But I answer with Cyprian and Augustine: Christ did not do this to exalt one man above the others, but to express the unity of the church. Cyprian says that God gave the keys to all through the person of one, to signify the unity of all — and that the rest were the same as Peter, endowed with equal share of honor and power. The point of beginning with one was to show that Christ's church is one. Augustine says: 'If there were not in Peter a mystery of the church, the Lord would not have said to him, I will give you the keys. For if this was said to Peter alone, the church does not have them. But if the church has them, then when Peter received the keys, he represented the whole church.' Augustine adds in another place: 'When they were all asked, Peter alone answered, You are the Christ — and it was said to him, I will give you the keys, as though he alone received the power of binding and loosing. But he, being one,

spoke on behalf of all; and he received this power with all, as one who bore the person of unity.' Therefore one spoke for all, because there is unity in all.

But the words 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church' are found spoken to no one else. As though Christ said anything different about Peter here than what Paul and Peter himself say about all Christians. Paul makes Christ the chief cornerstone on which all believers are built together, growing into a holy temple to the Lord. And Peter calls us to be living stones, built upon that chosen and precious stone, and by this joining together with God we are also joined to one another. Our opponents say: Peter is above the rest because the name was given to him specially. I gladly grant Peter this honor: that in the building of the church he holds the first place among the faithful — or, if they insist, the very first of all. But I will not allow them to conclude from this that he holds supremacy over the rest. What kind of reasoning is that? He surpasses the others in fervent zeal, in learning, and in courage — therefore he has authority over them? By that logic we could argue with better reason that Andrew ranks above Peter, since Andrew came first and brought Peter to Christ. But I leave that aside. Let Peter truly hold the first place — there is still a great difference between an honor of rank and actual authority. We see that the apostles commonly granted Peter the role of speaking in assemblies and, in a certain sense, leading the way in raising proposals, urging, and exhorting. But of any governing power over the others, we read nothing at all.

We have not yet reached the full discussion of that point. My purpose here is only to show that they reason far too carelessly when they try to build an empire over the whole church out of one

name — Peter's. Those old tricks by which they first tried to deceive people are not even worth repeating, much less refuting — such as the claim that the church was built upon Peter because Christ said 'upon this rock,' etc. Some of the fathers did interpret it that way. But when all of Scripture cries out against it, what use is it to appeal to their authority against God? And why argue over the meaning of these words as though they were obscure or uncertain, when nothing could be plainer or more definite? Peter had confessed — on his own behalf and on behalf of his brothers — that Christ is the Son of God. Upon this rock Christ builds His church, for it is, as Paul says, the only foundation, and no other can be laid. I am not dismissing the authority of the fathers here for lack of their testimony — I could produce plenty if I chose. But, as I said, I will not trouble readers with a dispute over something this clear, especially since this point has already been handled carefully and thoroughly by others on our side.

No one can settle this question better than Scripture itself, if we simply compare all the passages that show what office and power Peter had among the apostles, how he conducted himself, and how they received him. Read through everything that remains written, and you will find nothing other than this: Peter was one of the twelve, equal with the rest, their fellow but not their lord. He would indeed bring proposals to the council when something needed to be decided, and he would point out what seemed best — but he also listened to others, not only giving them room to speak their minds but leaving the judgment to them. When a decision was made, he followed and obeyed. When he wrote to pastors, he did not command them by authority as a superior. He called them his companions and gently encouraged them, as equals do. When

he was accused for having gone in to the Gentiles — though the accusation was unjust — he answered and defended himself. When his fellow apostles commanded him to go with John to Samaria, he did not refuse. In sending him, the apostles made plain that they did not regard him as their superior. In obeying and accepting the commission given to him, he showed that he stood in fellowship with them, not in authority over them. Even if none of these examples were convincing, the letter to the Galatians alone would remove all doubt. In nearly two whole chapters Paul labors to establish nothing other than that he himself was Peter's equal in the honor of apostleship. Paul then recounts that he came to Peter not to profess submission, but simply to confirm that their teaching was in agreement — and that Peter himself required no submission, but instead gave Paul the right hand of fellowship to work together in the Lord's vineyard. And no less grace had been given to Paul among the Gentiles than to Peter among the Jews. Finally, when Peter was not acting faithfully, Paul corrected him — and Peter accepted the rebuke. All of this makes plain that Paul and Peter were equals, or at the very least that Peter had no more authority over the others than they had over him. And, as I said, Paul deliberately presses this point — so that no one would place Peter or John above him in the apostleship, since they were fellow workers, not lords.

But let us grant them what they want regarding Peter — that he was the chief of the apostles and surpassed the rest in dignity. Even then, there is no reason to make a universal rule from a single example, or to treat as permanent what was done once for a particular reason. One was chief among the apostles, certainly — but the apostles were a small group. If one man was the leader of

twelve, does it follow that one man must therefore be made ruler of a hundred thousand? It is no surprise that twelve men had one among them to lead the group. Nature works that way, and common sense requires that in every assembly — even when all are equal in power — there should be one person to coordinate, toward whom the rest can look. There is no court without a presiding officer, no bench of judges without a chief justice, no company without a commander, no fellowship without a leader. So it would not be absurd to say the apostles gave Peter a certain preeminence. But what works among a small group cannot simply be extended to govern the whole world, for which no single man is sufficient. Our opponents say: this principle of one sovereign head over all applies not only to small groups but to nature as a whole. And for this — if you can believe it — they draw proof from cranes and bees, which always choose a single leader and not many. I accept their examples — but do bees gather from all over the world to elect one king? Each king is content with his own hive. And among cranes, each flock has its own leader. What does this prove, except that each church ought to have its own bishop? Then they turn to political arguments. They quote Homer — 'It is not good to have many rulers' — and similar praise of monarchy from secular writers. The answer is simple. When Ulysses in Homer — or anyone else — praises monarchy, he does not mean that one man should be emperor of the whole world. He means only that a single kingdom cannot hold two kings, and that power, as he calls it, cannot share its place.

But let us suppose — though it is deeply absurd — that a world monarchy is good and useful. Even then, I will not grant that the same applies to the governance of the church. For the church has

Christ as her only head, under whose lordship we all hold together according to the order and structure He has prescribed. So they do great wrong to Christ when, on the pretext that the church cannot exist without a head, they require one man to rule the universal church. Christ is the head. From Him the whole body is joined and knit together through every supporting joint, as each member contributes to the others according to its proper measure — and so the body grows. Do you not see that Paul places all people without exception within the body, and leaves the honor and title of head to Christ alone? Do you not see that he assigns to every member a certain measure, a defined and limited function — so that the fullness of grace and the supreme authority of governance remain with Christ alone? I am well aware of how they typically dodge this objection. They say Christ is properly called the only head because He alone reigns by His own authority and in His own name — but that this does not prevent there being, under Him, another ministerial head (as they call it) who serves as His representative on earth. But this evasion accomplishes nothing unless they first show that Christ actually appointed such a ministry. For the apostle teaches that all ministry is distributed among the members, and that power flows from that one heavenly head. To put it plainly: since Scripture testifies that Christ is the head and reserves that honor to Him alone, it must not be transferred to another unless Christ Himself has appointed that person as His representative. But that appointment is not found anywhere in Scripture — and in fact can be thoroughly refuted by many passages.

Paul sometimes gives us a vivid picture of the church, and in that picture there is no mention of a single head on earth. His description actually suggests that such a structure contradicts

Christ's institution. When Christ ascended, He withdrew His visible presence from us — yet He ascended in order to fill all things. The church therefore still has Him present, and always will. When Paul explains the means by which Christ makes Himself present, he points to the ministries Christ uses. The Lord is at work in us all, Paul says, according to the measure of grace He has given to each member. Therefore He has appointed some as apostles, some as pastors, some as evangelists, others as teachers, and so on. Why does Paul not say that Christ has set one man over all as His representative? The passage calls for it — and if it were true, it could not possibly have been left out. Paul says Christ is present with us. How? Through the ministry of people He has appointed to govern the church. Why not through a ministerial head to whom He has entrusted His place? Paul grounds everything in God and in faith in Christ. He assigns to human beings nothing more than common ministry, with each person given a particular measure. In that great declaration of unity — where Paul says there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one God, one faith, one baptism — why did he not immediately add: and one chief bishop to hold the church together in unity? If it were true, nothing could have been more fitting to say. Let that passage be carefully considered. There is no question that Paul's purpose was to describe the holy and spiritual government of the church, which later writers called hierarchy. As for a monarchy among ministers, he not only mentions none — he actually shows that there is none. And there is equally no question that Paul meant to express the manner in which believers are joined to Christ their head. There he speaks of no ministerial head at all, but assigns to each member a particular function according to the measure of grace distributed to each one. There is no reason to

speculate about some comparison between a heavenly and an earthly hierarchy. We dare not go beyond what is given to us. In forming the church's government, we must follow no other pattern than the one the Lord Himself has laid out in His word.

Now, even if I were to grant them something they could never prove to any reasonable person — that the supremacy of the church was so established in Peter that it should remain permanently by succession — how would they prove that his seat was so fixed at Rome that whoever is bishop of that city should be set over the whole world? By what right do they tie a dignity to a place, when the original grant made no mention of place? They say: Peter lived and died at Rome. But what about Christ Himself? Did He not exercise His episcopal ministry in life, and fulfill the priestly office in death, at Jerusalem? The chief of pastors, the supreme bishop, the head of the church — could not even He confer honor on a place. And Peter, so far inferior to Him, could? Is this not more than childish reasoning? The logic runs: Christ gave supremacy to Peter; Peter sat at Rome; therefore Rome is where the seat of supremacy was established. By the same reasoning, the Israelites of old could have established the seat of supremacy in the wilderness, where Moses — the chief teacher and prince of the prophets — carried out his ministry and died (Deuteronomy 34:5).

Let us see how cleverly they reason. Peter, they say, held supremacy among the apostles — therefore the church where he sat should hold that privilege. But where did he sit first? At Antioch, they say. Therefore the church of Antioch rightly claims the supremacy for itself. They admit that Antioch held the first place in ancient times, but they argue that when Peter moved to Rome, he carried the honor with him. There is in fact a letter un-

der the name of Pope Marcellus to the bishops of Antioch, which says: 'Peter's seat was at first with you, but afterward by the Lord's command it was transferred here.' So the church of Antioch, which was once the chief, is said to have yielded its place to the see of Rome. But by what revelation had this man learned that the Lord so commanded? If this question is to be decided by legal reasoning, they must answer whether this privilege is personal, territorial, or a combination of both — for it must be one of those three. If it is personal, then it belongs to the person, not to the place. If it is territorial, then once given to a place it cannot be taken away by the death or departure of a person. The only remaining option is that it is a combination of both — but then the place alone is not sufficient; the person must also correspond. Whatever option they choose, I will immediately show and easily prove that Rome can claim the supremacy on none of these grounds.

But let us suppose, as they frivolously claim, that the supremacy was transferred from Antioch to Rome. Why did Antioch not keep the second place? If Rome holds the first place because Peter sat there until the end of his life, who more deserves the second place than the church where he had his first seat? How then did Alexandria come to rank above Antioch? How is it consistent that the church of a mere disciple should outrank Peter's own seat? If honor is due to every church according to the dignity of its founder, what shall we say about the other churches? Paul names three who seemed to be pillars: James, Peter, and John. If the first place was given to the see of Rome in honor of Peter, do the sees of Ephesus and Jerusalem — where John and James sat — not deserve the second and third places? But among the patriarchates, Jerusalem held the last place, and Ephesus could not even occupy

the outermost corner. And many other churches were passed over entirely — all those Paul founded, and those the other apostles governed. The see of Mark, who was only a disciple, received honor. So they must either admit that the ancient ordering was completely disordered, or they must grant us that there is no fixed rule requiring every church to hold the same rank as its founder.

As for the claim that Peter sat as bishop in the church of Rome, I see no reason to give it much credit. The claim in Eusebius that Peter governed there for twenty-five years is easily refuted. It is evident from Galatians 1 and 2 that about twenty years after Christ's death Peter was still in Jerusalem, and that he then went to Antioch — where it is uncertain how long he stayed. Gregory counts seven years there, and Eusebius twenty-five. But from the death of Christ to the end of Nero's reign — during which time they say Peter was killed — there are only thirty-seven years. Christ suffered under Tiberius, in the eighteenth year of his reign. If you subtract the twenty years during which Paul witnesses that Peter was at Jerusalem, only seventeen years remain at most — and these must now be divided between two bishoprics. If Peter stayed long at Antioch, he could have been at Rome for only a very short time. This can be shown even more plainly. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans while traveling to Jerusalem, where he was arrested and later brought to Rome. That letter was likely written four years before he arrived in Rome. Yet there is no mention of Peter in it — which could not have been omitted if Peter had been governing that church. In fact, at the close of the letter, where Paul greets a long list of believers — gathering together everyone he knew — he

says nothing at all about Peter. No lengthy proof is needed for anyone of sound judgment. The very argument of the letter cries out that Paul could not have overlooked Peter if he had been in Rome.

When Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner, Luke records that he was welcomed by the brothers — but says nothing about Peter. Paul wrote from Rome to many churches, and in several letters he conveyed greetings from named individuals — yet in not one word does he indicate that Peter was there at the time. Who could believe that Paul would have passed over Peter in silence if he had been present? Indeed, writing to the Philippians, Paul said he had no one who cared as faithfully for the Lord's work as Timothy, and complained that everyone else was looking out for their own interests. And to Timothy himself he wrote the even more grievous complaint that at his first defense no one stood with him — everyone had deserted him. Where was Peter at that point? If they say Peter was in Rome at that time, Paul is charging him with the great shame of abandoning the Gospel — for Paul is speaking of believers, since he adds, 'May God not hold it against them.' How long, then, and during what period did Peter actually hold that seat? Ancient writers generally agree that he governed that church until his death — though even among those writers there is no agreement about who succeeded him: some say Linus, others say Clement. They also tell many fanciful stories about a disputation between Peter and Simon the magician. Even Augustine does not hesitate to admit, in a discussion of superstitions, that on the basis of a rashly conceived opinion, the custom arose at Rome of not fasting on the day when Peter was believed to have defeated Simon. The records from that period are so tangled with conflicting accounts that nothing should be believed without caution. For

all that, I will not fight against the consensus that Peter died in Rome. But that he served as bishop there — especially for any significant length of time — I cannot accept. And in any case, it does not much matter. Paul himself testifies that Peter's apostleship was directed specifically to the Jews, while his own was directed to us Gentiles. So that the agreement they made between themselves may hold for us — or rather, so that the Holy Spirit's appointment may stand — we should look to Paul's apostleship rather than Peter's. The Holy Spirit divided their spheres: Peter to the Jews, Paul to us. Let the Romanists therefore look elsewhere than Scripture for the foundation of their supremacy, since it cannot be found there.

Now let us turn to the ancient church, and show that our opponents have no more legitimate basis in its testimony than they do in Scripture. They boast of this principle: that the church's unity can only be maintained if there is one supreme head on earth whom all members obey — and therefore the Lord gave the supremacy to Peter, and from there it passed by succession to the see of Rome, where it was to remain until the end. They claim this has been observed from the beginning. But since they badly misuse many testimonies, I will say this upfront: I do not deny that the ancient writers everywhere show great honor to the church of Rome and speak of it with reverence. I believe this happened primarily for three reasons. First, a widespread opinion — however it arose — that Rome had been founded and established through Peter's ministry gave it considerable favor and prestige. For this reason the Eastern churches called it the apostolic see as a mark of honor. Second, since the capital of the empire was located there, Rome naturally attracted men of exceptional learning, wisdom, experi-

ence, and ability. It was fitting that both the city's honor and these outstanding gifts of God should be duly recognized. Third, while the churches of the East, Greece, and even Africa were frequently torn by internal controversies, the church of Rome was calmer and less turbulent than the rest. Godly and holy bishops, driven from their own sees, often fled there as to a sanctuary or safe harbor. The Western temperament is less quick and eager for change than the Asian or African — and this steadiness greatly added to Rome's authority. In those turbulent times, Rome was not tossed about as others were, and held more firmly than any other to the teaching it had originally received, as we will show more clearly shortly. For these three reasons, then, Rome was held in no small honor and commended by many notable testimonies from the ancient writers.

But when our opponents try to conclude from this that Rome holds supremacy and sovereign power over other churches, they go far wrong, as I have already said. To make this clearer, I will first briefly show what the ancient fathers actually thought about this unity that the Romanists press so earnestly. Jerome, writing to Nepotianus, after reciting many examples of unity, finally comes to the church's hierarchy. Each bishop of each church, each arch-priest, each archdeacon, and all the church's orders rest under their own rulers, he says. Here is a Roman priest speaking, commending unity in church order — so why does he not say that all churches are bound together under one head as under a single bond? Nothing could have served his point better. It cannot be said he forgot — if the matter had allowed for it, nothing would have suited him more. He evidently understood that the true basis of unity is the one Cyprian describes so well in these words: "The

bishopric is one, of which each bishop holds an entire share; and the church is one, which spreads more broadly into a multitude through the growth of her fruitfulness.' He continues: 'Just as there are many sunbeams but one light; many branches of a tree but one body rooted on a firm foundation; many streams flowing from one spring — though the abundance pours out in many directions, yet the unity is kept whole at its source. So the church, spread abroad with the light of the Lord, extends her rays throughout the whole world, yet it is one light that is shed everywhere and the unity of the body is not divided. She spreads her branches over the whole world and pours out her streams — yet there is one head and one beginning.' He goes on: 'The bride of Christ cannot be an adulteress. She knows one house alone, and guards the purity of one chamber with chaste modesty.' Do you see? Cyprian places the universal bishopric with Christ alone, who encompasses the whole church under Him — and says that all those who exercise the bishop's office under this head hold an entire share of it. Where is the supremacy of the see of Rome, if the whole bishopric belongs to Christ alone and each bishop holds his entire share of it? These observations serve to let the reader understand, in passing, that the ancient fathers were entirely unaware of the principle the Romanists treat as settled and beyond dispute — that the church's hierarchy requires one earthly head.

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Regarding the historical roots of Rome's supremacy, the oldest evidence they can produce is the decree of the Nicene Council, in which the bishop of Rome is given the first place among the patriarchs and charged with overseeing the churches near the city. But when the council divided the patriarchs and assigned each his own region, it did not appoint Rome as head of all — it made Rome one of the chief. Vitus and Vincentius attended the council as representatives of Julius, who then governed the church of Rome, and they were assigned the fourth place. If Julius had been acknowledged as head of the church, would his legates have been placed in the fourth seat? Would Athanasius have

presided over a council where the church's hierarchical order was supposed to be most clearly on display? At the Council of Ephesus, it appears that Celestinus, who was then bishop of Rome, used a devious tactic to protect his see's dignity. When he sent his delegates there, he entrusted his place to Cyrillus of Alexandria, who would otherwise naturally have presided. What was the point of this arrangement, if not to keep his name in the first place by whatever means possible? His legates sat in a lower seat, were asked their opinion in turn, and signed in their proper order — while the patriarch of Alexandria simply joined Celestinus's name to his own. What shall we say about the second Council of Ephesus, where Leo's legates were present and yet Dioscorus, patriarch of Alexandria, sat in the first place as though it were his by right? Our opponents will object that it was not a valid council — it was there that the saintly Flavianus was condemned, Eutyches was acquitted, and his heresy was approved. But when the council gathered and the bishops took their places, Leo's legates sat among the rest just as they would in a legitimate council. Yet they did not claim the first seat — they yielded it to another. They would never have done this if they believed that seat was rightfully theirs. The bishops of Rome have never hesitated to enter the fiercest disputes over their dignity, and for that cause alone have frequently troubled the church with damaging conflicts. But Leo saw that it would be too unreasonable a demand to seek the first place for his legates — so he conceded it.

Then came the Council of Chalcedon, where by the emperor's grant the legates of the church of Rome sat in the first place. But Leo himself admitted that this was an exceptional privilege. When he petitioned the Emperor Marcian and the Empress Pulcheria for

it, he did not claim it as his due — he argued only that the Eastern bishops who had presided at Ephesus had thrown everything into disorder and badly abused their authority. Since a sober presiding officer was needed, and since those who had behaved so carelessly and corruptly at Ephesus were obviously unfit for the role, Leo asked that the task of governing the council fall to him by reason of the others' failure and unfitness. What is obtained by special exception and outside of normal order is not part of the common law. When the only grounds given are that a new governor is needed because former governors behaved badly, it is clear that this arrangement was not the prior practice and is not meant to continue permanently — it was done only in response to the immediate situation. The bishop of Rome therefore presided at the Council of Chalcedon not because it belonged to his see by right, but because the council lacked a capable and sober presiding officer, while those who should have presided had through their own recklessness and bias disqualified themselves. And Leo's own successor proved as much. When he sent his legates to the Fifth Council of Constantinople, held long afterward, he did not quarrel over the first seat — he readily allowed Mennas, patriarch of Constantinople, to preside. Similarly at the council of Carthage, at which Augustine was present, it was not the legates of Rome but Aurelius, the archbishop of Carthage, who presided — even though the very authority of the bishop of Rome was one of the matters under discussion. There was even a general council held in Italy itself at which the bishop of Rome was not present. Ambrose presided, being held in very high regard by the emperor, and no

mention was made of the bishop of Rome. At that time it was the dignity of Ambrose that made the see of Milan more distinguished than the see of Rome.

As for the title of supremacy and the other titles of pride in which Rome now so magnificently boasts, it is not difficult to judge when and how they crept in. Cyprian frequently mentions Cornelius. He refers to him with no other title than 'brother,' 'fellow bishop,' or 'colleague in office.' When Cyprian writes to Stephen, Cornelius's successor, he not only treats him as an equal but speaks to him more sharply — at times accusing him of arrogance, at other times of ignorance. From Cyprian we can also see what the whole church of Africa thought about this matter. The Council of Carthage forbade anyone to be called 'prince of priests' or 'chief bishop' — only 'bishop of the chief see.' If one reads the older records, one finds that at that time the bishop of Rome was content with the ordinary title of 'brother.' As long as the church retained its true and pure form, all these titles of pride — with which the see of Rome has since become so outrageous — were completely unheard of. There was no concept of a 'supreme bishop' or 'sole head of the church on earth.' And if the bishop of Rome had dared to claim such a thing, there were men of enough courage and wisdom to have immediately put down the presumption. Jerome was himself a priest at Rome and was not reluctant to speak well of his own church's dignity — as much as the circumstances of the times allowed. Yet we see how even he brings it down to equality with the rest. 'If authority is what we are seeking,' he says, 'the world is larger than a city. Why do you appeal to the custom of one city? Why do you defend the pride of a small number against the laws of the church? Wherever there is a bishop —

whether at Rome, or at Eugubium, or at Constantinople, or at Rhegium — he is of the same merit and the same priesthood. The power of wealth or the lowness of poverty does not make a bishop greater or lesser.'

The dispute over the title 'universal bishop' first arose in Gregory's time, triggered by the ambition of John, bishop of Constantinople, who tried — a thing no man before him had attempted — to make himself universal bishop. In that dispute Gregory does not argue that a right belonging to himself is being taken away. He speaks out forcefully against the title itself, calling it a profane name — indeed, full of sacrilege, and the herald of antichrist. 'If he who is called universal falls,' Gregory says, 'the whole church collapses with him.' Elsewhere: 'It is deeply grieving to endure patiently that our brother and fellow bishop, despising all others, should be called bishop alone. What else does this pride signal but that the times of antichrist are drawing near? For he follows the one who, despising the fellowship of the angels, sought to climb to the summit of singularity.' He writes to Eulogius of Alexandria and Anastasius of Antioch: 'None of my predecessors ever used that profane word. For if one patriarch is called universal, the name of patriarch is diminished for all the rest. Far be it from any Christian mind to desire anything that would lessen — even slightly — the honor of his brothers. To agree to this wicked word is nothing less than to lose the faith.' 'I say it boldly,' he continues: 'whoever calls himself or desires to be called universal bishop, in his proud self-exaltation runs ahead of antichrist — for he lifts himself above the rest in arrogance.' To Anastasius of Alexandria: 'I have said that he cannot be at peace with us unless he abandons that arrogant and superstitious title, which the first

apostate invented. And — setting aside what it takes from your own honor — if one man is called universal bishop, the universal church falls when that one man falls.' Now, Gregory claims this title was offered to Leo at the Council of Chalcedon — but this has no basis in fact. Nothing of the kind appears in the council's records. And Leo himself, who opposed in many letters the council's decree honoring the see of Constantinople, would certainly not have passed over such an argument — it would have been the strongest point of all — if it were true that he had refused the title when offered. Being a man not exactly deficient in love of honor, he would not have omitted anything that spoke well of him. So Gregory was mistaken in thinking the title was offered to Rome at Chalcedon. And it is rather absurd that he both credits a holy council with this offer and at the same time calls the title wicked, profane, abominable, proud, full of sacrilege, devised by the devil, and proclaimed by the herald of antichrist. He adds, though, that his predecessor refused it so that no single bishop would receive privately what belonged to all — lest all priests be stripped of their due honor. Elsewhere Gregory writes: 'No one at any time has wished to be called by that word. No one has seized that presumptuous name — for to claim in the episcopal office a glory of singularity would seem to deny that same standing to all one's brothers.'

Now I come to the question of jurisdiction — the authority over all churches that the bishop of Rome claims for himself. I know there have been great controversies about this for a long time. There has never been a period when the see of Rome was not reaching for an empire over other churches. It is worth tracing here, briefly, how it gradually acquired some degree of power. I am not yet speaking of the vast empire Rome has seized in more re-

cent times — that I will address at a more fitting place. Here I want to show how in ancient times, and by what means, Rome extended its reach over other churches. When the Eastern churches were torn apart and troubled by the Arian factions under the emperors Constantius and Constans, sons of Constantine the Great, and when Athanasius — the chief defender of the true faith — was driven from his see, his situation compelled him to come to Rome. He hoped that through Rome's authority he might somewhat restrain the fury of his enemies and give encouragement to the godly who were under pressure. He was honorably received by Julius, then bishop of Rome, and succeeded in getting the Western bishops to take up his cause. When the godly were in desperate need of outside help, and saw that the church of Rome could offer real assistance, they willingly granted it as much authority as they could. But all of that amounted to nothing more than a high regard for Rome's fellowship and a sense that excommunication from it was a serious disgrace. Wicked people also added to Rome's power afterward, for their own reasons — they fled to it as a refuge to escape lawful judgments. Whenever a priest was condemned by his bishop, or a bishop by his provincial synod, they immediately appealed to Rome. The bishops of Rome received these appeals more eagerly than was fitting, since it gave them the appearance of extraordinary authority to reach into affairs far beyond their own territory. So when Eutyches was condemned by Flavianus, bishop of Constantinople, he complained to Leo that he had been wronged. Without delay — and no less rashly than presumptuously — Leo took up the defense of a bad cause. He fiercely attacked Flavianus as though he had condemned an innocent man without a hearing. This ambition caused the heresy of Eutyches to gain strength for a

time. The same pattern was clearly repeated in Africa. Whenever a corrupt man lost his case in a lawful judgment, he immediately fled to Rome and loaded his countrymen with accusations — and the see of Rome was always ready to interfere. This abuse compelled the bishops of Africa to pass a law that anyone who appealed beyond the sea would be excommunicated.

But whatever happened, let us examine what actual authority the see of Rome held in that era. Church authority has four components: consecrating bishops, summoning councils, hearing appeals and exercising jurisdiction, and issuing admonitions and censures. All the ancient councils directed that bishops be consecrated by their own metropolitans — they never called on the bishop of Rome to participate except within his own patriarchate. Over time, however, a custom developed in which all the bishops of Italy came to Rome to be consecrated — except for metropolitans, who refused to submit to that kind of dependence. When a metropolitan was to be consecrated, the bishop of Rome would send one of his priests to be present — but only as a witness, not as the presiding officer. Gregory provides an example of this at the consecration of Constantius as bishop of Milan after the death of Laurence. I do not think this was a very ancient practice. It likely began as a courtesy — sending delegates to witness and celebrate a consecration with their colleagues — and what started as voluntary gradually came to be treated as obligatory. Whatever the case, it is clear that in ancient times the bishop of Rome held no power of consecration outside his own patriarchate — that is, the churches near Rome — as the canon of the Nicene Council states. Attached to consecration was the practice of sending a synodical letter, in which the bishop of Rome stood no higher than anyone else. The patriarchs, imme-

diately after their consecration, would issue a solemn statement of faith, by which they declared their agreement with the holy and catholic councils. By giving this account of their faith, they confirmed their fellowship with one another. If the bishop of Rome had received such a confession from others without giving one himself, he would have been recognized as superior. But since he was just as obligated to give it as to require it from others, and subject to the same common standard — this was clearly a mark of fellowship, not of dominion. Gregory's letters to Anastasius, to Cyriacus of Constantinople, and in other places to all the patriarchs together, provide examples of this.

Then there is the matter of admonitions and censures. Just as the bishops of Rome administered these to others in ancient times, they also received them from others. Irenaeus sharply rebuked Victor for recklessly troubling the church with a harmful division over a matter of no importance. Victor accepted the rebuke and did not push back. Such freedom existed among the holy bishops — they exercised a brotherly authority toward the bishop of Rome, admonishing and correcting him whenever he went wrong. And he in turn, when occasion called for it, would admonish others and rebuke their faults. When Cyprian urges Stephen to admonish the bishops of France, he does not appeal to superior authority — he appeals to the common right that priests share among themselves. Consider: if Stephen had actually been the ruler over France, would Cyprian not have said, 'Discipline them, because they are yours'? But he says nothing of the kind. He says: 'The brotherly fellowship by which we are bound to one another requires that we admonish each other.' And we see with what sharp language even the mild-tempered Cyprian attacks Stephen himself when he

thinks Stephen is being too arrogant. So here again there is no evidence that the bishop of Rome held any jurisdiction over those outside his own province.

As for the calling of synods, it was the duty of every metropolitan to assemble a provincial synod at appointed intervals. The bishop of Rome had no authority in this. Only the emperor could summon a general council. If any bishop had attempted to do so, not only would those outside his province have refused to come — it would immediately have caused an uproar. So the emperor summoned all of them impartially. Socrates does report that Julius complained to the Eastern bishops for not inviting him to the Synod of Antioch, claiming that the canons forbade any decision to be made without the bishop of Rome's knowledge. But who cannot see that this refers to decrees that bind the whole universal church? It is no great surprise that, given the antiquity and prestige of the city and the dignity of the see, so much was granted as to say no universal decree on religion should be made in the bishop of Rome's absence — provided he was willing to be present. But what does that have to do with dominion over the whole church? We do not deny that he was one of the chief. What we deny is what the Romanists now assert — that he had authority over all.

The fourth kind of power concerns appeals, and it is clear that the one to whose judgment seat appeals are made holds the chief authority. Many people appealed to the bishop of Rome, and he himself tried to draw cases to himself — but whenever he overstepped his bounds, he was rebuffed. I will say nothing about the East and Greece. In France, the bishops firmly resisted him when he appeared to be claiming an empire over them. In Africa, the dis-

pute went on for a long time. At the Council of Mileve — at which Augustine was present — those who appealed beyond the sea were excommunicated. The bishop of Rome then worked to have this decree reversed. He sent his legates to argue that the Nicene Council had granted him this privilege, and they produced acts of the Nicene Council — drawn from their own church's archives. The Africans opposed this, arguing that the bishops of Rome should not be trusted in their own case. They said they would send to Constantinople and other cities in Greece for copies that were less open to suspicion. It was found that the Roman copies contained nothing of the kind the Romans had claimed. So the original decree was confirmed — the one that removed the chief hearing of cases from the bishop of Rome — and in the process the bishop of Rome's shameless deception was exposed. By craftily substituting the Council of Sardica for the Nicene Council, he was caught in a plain and shameful lie. But even greater and more brazen was the wickedness of those who added a forged letter to the council's records — a letter in which some bishop of Carthage condemned the arrogance of his predecessor Aurelius for having dared to withdraw from obedience to the apostolic see, and humbly begged pardon for himself and his church. These are the fine monuments of antiquity on which the majesty of the see of Rome is built — forgeries so clumsy that even a blind man could detect them. The forged letter declared that Aurelius, 'puffed up with devilish boldness and stubbornness, had rebelled against Christ and Saint Peter and was therefore to be condemned with a curse.' What did Augustine say about this? What did so many of the fathers present at the Council of Mileve say? But why spend many words refuting a foolish document that even the Romanists themselves — if they

have any shame left — cannot read without great embarrassment? Then there is Gratian, who — whether from malice or ignorance — in summarizing the decree of excommunication for those who appeal beyond the sea, added an exception: 'Unless perhaps they appeal to the see of Rome.' What can one do with such men, so devoid of basic reason that they exempt from a law the very thing the law was clearly made to address? The council, in condemning appeals beyond the sea, was forbidding appeals to Rome — and here the clever interpreter exempts Rome from the law.

To settle this question once and for all, one historical episode will make plain what kind of jurisdiction the bishop of Rome actually held in ancient times. Donatus of the Black Houses accused Cecilian, bishop of Carthage. The accused was condemned without being heard — he knew the bishops had conspired against him and did not appear. The matter then came before the Emperor Constantine, who, wishing it to be settled by ecclesiastical judgment, assigned the hearing to Miltiades, bishop of Rome, and joined to him many bishops from Italy, France, and Spain as fellow commissioners. If hearing an appeal in a church matter belonged to the ordinary jurisdiction of the see of Rome, why did Constantine appoint others alongside him as he pleased? And why did Miltiades himself accept the role by the emperor's command rather than by his own office? Here is what happened: Cecilian prevailed; Donatus of the Black Houses was condemned for slander and then appealed. Constantine assigned the hearing of the appeal to the bishop of Orleans, who sat as judge after the bishop of Rome to pronounce his verdict. If the see of Rome holds supreme authority with no appeal above it, why did Miltiades suffer the humiliation of having the bishop of Orleans placed over him? And

who did this? Constantine — the very emperor the Romanists boast of as having devoted not only all his efforts but nearly all the empire's wealth to advancing the dignity of their see. We see plainly, then, how far the bishop of Rome was from that supreme dominion over all churches which he claims was given to him by Christ — and which he falsely asserts he has always possessed by the universal consent of the whole world.

I know there are many letters, writings, and decrees in which bishops give and boldly claim great authority for the see of Rome. But everyone with even a little wit and learning knows that most of these are so obviously fabricated that a single reading reveals where they came from. What person of sound judgment would believe that the interpretation in Gratian, attributed to Anacletus — that 'Cephas means head' — actually came from Anacletus? The Romanists still use many such worthless documents today, patched together by Gratian without any critical judgment. And yet, even in broad daylight, they continue to peddle these forgeries with which they once deceived the ignorant in darker times. I will not spend much effort refuting things that openly refute themselves by their own obvious absurdity. I grant that genuine letters of the early bishops remain, in which they speak of their see with grand titles — some of Leo's letters are of this kind. Leo was a learned and eloquent man, but he was also excessively hungry for glory and power. Whether the churches at that time actually accepted his self-promotion is precisely what is in dispute. And it is clear that many were offended by his ambition and actively resisted his grasping. At times he appointed the bishop of Thessalonica as his representative throughout Greece and neighboring regions; at other times he appointed the bishop of Orleans

or another for France. He appointed Hormisdas of Seville as his vicar in Spain — but always with the condition that the metropolitans would retain their ancient privileges intact. Leo himself explains that one of those privileges was that whenever any question arose, the metropolitan was to be consulted first. So these appointments of vicars were made on the condition that no bishop would be hindered in his ordinary jurisdiction, no metropolitan in hearing appeals, and no provincial council in governing its own churches. What was this, then, but staying out of all jurisdiction — intervening only to help resolve conflicts, and only as far as the law and nature of church fellowship allowed?

By Gregory's time, the ancient order had already changed considerably. When the empire was shaken and torn apart — France and Spain suffering repeated defeats, the Slavic regions devastated, Italy troubled, and Africa almost destroyed by relentless disasters — the bishops from every region attached themselves more closely to the bishop of Rome, hoping that in such political upheaval the integrity of the faith might at least survive. As a result, not only the dignity but also the power of that see grew substantially. Still, however that came about, there was still a great distance between what existed then and the unchecked dominion in which one man rules over others by his own will. The see of Rome's authority was such that it could bring pressure to bear on the unruly and stubborn who could not be kept in line by their own bishops. Gregory frequently and carefully testifies to this — that he preserved others' rights just as faithfully as he claimed his own. 'I am not,' he says, 'driven by ambition to take from any man what belongs to him. I desire in all things to honor my brothers.' The most sweeping claim of supremacy found in his writings is this: 'I

know not what bishop is not subject to the apostolic see when he is found in fault.' But he immediately adds: 'Where fault does not require it, all are equal according to the order of humility.' He claims authority to correct those who have offended — but when all are doing their duty, he places himself on equal footing with the rest. And he assumed this authority on his own terms: those who agreed, agreed; those who did not were free to refuse — and most of them clearly did. Beyond that, the specific case he was addressing concerned the primate of Constantinople, who had been condemned by his provincial synod and refused to accept the judgment. His fellow bishops informed the emperor of this stubbornness, and the emperor asked Gregory to adjudicate the case. We see, then, that Gregory attempted nothing that would undermine ordinary jurisdiction, and that what he did to assist others he did only at the emperor's direction.

This, then, was the full extent of the bishop of Rome's power: to set himself against obstinate and unruly individuals when an extraordinary remedy was needed — and to help bishops, not to hinder them. He therefore claimed no more authority over others than he elsewhere granted others over himself, for he openly acknowledged he was ready to be corrected and instructed by all. In one instance he did summon the bishop of Aquileia to come to Rome to answer for a controversy of faith that had arisen between him and others — but he did so not by his own authority, only because the emperor had directed it. And he did not appoint himself as sole judge; he promised to assemble a synod by whom the whole matter would be decided. Yet even with such restraint — even when the see of Rome's power had clear limits it could not exceed, and the bishop of Rome stood no higher than the others — Gregory

himself clearly disliked this state of affairs. He complained at times that the bishopric had drawn him back into the world, and that he was more entangled in earthly concerns than he had ever been as a layman. He felt crushed by the weight of worldly business. Elsewhere he writes: 'Such great burdens of business weigh me down that my mind cannot lift itself at all toward things above. I am tossed by many waves of disputes, and after any brief moment of rest I am thrown into the storms of troublesome life — so that I can rightly say, I have gone into the depths of the sea, and the tempest has overwhelmed me.' From this, judge what he would have said had he lived in our times. Though he did not always fully carry out the duties of a pastor, he was striving to do so. He kept out of civil government, and acknowledged himself subject to the emperor like everyone else. He did not involve himself in other churches except under the compulsion of necessity. And yet he felt he was lost in a maze, because he could not give himself wholly to the bishop's office.

At that time the bishop of Constantinople was contending with the bishop of Rome for supremacy, as has already been mentioned. After the seat of the empire was established at Constantinople, it seemed natural that this church should have the second place of honor after Rome. And indeed, what first gave Rome its supremacy was precisely the fact that the seat of the empire had been there. In Gratian there is a writing under the name of Pope Lucius, stating that the boundaries of metropolitans and primates were arranged according to the pre-existing civil government. There is also another under the name of Pope Clement, saying that patriarchs were ordained in cities that had previously held the chief flamens. Though this claim is false in itself, it is derived from

something true. It is certain that, to minimize disruption, provinces were divided in accordance with the existing political order, and that primates and metropolitans were placed in cities that already held civil prominence and power. The Council of Turin decreed that cities which were the chief cities of their provinces in civil government should also be the chief episcopal sees — and that if civil preeminence moved from one city to another, the metropolitan rights should move with it. But Innocent, bishop of Rome, seeing his city's ancient prestige declining after the seat of empire had moved to Constantinople, and fearing the diminishment of his see, issued a contrary ruling: that ecclesiastical mother-churches need not change as imperial capitals change. But the authority of a council rightly outweighs the judgment of one man — and we should be suspicious of Innocent's opinion in his own case. Nevertheless, even his own rule shows that from the beginning, the arrangement of metropolitan sees followed the external order of the empire.

In keeping with this ancient arrangement, the First Council of Constantinople decreed that the bishop of that city should have privileges of honor second only to the bishop of Rome, since it was the 'new Rome.' Much later, when a similar decree was made at Chalcedon, Leo raised a fierce objection. He took it upon himself to set aside what more than six hundred bishops had decreed, and bitterly criticized them for giving to Constantinople an honor taken from other sees. What could move a man to trouble the whole church over such a matter, except pure ambition? He argued that what the Nicene Council had once decreed must be treated as inviolable — as though the Christian faith were in danger if one church ranked above another, or as though patriarchates had been

divided for any purpose other than practical administration. But we know that practical arrangements are changed — indeed, must be changed — as times change. So Leo's argument that the honor given to Alexandria by the Nicene Council could not be given to Constantinople was groundless. Common sense tells us that such a decree was the kind that could rightly be adjusted as circumstances required. And none of the Eastern bishops — who were most directly concerned — opposed the change. Proterius was present, having been made bishop of Alexandria in Dioscorus's place. The other patriarchs whose honor was diminished were also present. If anyone should have objected, it was they, not Leo, whose own position remained unaffected. But when all of them stayed silent — indeed, assented — and only the bishop of Rome resisted, it is easy to see his motive: he foresaw that what shortly came to pass — that as old Rome's glory declined, Constantinople would not be content with second place but would challenge Rome for the supremacy. Yet his protests did not prevail, and the council's decree was confirmed. His successors, seeing they were overruled, quietly abandoned their resistance and accepted Constantinople as the second patriarchate.

Not long after, John, who governed the church of Constantinople in Gregory's time, went so far as to call himself the universal patriarch. Gregory, not willing to fail in defending his own see in so just a cause, stood firmly against him. John's pride and arrogance were indeed intolerable — he wanted the boundaries of his bishopric to extend as far as the empire itself. And yet Gregory does not claim for himself what he denies to another. He rejects the title as wicked, ungodly, and abominable, whoever takes it. He even rebuked Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria, for honoring

him with the same title. 'Look,' he says, 'in the preface of the letter you addressed to me, you have used the word of proud address in calling me the universal pope — though I have forbidden it. I beg your holiness not to do this again, for what is given to another beyond reason is taken from you. I consider it no honor if I see my brothers' honor diminished in it. My honor is the honor of the universal church, and the full strength of my brothers. But if your holiness calls me the universal pope, you deny yourself to be what you acknowledge me fully to be.' Gregory stood in a right and honest cause. But John, supported by the favor of the Emperor Maurice, could never be moved from his position, and Cyriacus, his successor, never allowed himself to be persuaded in this matter either.

In the end, Phocas — who seized power after murdering Maurice, and who was more friendly to Rome for reasons I cannot say, though perhaps because he had been crowned there without opposition — granted to Boniface III what Gregory had never sought: that Rome should be the head of all churches. That is how the controversy was resolved. Yet this imperial grant could not by itself have benefited the see of Rome so greatly, had other things not followed. Greece and all of Asia were soon afterward cut off from Rome's communion. France gave Rome some reverence, but obeyed no further than it pleased. It was not fully brought into subjection until Pepin seized the kingdom. The bishop of Rome, Zachary, had helped Pepin break his oath and seize what was not his — supporting the overthrow of the lawful king so that Pepin could violently enter upon the kingdom as plunder. His reward was that the see of Rome would have jurisdiction over the churches of France. Like robbers dividing their spoils, these two

arranged the matter between themselves: Pepin would have earthly and civil dominion, taken from the rightful king, and Zachary would be made head of all bishops with spiritual power. This power was at first weak, as is common with newly established things, but was later strengthened by the authority of Charlemagne, for a similar reason — he too was indebted to the bishop of Rome, whose efforts had helped him attain the honor of the imperial title. Although the churches everywhere were likely already badly deformed before this, it is certain that the ancient form of the church was first utterly destroyed in France and Germany at that time. Brief records from those days still survive in the archives of the Paris court, and where they deal with church matters they mention the agreements of both Pepin and Charlemagne with the bishop of Rome. From these we can conclude that a fundamental change in the old order was made at that time.

After that, as things continued to worsen everywhere day by day, the tyranny of the Roman see was gradually established and increased -- partly through the ignorance and partly through the laziness of the bishops. For when one man seized control of everything and kept pushing to advance himself beyond all limits and against all law and right, the bishops did not resist his ambition with the zeal they should have. Though they did not lack courage, they lacked true learning and knowledge, and so they were completely unfit to take on so great a challenge. Because of this, we can see what a monstrous and unholy corruption of all sacred things, and what a scattering of all church order, existed in Bernard's time. He complains that from all over the world there flocked to Rome in crowds the ambitious, the greedy, those guilty of simony,

robbers of God, keepers of mistresses, those guilty of incest, and every kind of such monster -- all seeking to obtain or hold onto church offices through papal authority. He adds that fraud, scheming, and violence had become the norm. He says that the manner of conducting trials at that time was disgraceful, unworthy not only of the church but even of a civil court. He cries out that the church is full of ambitious men, and that none of them fear committing wicked acts any more than robbers in their den fear dividing the spoils of travelers. Few, he says, look to the lawgiver's mouth; they look to his hands. And not without reason. For those hands do all the Pope's business. What kind of thing is this -- that they are bought with the plunder of churches, these people who say to you, "Well done, well done"? The livelihood of the poor is scattered in the streets of the rich. Silver gleams in the mud. People run to it from every direction -- not the poor but the powerful snatch it up, or perhaps whoever runs fastest. But this practice, or rather this death, did not begin with you. I wish it might end with you. In the midst of all this, you as pastor go forward, surrounded by much costly display. If I dare say it, these are the pastors of devils rather than of sheep. Peter certainly did not do this. Paul did not play this role. Your court is more accustomed to receiving good men than to making them good. For the wicked do not improve there, but the good deteriorate. Now, as for the abuses of appeals that he describes, no godly person can read about them without great horror. At last he concludes his account of the unbridled greed of the Roman see in seizing jurisdiction with these words: I am voicing the murmur and common complaint of the churches. They cry out that they are being mangled and torn apart. There are either none or very few who do not either mourn or fear

this plague. Do you ask what plague? The abbots are torn from the bishops, the bishops from the archbishops, and so on. It would be remarkable if this could be excused. By doing this you prove that you have the fullness of power, but not of righteousness. You do this because you can. But whether you also ought to is the question. You are appointed to preserve, not to begrudge, every person's honor and proper place. I chose to quote these few things out of many, partly so that readers may see how badly the church had deteriorated, and partly so that they may understand what great sorrow and grief this disaster caused all the godly.

But now, even if we grant the bishop of Rome today the same prominence and breadth of jurisdiction that the Roman see held in the intervening centuries -- such as in the times of Leo and Gregory -- what does that have to do with the current state of the papacy? I am not yet speaking about the earthly dominion or civil power of the papacy, which I will address later in its proper place. But regarding the very spiritual government they boast of -- what does it have in common with the state of those earlier times? For they define the Pope as nothing less than the supreme head of the church on earth and the universal bishop of the whole world. And the popes themselves, when they speak of their own authority, boldly declare that they have the power to command and others are bound to obey. They insist that all their decrees should be treated as if confirmed by the divine voice of Peter, that provincial synods have no force because the Pope is not present, that they may appoint clergy in any church they wish, and that they may summon to their own see those who were ordained elsewhere. Countless claims of this sort are found in Gratian's collection, which I will not rehearse now so as not to bore the readers. But the

sum of it all is this: that only the bishop of Rome has the supreme authority to hear and decide all church matters -- whether in judging and defining doctrine, making laws, establishing discipline, or carrying out judgments. It would also be tedious and unnecessary to list the privileges they claim for themselves in what they call "reservations." But most intolerable of all, they allow no court on earth to restrain or check their unchecked power, even if they abuse such immense authority. No one, they say, may overturn the judgment of that see, because of the supremacy of the church of Rome. Again: The pope shall be judged neither by the emperor, nor by kings, nor by all the clergy, nor by the people. This is indeed imperious in the extreme -- that one man makes himself judge over everyone else and refuses to submit to anyone's judgment. But what if he acts as a tyrant over God's people? What if he scatters and devastates the kingdom of Christ? What if he throws the whole church into turmoil? What if he turns the pastor's office into robbery? Indeed, even if he is the most wicked man alive, he says he is not obligated to give an account. For these are the popes' own words: God's will was to have the cases of other men decided by men, but He has without question reserved the bishop of this see to His own judgment alone. Again: The actions of our subjects are judged by us, but ours by God alone.

And to give such decrees more weight, they have falsely attached the names of ancient bishops, as though things had been arranged this way from the beginning. But it is absolutely certain that whatever the bishop of Rome claims for himself beyond what we have shown was granted by the ancient councils is new and recently fabricated. Indeed, they have reached such brazenness that they have published a document under the name of Anastasius,

Patriarch of Constantinople, in which he supposedly testifies that the ancient rules decreed that nothing should be done even in the most remote provinces without first being referred to the Roman see. Besides the fact that this is clearly a complete fraud, what reasonable person would believe that such a commendation of the Roman see came from the very man who was its rival and envied its honor and dignity? But truly it was fitting that these antichrists should be driven to such great madness and blindness, so that their wickedness would be plain for everyone to see -- at least for all who are willing to open their eyes. But the decretal epistles compiled by Gregory IX, along with the Clementines and Extravagantes of Martin, breathe out their outrageous ferocity even more openly and fully on every page -- like the tyranny of barbaric kings. But these are the oracles by which the Romanists want their papacy to be measured. From this arose those well-known principles that today hold the force of oracles throughout the papacy: that the Pope cannot err, that the Pope is above the councils, that the Pope is the universal bishop of all bishops and the supreme head of the church on earth. I pass over the far more absurd nonsense that the foolish canonists babble in their schools -- claims to which the Roman theologians not only agree but even applaud, flattering their idol.

I will not press them with the full force of the argument. Someone else might set against their great arrogance the words of Cyprian, which he spoke at a council where he presided as chief bishop: None of us calls himself bishop of bishops, or uses tyrannical fear to compel his fellow bishops to obey. That person might also cite what was soon afterward decreed at Carthage: that no one should be called prince of priests or chief bishop. He could gather

many testimonies from histories, canons from synods, and many statements from the works of ancient writers, all of which would bring the bishop of Rome down to the level of his fellow bishops. But I pass over all of these, so that I do not appear to press the point too hard. But let the best defenders of the Roman see answer me this: with what face do they dare uphold the title of universal bishop, which they see Gregory so often condemned with a curse? If Gregory's testimony carries any weight, then by their own logic they are declaring that their bishop is the Antichrist, since they make him universal. The title of "head" was equally uncommon. For Gregory says in one place: Peter is the chief member in the body. John, Andrew, and James are heads of particular peoples. Yet they are all members of the church under one head. Indeed, the saints before the law, the saints under the law, and the saints under grace are all set among the members, altogether making up the body of the Lord. And no one ever wished to be called universal. But the bishop of Rome's claim to the power of commanding fits poorly with what Gregory says elsewhere. For when Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria, said that he had been commanded by Gregory, Gregory answered in this way: I ask you, take that word "commanding" away from my hearing. For I know what I am and what you are. In rank, you are my brothers. In character, you are my fathers. Therefore I did not command; I simply took care to share what I thought was useful. When the pope extends his jurisdiction without limit, he does great and serious wrong not only to the other bishops but also to every individual church, which he tears apart and dismembers so that he may build his own seat on their ruins. And when he exempts himself from all judgment and rules like a tyrant, treating his own whim alone as law, this is so

outrageous and so far removed from proper church order that it cannot be tolerated in any way. It goes against not only every sense of godliness but also basic humanity.

Rather than going through everything point by point, I appeal again to those who today consider themselves the best and most faithful defenders of the see of Rome: are they not ashamed to defend the present state of the papacy? It is certainly a hundred times more corrupt than it was in the days of Gregory and Bernard — and yet those holy men were already deeply troubled by what they saw. Gregory complains throughout his writings that he is pulled too far in too many directions by outside business; that the bishopric has brought him back to the world; that he carries more worldly anxieties as a bishop than he ever did as a layman; that he is crushed by the weight of earthly affairs and his mind cannot rise toward heavenly things; that he is tossed by many waves of disputes and the storms of a troubled life, so that he can rightly say, 'I have gone into the depths of the sea.' And yet, amid all those earthly burdens, Gregory was still able to preach to the people, to privately admonish and correct those who needed it, to organize his church, to counsel and encourage his fellow bishops — and even to find time to write. And still he mourned that he was drowning in the deepest sea. If the governance of that time was a sea, what words describe the papacy today? There is no resemblance between them. Today there is no preaching, no concern for discipline, no zeal for the churches, no spiritual activity — nothing but the world. And yet this maze is praised as though nothing more orderly or well-structured could be imagined. But what complaints does Bernard pour out, what grief does he express, when he surveys the failures of his own age? What would he say if he could

see our age — the age of iron, or something worse if anything can be worse? What stubborn wickedness it is to not only defend as holy and divine what every holy father has condemned with one voice — but to use their very testimony to defend a papacy they never knew and would never have recognized. I will grant, though, that by Bernard's time the corruption of everything had grown so severe that it was not very different from our own day. But to claim any justification from the intermediate period — the time of Leo, Gregory, and their like — is shameless. It is like someone who, to establish the emperor's absolute monarchy, praises the old Roman republic — borrowing the praises of liberty to glorify tyranny.

Even if all their claims were granted, a new problem immediately arises: we deny that there is a true church at Rome in which such privileges could reside, and we deny that there is a true bishop there who could carry these marks of dignity. So suppose we concede everything — though we have already taken it all from them by argument: that Peter was appointed by Christ as head of the universal church; that he left his honor in the see of Rome; that this was established by the authority of the ancient church and confirmed by long continuance; that supreme power has always been given by universal consent to the bishop of Rome; that he has been judge of all cases and all persons, accountable to no one's judgment. Grant them even more if they wish — my answer in a single word is: none of it matters unless there is actually a church and a bishop in Rome. This they must grant: a body that is not itself a church cannot be the mother of churches. A man who is not himself a bishop cannot be the chief of bishops. Do they want an apostolic see at Rome? Then let them show me a true and lawful apostleship. Do they want a chief bishop? Then let them show me a

bishop. But where will they find even the outward form of a church? They name one — it is always on their lips. But the church is known by certain marks, and 'bishopric' is the name of an office. I am not speaking of the people — I am speaking of the governance itself, which ought always to be visible and active in the church. Where in their church is the ministry that Christ's institution requires? Let us recall what was said earlier about the office of priests and bishops. If we evaluate the cardinals' office by that standard, we will have to admit they are anything but priests. And as for the chief bishop himself — I would like to know a single thing about him that is actually episcopal. The principal duty of a bishop is to teach the people with God's word. The second is to administer the sacraments. The third is to admonish and exhort, to correct those who sin, and to hold the people together in holy discipline. Which of these does he do? Which does he even pretend to do? Let them explain, then, by what reasoning they would have this man counted a bishop — a man who does not touch even a single part of the bishop's office, even with his little finger, even in outward appearance.

A bishop is not like a king in this respect. A king, even if he fails to do what belongs to a king, still retains the honor and title. But in judging whether someone is a bishop, Christ's commandment is the standard — and that commandment must always hold authority in the church. So let the Romanists untie this knot for me. I deny that their high bishop is the chief of bishops, on the grounds that he is no bishop at all. They must disprove this second point if they hope to win the first. But what will they say to the fact that he not only lacks all the qualities of a bishop, but actually embodies the opposite? Where shall I begin, O God? With his teach-

ing, or with his conduct? What shall I say? What shall I leave unsaid? Where shall I stop? This I say: the world today is filled with so many corrupt and wicked doctrines, so many kinds of superstition, so much blindness of error, so deep in idolatry — and there is not one of these things anywhere that has not either originated in Rome or been confirmed there. The only reason the bishops attack the newly recovering Gospel with such fury, strain every effort to suppress it, and stir up kings and princes to cruelty — is that they see their entire kingdom crumbling the moment the Gospel of Christ enters. Leo was cruel; Clement was bloodthirsty; Paul is a merciless killer. But it is not so much their natural temperament that drives them to fight the truth — it is that this is their only means of holding onto power. They cannot survive unless Christ is driven away, so they fight for this cause as men fighting for their religion, their country, and their very lives. What then? Shall that be to us the apostolic see, where nothing is visible but horrible apostasy? Shall he be Christ's vicar who, by persecuting the Gospel with furious assaults, openly declares himself to be antichrist? Shall he be Peter's successor who ranges with sword and fire to destroy all that Peter ever built? Shall he be head of the church who cuts the church off from Christ — the only true head — and tears it to pieces? Even if Rome was once in ancient times the mother of all churches — since it became the seat of antichrist, it has ceased to be what it once was.

We may seem to be too harsh and abusive when we call the bishop of Rome antichrist. But those who think so do not realize they are accusing Paul of immodesty — for we speak after Paul, or rather from Paul's own mouth. And to prevent anyone from objecting that we wrongly apply Paul's words to the bishop of Rome

when they were meant for something else, I will briefly show that they cannot be understood in any other way than as pointing to the papacy. Paul writes that antichrist will sit in the temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Elsewhere the Holy Spirit, describing antichrist's character in the figure of Antiochus, shows that his kingdom will consist in lofty speech and blasphemies against God (Daniel 7:25). From this we understand that the kingdom being raised up against Christ's spiritual kingdom is a tyranny over souls rather than bodies. And it is a tyranny that does not abolish the name of Christ and the church — but rather exploits Christ's name, lurking under the title of the church as under a disguise. Now while all heresies and sects that have ever existed belong in some sense to the kingdom of antichrist, Paul's prophecy of 'a great falling away' points to a specific time when the seat of abomination would be established — when a widespread apostasy would overtake the church, even while many individual members remained in the true unity of faith. And when Paul adds that in his own time the work of iniquity was already beginning in secret, before it would later be revealed openly — by this we understand that this disaster was not to be brought in by one man, nor ended with one man. Since Paul identifies antichrist by this mark — that he would steal from God the honor due to God alone and claim it for himself — this is the chief sign we must look for in identifying antichrist, especially when such pride goes so far as to openly devastate the church. Since it is certain that the bishop of Rome has shamelessly seized for himself what belongs to God and Christ alone, there is no doubt that he is the captain and standard-bearer of that wicked and abominable kingdom.

Now let the Romanists appeal to antiquity against us — as though in so total a collapse of everything, the honor of a see could remain where there is no longer a true see. Eusebius tells how God, to make room for His judgment, transferred the church that was at Jerusalem to Pella. What happened once can happen again. So to tie the honor of supremacy so firmly to a place that someone who is in truth the most hateful enemy of Christ, the greatest adversary of the Gospel, the worst destroyer and ravager of the church, the most cruel killer of the saints — that such a man should still be considered the vicar of Christ, the successor of Peter, and the chief bishop of the church, simply because he occupies what was once the highest see — that is too foolish to be taken seriously. I will not even speak of how vast the difference is between the pope's chancery and a rightly ordered church. But this one thing alone should settle all doubt: no one in his right mind would locate a bishopric in lead seals and official bulls — much less in that school of fraud and deceit in which the pope's so-called spiritual governance consists. Therefore it was well said by someone that the church of Rome everyone boasts about has long since been turned into a court — and a court is all that now exists in Rome. I am not here accusing the faults of individual men. I am showing that the papacy itself stands directly opposed to the true order of a church.

But if we come to the actual persons, it is well enough known what kind of vicars of Christ we will find. Julius, Leo, Clement, and Paul are to be pillars of the Christian faith and the leading interpreters of religion — men who never knew anything about Christ except what they learned from Lucian's school of mockery. But why single out three or four popes? As though it were in any doubt what kind of religion the popes together with their whole college of

cardinals have long professed — and still profess today. For the first article of the secret theology that reigns among them is this: there is no God. The second: everything written and taught about Christ is lies and deceit. The third: the doctrine of the life to come and the last resurrection is pure fable. Not all of them think this way, and few say it openly — I grant that. But this has long since become the ordinary religion of the popes. And yet, though this is perfectly well known to everyone who knows Rome, the Roman theologians do not stop boasting that by Christ's special provision the pope cannot err — because Christ said to Peter, 'I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.' What do they gain by such shameless mockery, except to let the whole world see that they have reached such a depth of wickedness that they fear neither God nor man?

But suppose we imagine that the ungodliness of those popes I mentioned is hidden — they did not publish it in sermons or in writing, only revealing it at table, in private chambers, or at least within the walls of their houses. Even then, if they want this privilege of infallibility to stand, they must erase John XXII from the list of popes — the man who publicly declared that souls are mortal and die with the body until the day of resurrection. And so you may understand that the entire see had by then completely collapsed at its foundations: not one of all the cardinals opposed so great a madness. It was the university of Paris that moved the king of France to force him to recant. The king forbade his subjects to have any dealings with John unless he immediately repented — and proclaimed this by herald, as was the custom. Compelled by this pressure, the pope abjured his error. This example alone removes any need to dispute further over their claim that the see of

Rome and its bishops cannot err in faith, because Christ said to Peter, 'I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.' John fell from right faith in so disgraceful a manner that he stands as a clear warning to those who come after — not everyone who succeeds Peter in the bishopric is a Peter. But the argument is so weak on its own that it needs no answer. For if every statement made to Peter is to be applied to his successors, it will follow that they are all Satans — since the Lord also said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan, you are an offense to me.' It is just as easy for us to turn that saying against them as it is for them to use the other against us.

But I have no wish to compete with them in foolishness. So I return to where I digressed from. To bind the place, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church so tightly together that whoever sits in that seat — even if he is the devil himself — must be judged the vicar of Christ and the head of the church, simply because the seat was once Peter's: this is not only wicked and an insult to Christ, but also absurd beyond all reason. For a long time now the bishops of Rome have been either utterly without religion or the most active enemies of religion. They are therefore no more made vicars of Christ by the seat they occupy than an idol set up in God's temple is to be received as God. Now if their conduct is to be judged, let the popes answer for themselves: what single thing is there about them by which they could be recognized as bishops? First, the kind of life common at Rome — which they not only ignore but appear to quietly approve — is completely incompatible with the bishop's duty, which is to restrain the people's licentiousness with firm discipline. But I will not be too hard on them by holding them responsible for other men's sins. Yet when they themselves — with their own households, with nearly the whole college of cardinals, with

the whole multitude of their clergy — are so given over to every kind of wickedness, filth, depravity, and corrupt behavior that they more closely resemble monsters than men: in this they plainly show themselves to be anything but bishops. Yet they need not fear that I will expose their filth any further. I am weary of wading through such foul mud, I must have some regard for my readers' decency, and I believe I have already more than sufficiently proved the point I set out to make: that even if Rome was once in ancient times the head of the churches, today it is not worthy to be counted even the smallest toe of the churches' feet.

As for the cardinals — as they are called — I cannot explain how they have so suddenly risen to such great dignity. In Gregory's time the title belonged to bishops only. Whenever Gregory mentions cardinals, he refers not to those of the Roman church specifically, but to any bishop anywhere — so that in short, a cardinal priest was simply a bishop. I find this title nowhere in writers before that period. But I see that those who then held it ranked below bishops — whereas today cardinals stand far above them. Augustine's well-known saying is relevant here: 'Although in terms of the titles of honor which church custom has established, a bishopric is greater than a priesthood — yet in many things Augustine is less than Jerome.' He does distinguish the priest of the Roman church from others — but he places all priests below bishops without exception. This was observed so consistently that at the Council of Carthage, when two legates of the see of Rome were present — one a bishop, the other a priest — the priest was placed in the last seat. And to avoid going too far back: there is a council held at Rome under Gregory at which priests sat in the lowest place and signed separately; deacons had no place in the signing at

all. At that time priests had no office other than to assist the bishop in the ministry of teaching and the sacraments. Now everything has changed — cardinals have become the cousins of kings and emperors. There is no doubt that they grew step by step alongside their head, until they were elevated to this pinnacle of dignity. I thought it worth noting briefly in passing, so that readers might better understand that the see of Rome as it exists today differs enormously from the ancient see under whose pretense it now defends itself. But whatever they once were — since they now hold nothing of a true and lawful office in the church, retaining only a deceptive appearance and an empty disguise, and having everything turned into its opposite — it was inevitable that what Gregory so often wrote would come upon them. 'I say it weeping,' he writes, 'I give warning of it with groaning: since the order of priesthood has fallen within, it will not be able to stand long without.' But more fittingly, what Malachi says should be fulfilled in them: 'You have turned aside from the way and have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord. So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people' (Malachi 2:8). I now leave it to all the godly to judge what kind of thing this supreme height of Rome's hierarchy is — to which the papists with shameless audacity do not hesitate to subject the very word of God, which ought to be held in honor and reverence by heaven and earth, by men and angels alike.

THE .VIII. CHAPTER. OF THE POWER
OF THE CHIRCHE AS TOUCHYNG THE
ARTICLES OF FAITH: AND WITH
HOWE VNBRIDLED LICĒTIOUSNESSE
IT HATH IN THE PAPACIE BEN
WRESTED TO CORRUPT ALL PURE-
NESSE OF DOCTRINE.



Next comes the third subject: the power of the church, which belongs partly to all bishops and partly to councils, whether provincial or general. I am speaking only of the spiritual power that is proper to the church. This spiritual power consists in three things: doctrine, jurisdiction, and the making of laws. Doctrine itself has two parts: the authority to define articles of doctrine, and the authority to interpret them. Before we discuss each of these in detail, I want to give godly readers one important warning: whatever is taught about the power of the church must always be understood in light of the purpose for which — as Paul testifies — it was given: to build up, not to tear down. Whoever uses this power rightly thinks of himself as nothing more than a servant of Christ, and equally a servant of the people in Christ.

There is only one way to build up the church: ministers must labor to preserve for Christ His own authority. That authority cannot remain intact unless what He received from His Father is left to Him — namely, that He alone is the teacher of the church. For it is written of no one else but Him: 'Listen to Him.' The church's power, then, must be clearly set forth — but it must be kept within definite limits, so that it is not pulled in whatever direction human desire dictates. To this end, it will be very helpful to see how this power is described by the prophets and apostles. For if we simply hand over to men as much authority as they wish to take, it is obvious how quickly the door opens to tyranny — which must have no place in Christ's church.

This must be kept in mind: whatever authority or dignity the Holy Spirit in Scripture gives to priests, prophets, apostles, or the successors of the apostles — all of it is given not to the men themselves, but to the ministry to which they are appointed, or more plainly, with which they have been entrusted. For if we go through them all in order, we will find that none of them had authority to teach or to speak except in the Lord's name and by the Lord's word. When they are called to office, they are also charged to bring nothing from themselves, but to speak from the Lord's own mouth. The Lord does not bring them before the people to be heard until He has given them their instructions — so that they speak nothing beyond His word. Moses himself, the greatest of all the prophets, was to be heard above all others — but he was first equipped with God's commandments so that he would declare nothing except what came from the Lord. Therefore it is said that when the people received his teaching, they believed in God and in His servant Moses. To prevent the priests' authority from being treated with

contempt, it was maintained by very severe penalties. But the Lord also shows the condition under which they were to be heard, when He says He made His covenant with Levi — that the law of truth would be in his mouth. A little further He adds: 'The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and people shall seek the law from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.' So if a priest wishes to be heard, let him show himself to be God's messenger — that is, let him faithfully report the commandments he received from his master. And where the hearing of priests is specifically addressed, this is the express condition: that they answer according to the law of God.

The kind of authority the prophets generally held is described very clearly in Ezekiel: 'Son of man,' says the Lord, 'I have appointed you as a watchman to the house of Israel. You shall hear the word from My mouth and give them warning from Me.' The one commanded to hear from the Lord's mouth — is he not thereby forbidden to invent anything of his own? And what does it mean to declare from the Lord, except to speak in such a way that one can honestly say: this is not my word, it is the Lord's? The same principle appears in Jeremiah, in different words: 'Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, and let him who has My word speak My word faithfully.' He clearly lays down a law for all of them — one that permits no one to teach beyond what has been commanded. And he calls chaff everything that does not come from God alone. None of the prophets ever opened his mouth except as the Lord had first given him the words. This is why phrases like these appear so frequently among them: 'The word of the Lord,' 'the burden of the Lord,' 'thus says the Lord,' 'the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' And rightly so. Isaiah cried out that his lips

were unclean; Jeremiah confessed he did not know how to speak because he was only a youth. What could come from the defiled lips of one and the halting speech of the other, but something impure and unwise, if they had spoken their own words? But their lips became holy and pure when they became instruments of the Holy Spirit. When the prophets are bound by this rule — to deliver nothing except what they have received — they are then clothed with remarkable power and given outstanding titles. For when the Lord declares that He has set them over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant — He immediately adds the reason: because He has put His words in their mouths.

Now consider the apostles: they are given many outstanding titles — light of the world, salt of the earth, to be heard as representing Christ, and whatever they bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven. But their very title shows the limits of their authority. If they are 'apostles' — that is, those sent — they are not free to say whatever they please. They are messengers, bound to faithfully deliver the commandments of the one who sent them. Christ's own words make this clear when He defined their commission: He commanded them to go and teach all nations everything He had commanded (Matthew 28:19). Indeed, Christ submitted Himself to this same law, and made it binding for all. 'My teaching is not My own,' He said, 'but comes from the Father who sent Me' (John 7:16). He who was always the eternal counselor of the Father, and whom the Father appointed Lord and teacher of all people — even He, in carrying out the ministry of teaching, set by

His own example the rule that all ministers are to follow. The church's power is therefore not unlimited. It is subject to the Lord's word and, so to speak, enclosed within it.

From the beginning it has been binding in the church — and it remains binding today — that God's servants may teach only what they have learned from Him. Yet the manner in which they received their instruction has differed across the ages. The order of learning that exists now differs greatly from those that came before. First: if it is true, as Christ says, that no one has seen the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him — then everyone who has ever come to the knowledge of God has had to be guided by the Father's eternal wisdom (Matthew 11:27). For how could they have grasped or expressed the mysteries of God except through the teaching of the one to whom alone the Father's secrets are open? The holy fathers of old therefore knew God only by beholding Him in the Son as in a mirror. By this I mean that God has never disclosed Himself to human beings except through the Son — His only wisdom, light, and truth. From this fountain Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the rest drew whatever knowledge of heavenly doctrine they possessed. From the same fountain all the prophets drew the heavenly oracles they proclaimed. For this wisdom always made itself known by more than one means. To the patriarchs He used secret revelations, but He confirmed their minds with signs so clear that there could be no doubt that God Himself was speaking. The patriarchs then passed down from hand to hand what they had received, for the Lord entrusted it to them so that they would spread it abroad.

And their children and grandchildren, inwardly taught by God, knew that what they heard had come from heaven and not from the earth.

But when it pleased God to establish a more visible form of the church, He had His word put into writing, so that the priests could draw from it what they would deliver to the people, and so that all teaching could be tested against that standard. After the publishing of the law, when the priests were commanded to teach from the Lord's mouth, this meant they were to teach nothing foreign or different from what the Lord had given in the law. It was not lawful for them to add to it or subtract from it. Then came the prophets, through whom the Lord published new oracles to be added to the law — yet not so new that they did not flow from the law and remain consistent with it. In terms of doctrine, the prophets were simply expositors of the law, adding nothing to it beyond prophecies of things to come. Apart from those prophecies, they said nothing beyond a clear exposition of the law. But because the Lord was pleased to give a fuller and more expanded teaching, so that troubled consciences might be better satisfied, He directed that the prophecies also be written down and counted as part of His word. To this were added the historical books, which are also the work of the prophets, composed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I include the Psalms among the prophecies, since what is true of the prophecies applies equally to the Psalms. This whole body — comprising law, prophecies, Psalms, and histories — was the word of the Lord for the ancient people, and by this rule the priests and teachers were bound to examine their doctrine all the way to Christ's coming. They were not free to turn to the right or to the left, for their entire office was enclosed within these bounds:

they were to answer the people from the mouth of God. This is clearly expressed in a notable passage of Malachi, where he calls them to be mindful of the law and to hold to it, even until the preaching of the Gospel (Malachi 2:7). By this he forbids all newly invented doctrines and grants no license to stray even slightly from the path Moses faithfully set out (Malachi 4:4). This is also why David speaks so magnificently about the excellence of the law and heaps so many praises on it — so that the Jews would desire nothing outside it, since all perfection was enclosed within it.

But when at last the wisdom of God was openly revealed in the flesh, that same wisdom declared to us fully everything that can be grasped by human understanding or ought to be known about the heavenly Father. Now that Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, has risen, we have the perfect brightness of God's truth — as clear as noonday light, compared to the faint light that came before. The author of Hebrews was not speaking of something trivial when he wrote that God in times past spoke in many and various ways to the fathers through the prophets, but that in these last days He has spoken to us by His beloved Son. He is saying — and saying it plainly — that God will no longer speak as before, sometimes through one person and sometimes through another, adding prophecy to prophecy and revelation to revelation. Rather, He has fulfilled all parts of His teaching in the Son, and we must receive from Him this final and eternal testimony. This is why the entire era of the New Testament — from Christ's appearing in the Gospel's proclamation to the day of judgment — is described as 'the last hour,' 'the last times,' 'the last days.' The purpose is that, satisfied with the perfection of Christ's teaching, we should neither invent anything new alongside it nor receive such inventions from

others. It is therefore not without reason that the Father by singular prerogative has appointed the Son to be our teacher, commanding that He — and no one else — be heard. In just a few words He set out the Son's teaching authority when He said, 'Listen to Him.' But these words carry far more weight and force than people commonly recognize. The effect is as though the Father were drawing us away from all human teaching, bringing us to Christ alone, and commanding us to seek all saving doctrine from Him alone, to depend on Him alone, to cling to Him alone — and, as the very words ring out, to hear His voice alone. And truly what more should be sought or desired from human beings, now that the very Word of life has openly and fully made Himself known to us? Indeed, now that He in whom the heavenly Father willed all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom to be hidden has spoken — and spoken in a way befitting both the wisdom of God, which is perfect in every part, and the Messiah from whose hand the full revelation of all things was expected — all human mouths should be silent. He left nothing afterward for others to add.

Let this therefore be a fixed principle: the only word of God that has any place in the church is what is contained first in the law and the prophets, and then in the writings of the apostles. And the only proper way to teach is according to the direction and rule of this word. From this we also understand that the apostles were given nothing different from what the prophets had in ancient times — that is, to expound the old Scripture and show that what it teaches was fulfilled in Christ. And even this they were not to do on their own initiative, but guided by the Spirit of Christ going before them and, in a sense, giving them the words. For Christ defined their commission with this boundary when He commanded

them to go and teach — not things they had rashly invented themselves, but everything He had commanded them. Nothing could be more clearly stated than what He says elsewhere: 'Do not be called teachers, for you have only one teacher, Christ.' And to stamp this more deeply into their minds, He repeats it twice in the same passage. Because their capacity was such that they could not yet fully understand what they had heard and learned from their Master's lips, the Spirit of truth was promised to them — to guide them into the full understanding of all things. And this limit must be carefully noted where the Holy Spirit's office is defined: His task was to bring to their minds all those things that Christ had previously taught them by word of mouth.

Peter, who was well taught as to the limits of his authority, therefore leaves neither to himself nor to others anything except the distribution of the doctrine delivered by God. 'Whoever speaks,' he says, 'let him speak as the words of God' — that is, not with hesitation, as those whose conscience fails them are accustomed to tremble, but with the sure confidence that befits a servant of God equipped with certain instruction. What else is this but to forbid all inventions of human minds — from whatever source they originate — so that the pure word of God alone may be heard and taught in the assembly of believers? It is to sweep away the ordinances — or rather the fabrications — of all people, whatever their rank, so that only God's decrees remain in force. These are the spiritual weapons that are mighty through God for tearing down strongholds — by which faithful servants of God may demolish arguments and every proud obstacle that raises itself against the knowledge of God, and lead every thought captive into obedience to Christ. This, then, is the supreme power with which the

church's pastors must be clothed, by whatever title they may be called. By the word of God they should be bold to act with confidence in all things. They should bring all the strength, glory, wisdom, and pride of the world to yield before His majesty. Upheld by His power, they should govern all — from the greatest to the least. They should build Christ's house and pull down Satan's. They should feed the sheep and drive away the wolves. They should instruct and encourage those willing to learn, and rebuke, correct, and restrain the rebellious. They should bind and loose — and thunder and lightning if necessary. But all of this in the word of God. There is, however, the difference I mentioned between the apostles and their successors: the apostles were the authorized and authentic secretaries of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be received as the oracles of God. Their successors have no other office than to teach what has been set forth and written in the Holy Scriptures. We therefore conclude that faithful ministers today are not free to forge any new doctrine — they must simply hold to the teaching to which the Lord has made all people without exception subject. When I say this, I mean not only what is lawful for every individual, but what is lawful for the whole universal church. As for individuals: Paul was appointed by the Lord as apostle to the Corinthians — yet he denies having authority over their faith. Who now dares claim a dominion that Paul himself says does not belong to him? If Paul had believed he had the freedom to teach that whatever a pastor says must by right be believed, he would never have given the Corinthians this rule: that when two or three prophets speak, the rest should weigh what is said, and if something is revealed to another who is seated, the first should give way. By this rule he subjected the authority of all to the judg-

ment of God's word. But someone may say: the case of the whole universal church is different. Paul answers this objection too, where he says that faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of God. If faith depends on God's word alone, looks to it alone, and rests on it alone — what room remains for the word of the whole world? No one who truly understands what faith is can doubt this. Faith must rest on a certainty that stands invincible against Satan, against all the powers of hell, and against the whole world. That certainty is found nowhere but in the word of God alone. And here is a general rule that applies: God withholds from human beings the power to put forth new doctrine precisely because He alone is to be our teacher in heavenly things — as He alone is truthful and cannot lie or deceive. This rule applies to the whole church no less than to every individual believer.

But if the church power we have described is compared with the power in which the spiritual tyrants — those who have falsely called themselves bishops and rulers of religion — have gloried among God's people in recent centuries, the agreement is no better than that between Christ and the devil. It is not my purpose here to describe in what manner and by what wicked means they have exercised their tyranny. I will only state the doctrine they defend today — first with writings, and then with sword and fire. They take it as settled that a general council is the true image of the church. From this premise they conclude without hesitation that such councils are directly governed by the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot err. But since they themselves control and in effect create the councils, they end up claiming for themselves whatever they attribute to councils. So they want our faith to stand or fall at their will — whatever they decide, on any question, is to be established

and certain for our minds. If they approve something, we must approve it without doubting. If they condemn something, we must hold it condemned. Meanwhile, following their own desires and ignoring God's word, they manufacture doctrines, and then demand by this rule that those doctrines be believed. They even say that anyone who does not give certain assent to all their teachings — both positive and negative — is no Christian: if not with explicit faith, then with implicit faith, since it is within the church's power to create new articles of faith.

First let us hear what arguments they use to prove that this authority belongs to the church, and then we can see how much the passages they cite actually support their position. The church, they say, has outstanding promises: that Christ her spouse will never forsake her, and that His Spirit will guide her into all truth. But many of the promises they typically cite were given no less to each believer individually than to the whole church universally. When the Lord said to the twelve apostles, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age,' and 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, the Spirit of truth' — He made these promises not only to the twelve as a group, but to each one of them. And likewise to the other disciples, both those He had already received and those who would afterward be added. When they interpret such deeply comforting promises as though given only to the whole church together and not to individual Christians, what are they doing but robbing all Christians of the confidence those promises were meant to give each one? I am not denying that the whole fellowship of believers, furnished with the varied gifts of the Spirit, possesses a much richer and more abundant treasury of heavenly wisdom than any one believer alone. Nor am I saying that all be-

lievers are equally endowed with the Spirit of understanding and doctrine. But it cannot be granted to the enemies of Christ that they should twist Scripture to a false meaning in defense of a bad cause. Setting that aside, I simply acknowledge what is true: the Lord is perpetually present with His people and governs them by His Spirit. And this Spirit is not the spirit of error, ignorance, lying, or darkness — but of sure revelation, wisdom, truth, and light. By Him believers may truly learn what has been given them — that is, the hope of their calling and the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints. But since even the most gifted believers receive in this life only the first fruits and a foretaste of that Spirit, nothing is more proper for them than to recognize their own weakness and hold carefully to the bounds of God's word. If they wander far by their own thinking, they quickly go astray — they are still dependent on that Spirit, by whose teaching alone truth is discerned from falsehood. For all people, with Paul, acknowledge they have not yet reached the goal. So they press on toward daily growth, rather than boasting of perfection.

Our opponents will object that whatever belongs individually to each holy person belongs completely and fully to the church as a whole. This has some appearance of truth, but I deny it is true. God does distribute the gifts of His Spirit to each member in measure — but He does so in such a way that the whole body lacks nothing necessary when the gifts are shared together. Yet the church's riches are always such that there remains much short of that highest perfection our opponents boast of. The church is never so bereft that she lacks what is enough — for the Lord knows what she needs. But to keep her in humility and godly modesty, He gives her no more than He judges expedient. I know what they typ-

ically raise here: that the church is cleansed by the washing of water with the word of life, so that she might be without wrinkle or spot — and that elsewhere she is called the pillar and support of truth. But the first of these two passages describes what Christ is daily doing in the church, not what He has already fully accomplished. For if He daily sanctifies, purges, polishes, and cleanses all those who are His — then clearly they are still marked by some spots and wrinkles, and their sanctification is not yet complete. How foolish and fictional it is to declare the church already perfect and spotless in every part, when all its members are still imperfect and unclean. It is true that the church is being sanctified by Christ. But only the beginning of that sanctification is visible now. The end and full completion will come when Christ, the Holy of Holies, truly and fully fills her with His holiness. It is true that her spots and wrinkles are being wiped away — but they are still being wiped away day by day, until Christ at His coming removes everything that remains. Unless we grant this, we must affirm with the Pelagians that the righteousness of believers is already perfect in this life — and we must follow the Cathars and Donatists in tolerating no weakness in the church. The other passage has a meaning, as we have seen elsewhere, entirely different from what they claim. Paul, having instructed Timothy and shaped him for the true work of a bishop, says he did it so that Timothy would know how to conduct himself in the church — and he adds that the church is the pillar and support of truth, to encourage Timothy to apply himself with greater zeal. What else do those words mean but that God's truth is preserved in the church — that is, through the ministry of preaching? As Paul says elsewhere, Christ gave apostles, pastors, and teachers so that we might no longer be tossed about by every

wind of doctrine or deceived by men, but that, enlightened with the true knowledge of the Son of God, we might all come together in unity of faith. The fact that truth is not extinguished in the world but remains intact is due to the church being its faithful guardian and sustainer through her service. But if this guardianship consists in the ministry of the prophets and apostles, then it depends entirely on whether the Lord's word is faithfully preserved and kept pure.

To help readers understand exactly where this question turns, I will briefly state what our opponents require and where we oppose them. When they say the church cannot err, they mean this: since the church is governed by the Spirit of God, it can go safely without the word. Wherever it goes, it can think or speak nothing but truth. Therefore, if it makes any determination without or alongside God's word, that determination is to be received as a kind of divine oracle. When we say the church cannot err in things necessary to salvation, we mean something entirely different: namely, that this is true only because the church abandons all her own wisdom and allows herself to be taught by the Holy Spirit through the word of God. This is the difference. They place the church's authority outside the word of God. We insist that it must be tied to the word and cannot be separated from it. Is it surprising that the bride and disciple of Christ should be subject to her husband and teacher, hanging continually and eagerly on His every word? This is the order of a well-governed home — the wife submits to the husband's authority. This is the rule of a well-ordered school — the teacher's voice alone is to be heard. So let the church not be wise by her own wisdom or rely on her own conclusions, but let her end her thinking where He has ended His speaking. In this way she will also distrust

all the inventions of her own reason. But in those things where she stands on God's word, she will waver with no doubt or uncertainty, but rest with great assurance and firm constancy. Trusting in the fullness of the promises she has received, she will have abundant ground on which her faith may rest — she need not doubt that the Holy Spirit, the best guide of the right way, is always present with her. But she must also keep in mind what use the Lord intends us to make of His Holy Spirit. 'The Spirit whom I will send from the Father,' He says, 'will lead you into all truth.' How? 'Because He will remind you of all the things I have told you.' By this He indicates that nothing more is to be expected from the Spirit than that He would illuminate our minds to grasp the truth of Christ's own teaching. Chrysostom says it well: 'Many boast of the Holy Spirit, but those who speak their own words falsely pretend to have Him. As Christ testified that He did not speak of Himself — because He spoke from the law and the prophets — so if anything beside the Gospel is thrust in under the title of the Spirit, we should not believe it. For as Christ is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, so the Spirit is the fulfillment of the Gospel.' From this it is easy to see how wrong our opponents are when they invoke the Holy Spirit for no other purpose than to introduce under His name doctrines that are foreign to God's word. For the Spirit will be inseparably joined to God's word — which is exactly what Christ declares when He promises the Spirit to His church. This is the truth. The sobriety the Lord once prescribed for His church, He requires to be maintained forever. He has forbidden her to add anything to His word or take anything away from it. This is God's inviolable decree — and this is what our opponents seek to overturn when they pretend the church is governed by the Spirit apart from the word.

Here they complain again, saying that the church had to add something to the apostles' writings — or that the apostles themselves afterward supplied by word of mouth many things they had not taught clearly enough in their writings. They cite Christ's words: 'I have many things to say to you, which you cannot bear now.' And they claim that these are the traditions which, without written Scripture, have been received through custom and practice. But what shamelessness is this? I grant that the disciples were still inexperienced and in some ways not yet ready to learn when the Lord said those words. But were they in the same condition of dullness when they wrote their teachings — needing to later supply by word of mouth what they had ignorantly left out? If they were already led by the Spirit of truth into all truth when they wrote, what prevented them from containing within those writings a full and complete knowledge of the Gospel's doctrine? But let us grant them what they ask. Let them only point out what those things are that needed to be revealed without being written down. If they dare attempt that, I will confront them with Augustine's words: 'When the Lord has said nothing about them, which of us would dare say these are the ones or those are the ones? And if anyone dares say so, how would he prove it?' But why argue over something so unnecessary? Any child knows that in the apostles' writings — which these men treat as crippled and only half complete — is found the very fruit of the revelation the Lord had then promised them.

They say: did not Christ settle all dispute about whatever the church teaches and decrees, when He commanded that anyone who speaks against the church should be treated as a pagan and a tax collector (Matthew 18:17)? First, that passage says nothing

about doctrine at all. It only establishes the authority of censures for correcting sins — so that those who have been admonished or rebuked will not resist the church's judgment. But setting that aside, it is remarkable how little shame these men have in appealing to that passage. For what does it give them, except that the consent of the church is never to be despised — and the church only consents to the truth of God's word? The church is to be heard, they say. Who denies it — as long as it speaks nothing but from the word of the Lord? If they want to claim more than that, let them know that Christ's words there give them nothing. Nor should anyone think me too contentious for standing so firmly on this point: that the church is not permitted to create any new doctrine — that is, to teach and deliver as an oracle anything beyond what the Lord has revealed in His word. People of sound judgment can see how great the danger is if such authority is once handed over to men. They can also see how wide a door is opened to the mockery and scheming of the wicked, if we say that what men have decided is to be received as an oracle among Christians. Furthermore, Christ in that passage was speaking in the context of His own time — He was giving that title to the synagogue, so that His disciples would afterward learn to respect holy assemblies of the church. By the same logic, every city and village would have equal authority to manufacture new doctrines.

The examples they use do nothing to help their case. They say that the baptism of infants rests not so much on an express command of Scripture as on a decree of the church. But it would be a sorry defense if we had to fall back on the bare authority of the church to justify infant baptism. It will be shown clearly in another place that the matter stands very differently. Similarly, they object

that the Nicene Council's declaration that the Son is consubstantial with the Father is nowhere found in those exact words in Scripture. But in saying this they do great injustice to the fathers — as though the fathers had rashly condemned Arius simply because he refused to swear to their wording, when he professed everything contained in the writings of the prophets and apostles. I grant that the exact word 'consubstantial' is not in Scripture. But when Scripture so repeatedly affirms that there is only one God, and so repeatedly calls Christ the true and eternal God, one with the Father — what else were the fathers of the Nicene Council doing when they declared Him to be of one substance, but simply expressing in clear terms the natural meaning of Scripture? Theodoret records that Constantine opened their assembly with these words: 'In disputes about divine matters, there is a prescribed teaching of the Holy Spirit. The books of the Gospels and the Apostles, along with the oracles of the Prophets, show us fully the mind of God. Therefore, setting aside discord, let us draw our discussions of these questions from the words of the Spirit.' No one at that time spoke against these holy words. No one raised the objection that the church may add something of her own — that the Spirit did not reveal everything to the apostles, or at least did not pass it on to those who came after, or any such argument. If our opponents were right, then first, Constantine sinned by taking away the church's authority. And since none of the bishops rose to defend it, they were not without guilt — they would have been traitors to the church's rights. But since Theodoret records that they willingly embraced what the Emperor said, it is certain that this new doctrine was completely unknown at that time.

CHAPTER 9: OF COUNCILS AND THEIR AUTHORITY



Even if I were to grant them everything they say about the church, it would do little to advance their cause. For whatever they claim for the church, they immediately transfer to councils, which in their view represent the church. In fact, their fierce insistence on the church's power has no other purpose than to hand everything over to the bishop of Rome and his associates. But before I take up this question, I must first register two things. First, where I speak somewhat sharply on this point, it is not because I esteem the ancient councils less than I should. I reverence them wholeheartedly and want them to be honored by everyone as they deserve. But there is a proper limit: nothing must be taken away from Christ. And Christ's right is this: to be the head in all councils, with no one sharing that dignity with Him. He is the head, I say, only when He governs the whole assembly by His word and Spirit. Second, where I attribute less to councils than our opponents demand, it is not because I fear councils, as though they would support their side and undermine ours. For we are so fully equipped by the Lord's word to prove our own doctrine and to

overthrow the entire papacy that we scarcely need anything else. Yet if the matter requires it, the ancient councils for the most part furnish us with more than enough for both purposes.

Now let us address the matter itself. If we ask Scripture about the authority of councils, no promise is clearer than Christ's own words: 'Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am among them.' But this promise applies no less to every particular assembly than to a general council. The difficulty in the question does not lie there, however, but in this: a condition is attached. God will be in the midst of a council only if it is gathered in His name. So let our opponents name councils of bishops a thousand times — it will accomplish little. We will not believe what they claim — that such councils are governed by the Holy Spirit — until they have proved that these councils are gathered in the name of Christ. For it is just as possible for wicked and corrupt bishops to conspire against Christ as for godly and honest bishops to come together in His name. The many decrees that have come out of such councils are a very clear proof of this — but we will see that later. For now I give only one answer: Christ promises His presence only to those gathered in His name. Let us therefore define what that means. I deny that people are gathered in the name of Christ who, disregarding God's commandment forbidding anything to be added to or taken from His word, decide everything according to their own will — who, not content with the oracles of Scripture as the only rule of perfect wisdom, fabricate new things from their own minds. Since Christ did not promise to be present at all councils, but attached a specific mark to distinguish true and lawful councils from others, we must not ignore that distinction. This is the covenant God made in ancient times with the Levitical priests

— that they would teach from His mouth. He required this of the prophets throughout their ministry. The same law was laid on the apostles. Whoever breaks this covenant, God refuses to honor with the dignity of priesthood or any authority. Let our opponents resolve this difficulty for me, if they expect my faith to be bound to the decrees of men beyond the word of God.

They assume that the truth cannot remain in the church unless it resides with the pastors, and that the church cannot stand unless it appears in general councils. But this was far from always being true, as the prophets themselves leave us clear testimony. In Isaiah's time there was a church in Jerusalem that God had not yet forsaken — and yet of the pastors He said: 'Their watchmen are all blind, they have no knowledge. They are all silent dogs unable to bark. They lie down and sleep, they love slumber. And the shepherds themselves have no understanding — they have all turned to their own way.' Hosea similarly says: 'The watchman of Ephraim is with God, a fowler's snare, and hatred in the house of God' — sarcastically pairing them with God to expose how worthless their pretended priesthood was. The church also continued into Jeremiah's time. And what does he say of the pastors? 'From prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.' And again: 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I did not send them, nor did I command them.' For the full picture, one need only read Jeremiah's chapters 23 and 40 in their entirety. Ezekiel at the same time was no less forceful against the same men: 'The conspiracy of her prophets in the midst of her is like a roaring lion tearing its prey. Her priests have violated My law, profaned My holy things, and made no dis-

inction between the holy and the common' — and so on with what follows in the same vein. Complaints like these appear throughout the prophets — nothing is more common in their writings.

Perhaps one might say: that was true of the Jews, but our age is free from so great an evil. I wish to God it were. But the Holy Spirit has given us clear warning that it will be very much otherwise. Peter's words are plain: 'Just as there were false prophets among the ancient people, so there will be false teachers among you, secretly introducing destructive heresies.' Do you not see how he says the danger will come not from ordinary people, but from those who will boast the title of teachers and pastors? And how many times did Christ and His apostles foretell that the church would face severe dangers from within the pastoral office? Indeed, Paul explicitly says that antichrist will sit nowhere but in the temple of God — meaning that the terrible catastrophe he describes will come from none other than those sitting in the place of pastors in the church. And he shows elsewhere that the seeds of this great disaster were already sprouting in his own day. For when he addressed the bishops of Ephesus, he said: 'I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own number men will arise speaking twisted things, to draw disciples after them.' If the pastoral order could fall this far in so short a time, how much more corruption could spread through many long centuries? Without filling many pages with names and examples: the history of almost every era warns us that truth is not always cradled in the bosom of the pastors, and that the safety of the church does not rest on their condition. They ought indeed to have been the guardians and protectors

of the church's peace and safety, for which they were ordained. But there is a difference between what a person owes and what he actually performs.

Let no one read these words as though I would carelessly and universally disparage the authority of all pastors. I am only cautioning that even among those called pastors, discernment is required — we should not assume that everyone who bears the title is truly a pastor. But the pope with his whole flock of bishops, on no other grounds than that they are called pastors, shakes off obedience to God's word and drives everything forward by their own will. All the while they insist that they cannot lack the light of truth, that the Spirit of God permanently dwells in them, and that the church consists of them and perishes with them. As though there were no longer any judgments of the Lord by which He might punish the world today with the same kind of punishment He once used against the ingratitude of the ancient people — striking the pastors with blindness and spiritual stupor. These foolish men do not realize they are singing the same song as those in ancient times who warred against God's word. For Jeremiah's enemies prepared themselves against the truth with exactly this argument: 'Come, let us devise plans against Jeremiah — for the law will not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.'

From this it is easy to answer the objection about general councils. No one can deny that the Jews had a true church in the time of the prophets. But if a general council had been assembled from all the priests at that time, what kind of church would have appeared? We hear what God said — not to one or two of them, but to the entire order: 'The priests will be appalled, and the prophets will be

dismayed.' And again: 'The law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.' And again: 'It will be night for you instead of vision, and darkness instead of prophecy. The sun will set on the prophets, and the day will grow dark for them.' If all such men had been gathered into one assembly, what spirit would have governed that council? We have a vivid example in the council Ahab convened. Four hundred prophets were present. But because they had come together with no other purpose than to flatter the wicked king, the Lord sent Satan as a lying spirit into the mouths of all of them. By their unanimous voices, truth was condemned, Micah was declared a heretic, struck, and thrown in prison. The same was done to Jeremiah and to the other prophets.

But let one example stand for all — one that is more striking than the rest. In the council that the chief priests and Pharisees assembled at Jerusalem against Christ, what was lacking in terms of outward appearance? If there had been no true church in Jerusalem at that time, Christ would never have participated in their sacrifices and other ceremonies. A solemn assembly was convened; the high priest presided; the whole order of priests sat alongside him — and yet Christ was condemned and His teaching suppressed. This proves that the church was not enclosed in that council. But surely, someone will say, there is no risk of anything like that happening to us. And who has given us that assurance? It is not without the fault of negligence to be so careless about such an important matter. And when the Holy Spirit explicitly prophecies through Paul that there will be 'a great falling away' — which can only occur when the pastors are the first to abandon God — why do we willfully blind ourselves to our own destruction? We must therefore never concede that the church is identical with the

company of pastors — for the Lord has nowhere guaranteed that they will always be good. He has in fact declared that they will sometimes be evil. When He warns us of this danger, He does so to make us all the more watchful.

What then? Are you saying councils should have no authority in making decisions? Not at all. I am not arguing that all councils should be condemned or all their acts swept away. But, you might say, you are subjecting them all to private judgment, so that anyone is free to accept or reject whatever a council has decided. No — that is not it either. What I am saying is this: whenever a council's decree is brought forward, it should first be carefully examined — when the council was held, why it was held, and who was present. Then the substance of the matter should be tested against the rule of Scripture. This should be done in such a way that the council's decision carries genuine weight as a prior judgment, without that weight preventing the examination I have described. I wish all people would practice the moderation Augustine prescribes in his third book against Maximinus. When he wanted to briefly silence this heretic who was appealing to council decrees, he wrote: 'I should not cite the Synod of Nicaea against you, nor should you cite the Synod of Ariminum against me, as though either of us could prevail by a prejudged ruling. I am not bound by the one, nor you by the other. Let the matter be decided by the authority of Scripture — not texts peculiar to either side, but those common to both. Let argument meet argument, case meet case, reason meet reason.' This would give councils the dignity they deserve, while leaving Scripture in its proper place above all things — so that nothing escapes its rule. On these terms we gladly embrace and honor as holy the early councils: those of Nicaea, Constantinople,

the first of Ephesus, Chalcedon, and similar ones held to refute errors. These contain nothing but the pure and natural exposition of Scripture, which the holy fathers applied with spiritual wisdom to subdue the enemies of true religion who arose in their day. In some of the later councils, too, we see genuine zeal for godliness and clear signs of learning and wisdom. But as things commonly tend to get worse over time, the later councils show how much the church has at various points fallen from the purity of that golden age. I do not doubt that even in those more corrupt periods, councils had some bishops of better character. But in these councils, the same thing happened that Roman senators themselves complained of in making Senate decrees: when votes are counted rather than weighed, the better cause is often defeated by sheer numbers. They produced many wicked decisions. There is no need to catalog the particular examples here — it would take too long, and others have already done it so thoroughly that little could be added.

What need is there to rehearse council after council contradicting one another? And no one should object against me that one of the two contradicting councils is simply illegitimate. By what standard would we judge that? By this, if I am not mistaken: we judge it by Scripture — whether its decrees agree with true doctrine. That is the only reliable law by which councils can be discerned. About nine hundred years ago the council assembled at Constantinople under the Emperor Leo judged that images set up in churches should be torn down and destroyed. Shortly afterward, the Council of Nicaea, which the Empress Irene convened in opposition, decreed that images should be restored. Which of these shall we acknowledge as the lawful council? The latter, which restored images to churches, has prevailed among the people. But Augustine says

this cannot be done without the most immediate danger of idolatry. Epiphanius, who came before, speaks even more sharply: he says it is wickedness and an abomination to have images visible in a Christian church. Would either of them, if alive today, have approved that council? And if the historians are truthful and the acts of the council are to be believed, not only were images themselves received there — the worship of them was as well. Such a decree clearly came from Satan. And how they twisted and mangled Scripture to justify it — turning it into a mockery — I have already sufficiently demonstrated. In any case, the only way to judge between conflicting and contradictory councils — of which there are many — is to test them all by the standard that governs all people and angels alike: the word of the Lord. On this basis we embrace the Council of Chalcedon while rejecting the Second Council of Ephesus — because the latter confirmed the wickedness of Eutyches, while the former condemned it. This is how holy men judged the matter, by Scripture alone — and we follow them in judging, so that the word of God that gave light to them also gives light to us. Let the Romanists now go and boast, as they do, that the Holy Spirit is permanently bound and fixed to their councils.

There is also something one might reasonably find lacking even in those ancient and purer councils — either because the learned and wise men present, being entirely focused on the matter at hand, did not foresee many other things; or because many lesser matters slipped by unaddressed while they were occupied with weightier concerns; or simply because, being human, they could be led astray by inexperience; or because they were sometimes swept along by excessive passion. The last of these — which seems most striking — was clearly visible even at the Nicene

Council, whose dignity has been deservedly and universally received with the highest reverence. The core article of our faith was at stake; Arius, the opponent, was present and ready to be challenged directly; everything depended on the unity of those who had gathered to combat Arian error. And yet — forgetting such great dangers, and as if they had lost all gravity, modesty, and common decency — they abandoned the battle before them and turned against each other. It was as though they had come not to fight Arius, but to do him a favor. Ugly accusations were traded, written charges were circulated, and the quarreling would have ended only in mutual destruction — had the Emperor Constantine not stepped in. Rather than rebuking them, he shamed their lack of self-control by gently praising what restraint remained, and declared that judging their personal conduct was beyond his competence. If this is what happened in that council, how many ways might the councils that followed have failed? This does not require lengthy proof. Let anyone read through the acts of the councils and he will find many weaknesses — and I am not even speaking of anything more serious.

Even Leo, bishop of Rome, did not hesitate to charge the Council of Chalcedon with ambition and rashness — though he acknowledged that its doctrine was sound. He did not deny it was a legitimate council, but he openly stated that it could err. Perhaps someone will think I am wasting time pointing out such errors, since our opponents themselves admit that councils can err in things not necessary for salvation. But this effort is not superfluous. Though they are compelled to admit it in words, when they press upon us the decisions of every council on every matter as oracles of the Holy Spirit, they are claiming far more than they ini-

tially acknowledged. In doing so, what are they really saying — except that councils cannot err, or that even if they do, we are not permitted to see the truth or refuse to flatter their errors? My only point is this: that the Holy Spirit governed the godly and holy councils, yet allowed human nature to produce some failures along the way — so that we would not place too much trust in men. This is a more measured position than Gregory Nazianzen's saying that he never saw a council come to a good end — for someone who says all councils without exception ended badly leaves them very little authority. There is no need at this point to address provincial councils separately. It is easy enough to judge from what we have said about general councils how much authority provincial councils ought to have to create new articles of faith or receive whatever teaching they please.

When our Romanists see that all rational argument fails them in defending their cause, they fall back on their last desperate resort: that even if the men are dull in mind and corrupt in will, God's word still commands obedience to rulers. Is that so? What if I deny that such men are rulers at all? For they should assume no greater authority than Joshua had — who was both a prophet of the Lord and an outstanding shepherd. And hear in what terms the Lord set Joshua in his office: 'Let not this book of the law depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night. You shall not turn to the right or to the left; then you will make your way prosperous and succeed.' Spiritual rulers, then, are those who do not turn from the Lord's law in either direction. But if the teaching of all pastors, whatever their character, is to be received without question — why were we so frequently and earnestly warned not to listen to false prophets? 'Do not listen,' says the

Lord through Jeremiah, 'to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They are teaching you vanity, not from the mouth of the Lord.' And: 'Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.' And John's exhortation that we should 'test the spirits, whether they are from God' would be pointless — a test from which even angels are not exempt, much less Satan with all his lies. What then does Christ's saying mean: 'If the blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch'? Does it not make plain that it matters greatly what kind of prophets are heard, and that not all are to be followed without examination? There is therefore no reason to be intimidated by their titles into sharing in their blindness — especially since we see that the Lord's great concern on the other side was to warn us against being led by others' error, whatever impressive name it hides behind. If Christ's word is true, then all blind guides — whether they call themselves fathers of the church, prelates, or bishops — can only drag those who follow them into the same headlong fall. Let no titles of councils, pastors, or bishops — which can be falsely claimed just as easily as genuinely held — prevent us from examining by the rule of God's word every spirit, from whatever source, to prove whether it is from God or not.

Having shown that the church has no power to establish new doctrine, let us now address the power they attribute to it in interpreting Scripture. We gladly grant that when a doctrinal dispute arises, there is no better or more reliable remedy than for a synod of true bishops to assemble and discuss the contested teaching together. A decision reached by pastors of the churches in common, calling on the Spirit of Christ, carries far greater weight than if each one formed his view privately at home, or if a few private in-

dividuals worked it out among themselves. Moreover, when bishops gather together, they can more effectively advise one another about what to teach and in what form, so that doctrinal diversity does not cause offense. Third, Paul prescribes this procedure for judging doctrines. While he grants every individual church the power of discernment, he shows that for weightier matters the churches should undertake a common examination together. The very instinct of godliness teaches us the same: if someone troubles the church with an unfamiliar doctrine, and the matter goes so far that a serious division is at risk, the churches should first come together, examine the proposed question, and after full discussion bring forth a judgment drawn from Scripture. This judgment should both resolve the people's doubts and silence the audacity of wicked and scheming men, preventing them from pressing further. This is exactly what happened when Arius arose: the Nicene Council assembled, broke the force of his wickedness, restored peace to the churches he had disturbed, and defended the eternal divinity of Christ against his blasphemous teaching. When Eunomius and Macedonius later stirred up new troubles, the Council of Constantinople met them with the same remedy. At Ephesus, the wickedness of Nestorius was condemned and expelled. This has been from the beginning the church's ordinary means of preserving unity whenever Satan began to work. But let us remember that men like Athanasius, Basil, Cyril, and the other defenders of true doctrine whom the Lord raised up then are not found in every age or every place. Consider what happened at the Second Council of Ephesus: the heresy of Eutyches prevailed; the godly Flavianus and other holy men were banished; and many other disasters occurred — because the seditious and deeply cor-

rupt Dioscorus presided there, not the Spirit of the Lord. But was the church present in that council? I grant that it was not. I am firmly convinced that truth does not die in the church even when it is suppressed by one council — the Lord wonderfully preserves it so that it rises again and prevails in due time. But I deny that whatever a council has received by common consent is necessarily a true and reliable interpretation of Scripture.

The Romanists are aiming at something different, however, when they teach that the power to interpret Scripture belongs to councils — and belongs to them with no appeal. They exploit this claim by calling whatever councils decree an 'exposition of Scripture.' On purgatory, the intercession of saints, auricular confession, and such things, not one syllable can be found in Scripture. But because all these things have been established by the authority of the church — that is, received into common opinion and practice — each one must be received as an exposition of Scripture. And not only that: if a council decrees something that Scripture itself cries out against, it will still be called an exposition of Scripture. Christ commands all to drink from the cup He offers at the Supper. The Council of Constance forbade it to be given to the laity and allowed only the priest to drink. What directly contradicts Christ's institution they insist must be received as an exposition of it. Paul calls the forbidding of marriage 'the hypocrisy of liars,' and the Holy Spirit elsewhere declares that marriage is honorable among all. When they afterward forbade priests to marry, they require us to receive this as the true and natural exposition of Scripture — when nothing could be more contrary to it. If anyone dares open his mouth in objection, he will be judged a heretic — for the church's determination admits no appeal, and to doubt her

interpretation is a serious offense. Why would I denounce such shamelessness? Exposing it is sufficient to defeat it. As for their teaching on the church's power to approve Scripture, I will deliberately pass over it. To make the oracles of God subject to human approval — so that they carry authority only because people have found them pleasing — is a blasphemy not worth dignifying in detail. I have already touched on this matter earlier. But I will ask them one thing: if Scripture's authority rests on the church's approval, which council decree will they cite for that? I suspect they have none. Why then did Arius submit to being refuted at Nicaea by testimonies from the Gospel of John? By their own logic, he was free to reject them, since no general council had previously approved them. They appeal to the ancient list known as the Canon, which they say proceeded from the church's judgment. But I ask them again: in which council was that canon established? Here they will have no answer. Furthermore, I want to know what kind of canon they have in mind — for I see that it was never firmly agreed upon among the ancient writers. And if Jerome's view is to carry weight, the books of Maccabees, Tobit, Sirach, and similar books would be placed among the Apocrypha — which those canons in no way allow.

¶ THE .X. CHAPTER. ¶ OF THE POWER
IN MAKYNG OF LAWES: WHEREIN THE
POPE AND HIS HAUE VSED A MOSTE
CRUELL TYRANNY AND BUTCHERIE
VPON SOULES.



Now comes the second part of church power — the power of making laws — out of which an endless stream of human traditions has flowed, becoming so many snares strangling poor souls. Those who exercised this power had no more conscience than the scribes and Pharisees when it came to loading heavy burdens onto other people's shoulders while refusing to touch those burdens themselves with a single finger. I have already explained elsewhere how cruel a butchery is the one they perpetrate in the law of auricular confession. Other laws appear less violent on the surface, but even the most seemingly tolerable ones tyrannically oppress consciences. I leave aside for now how they corrupt the worship of God and strip God Himself of the right that belongs to Him alone as the one true lawmaker. What must be examined here is whether the church has the authority to bind consciences with its own laws. In this discussion I am not touching on the political order. My sole concern is that God be rightly wor-

shipped according to the rule He Himself has prescribed, and that the spiritual liberty which has regard to God remain intact for us. By established usage, all decrees made by men about the worship of God beyond His word are called human traditions. It is against these that we contend — not against the church's useful and holy ordinances that serve the preservation of discipline, decency, or peace. Our contention has one aim: to restrain the immeasurable and barbaric empire that those who call themselves pastors of the church — but are in reality the cruelest of butchers — have seized over souls. They call their laws 'spiritual' and 'pertaining to the soul,' and they declare them necessary for eternal life. But in this way — as I just touched on — Christ's kingdom is invaded and the liberty He granted to the consciences of believers is utterly destroyed. I am not speaking here about the wickedness of the basis on which they require obedience to their laws — teaching that in obeying them one earns forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and salvation, making law-keeping the whole sum of religion. This one thing I firmly hold: no necessity must be imposed on consciences in those things in which Christ has set them free. And unless they are set free — as we showed earlier — they cannot rest with God. Consciences must acknowledge one King alone — Christ their liberator — and be governed by one law of liberty: the holy word of the Gospel. Otherwise they cannot hold onto the grace they once received in Christ. They must be held by no bondage and bound by no chains.

These would-be lawmakers claim their regulations are laws of liberty, a sweet yoke, a light burden. But who cannot see this is pure pretense? They themselves feel no burden from their own laws — having cast off the fear of God, they casually disregard both

their own laws and God's. But those who have any genuine concern for their salvation are far from feeling free while entangled in these snares. Notice the care with which Paul handled this matter — he was unwilling to lay even the smallest snare upon anyone. And not without reason. He saw clearly how deeply consciences would be wounded if they were burdened with necessities in things where the Lord had left them free. On the other side, these men have established countless regulations with the threat of eternal death, demanding them as necessary for salvation. Many of these rules are very difficult to keep, and when taken all together their sheer number makes them impossible. How can those who carry such an overwhelming weight not be tormented by constant anxiety and dread? My purpose here is to challenge those regulations that aim to bind souls inwardly before God and burden them with religious duty as though such requirements were necessary to salvation.

Most people find this question difficult because they do not clearly enough distinguish between the external court — as it is called — and the court of conscience. The difficulty is made worse by Paul's teaching that the magistrate must be obeyed not merely from fear of punishment, but for the sake of conscience. From this one might conclude that political laws also bind the conscience. But if that were so, everything we said in the previous chapter about spiritual governance — and everything we intend to say now — would collapse. To untangle this knot, we must first understand what conscience is. The definition can be drawn from the word's origins. Just as when people grasp and understand things with their minds they are said to 'know' — from which we get the word 'knowledge' — so when they have an awareness of God's judgment as an internal witness that does not allow them to hide their sins,

but drives them to stand accused before God's judgment seat, that awareness is called 'conscience.' Conscience stands as a kind of intermediary between God and man — it does not allow a person to suppress what he knows, but pursues him until it brings him to a reckoning. This is what Paul means when he says that conscience bears witness alongside people, while their thoughts either accuse or defend them before God's judgment. A bare intellectual awareness could remain quietly enclosed within a person. But this moral awareness — the one that brings a person before God's judgment — is like a guardian appointed to observe and monitor all his hidden thoughts, so that nothing remains buried in darkness. From this comes the ancient saying: conscience is a thousand witnesses. For the same reason, Peter speaks of the examination of a good conscience as the source of peace — when, persuaded of Christ's grace, we can present ourselves to God without fear. And the author of Hebrews uses the phrase 'no more conscience of sin' to mean being delivered and acquitted — freed from the accusation of sin.

So just as works have reference to other people, conscience is referred to God — conscience is nothing less than the inward purity of the heart. In this sense Paul writes that love is the goal of the law, proceeding from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Then in the same chapter he shows how much conscience differs from mere understanding, saying that some had shipwrecked their faith by abandoning a good conscience — meaning that conscience is a living devotion to God and a genuine desire to live a holy and godly life. Sometimes conscience is said to have reference to other people, as when Paul in Acts testifies that he strove to maintain a clear conscience before both God and men.

But this is because the fruits of a good conscience overflow even to those around us. Properly speaking, however, conscience refers to God alone, as I said. From this it follows that a law is said to bind the conscience when it binds a person simply — without reference to other people and without taking them into account. For example: God commands not only that the mind be kept chaste and pure from all lust, but He also forbids every form of filthy speech and outward immodesty. My conscience is subject to keeping this law even if there were not another person in the world. So a person who acts immorally does not only sin by setting a bad example for others — he is already guilty before God in his conscience. With matters that are indifferent in themselves, the case is different. We ought to abstain from them if they cause offense — yet conscience remains free. This is what Paul says about meat sacrificed to idols: 'If someone raises a question, do not eat it, for the sake of conscience — I say for conscience, not your own, but the other person's.' A believer who eats such meat after being warned would sin. But even though he must abstain out of regard for his brother — as God prescribes — he still retains his freedom of conscience. We see how this law, which binds the outward act, leaves the conscience free.

Now let us return to human laws. If they are made with the purpose of burdening us with religious obligation — as though keeping them were itself necessary for something — then we say that an obligation has been imposed on conscience that was not lawful to impose. For consciences have to do not with men, but with God alone. This is the basis of the common distinction between the external court and the court of conscience. Even when the whole world was wrapped in the densest fog of ignorance, this

small spark of light remained: people acknowledged that a person's conscience stood above all human judgments. Though in practice they overturned what they confessed in words, God still willed that some testimony to Christian liberty would survive — enough to free consciences from human tyranny. But the difficulty raised by Paul's words is not yet resolved. If we must obey rulers not only out of fear of punishment but also for conscience's sake, it seems to follow that rulers' laws also have authority over conscience. And if that is true, the same should apply to the laws of the church. My answer is this: we must distinguish between the general and the particular. Though individual laws do not each directly touch the conscience, we are bound by the general commandment of God, which commends to us the authority of magistrates. This is Paul's point — that magistrates are to be honored because they are appointed by God. He is not teaching, however, that the specific laws rulers prescribe belong to the inward governance of the soul. Throughout his letters he consistently exalts the worship of God and the spiritual rule of righteous living above all human ordinances. There is another important point closely related to this: human laws — whether made by magistrates or by the church — although they may be necessary to obey (I am speaking of good and righteous laws), do not in themselves bind conscience. This is because the entire obligation to obey them is grounded in the general end they serve, not in the specific things they command. Laws of a very different kind are those that prescribe new forms of worshipping God, or impose necessity in matters that God has left free.

And this is precisely what the so-called ecclesiastical regulations of the papacy are — thrust in as substitutes for the true and necessary worship of God. They are countless in number, and so are the traps they set for souls. Though I have touched on these things in discussing the law, this is a better place to address them fully, and I will now try to draw together the main points as clearly as I can. Since I have already said what seemed sufficient about the tyranny these false bishops seize for themselves in claiming freedom to teach whatever they please, I will skip that part here and focus on the specific power they claim to make laws. These false bishops burden consciences with new laws on the pretense that they have been appointed by the Lord as spiritual lawmakers, since the governance of the church is entrusted to them. They therefore declare that whatever they command and prescribe must necessarily be obeyed by the Christian people — and that anyone who breaks their laws is guilty of double disobedience, being rebellious to both God and the church. Certainly, if they were true bishops, I would grant them some authority in this area — not as much as they claim, but as much as is needed for the proper ordering of the church. But since they are everything except what they claim to be, they cannot take the smallest thing to themselves without taking too much. Setting that aside, however, let us for now grant them that whatever authority true bishops possess, they too rightly hold. Even so, I deny that they are therefore appointed as lawmakers over believers — free to prescribe on their own authority a rule of life, or to compel the people committed to them to keep their ordinances. What I mean is this: it is not lawful for them to deliver to the church as binding necessity what they have invented without God's word. This authority was unknown to the apostles, and the

Lord Himself repeatedly and explicitly forbade it to the church's ministers. I marvel at who first dared to take it upon themselves — and who today dares to defend it — contrary to apostolic example and against God's plain prohibition.

As for what pertains to the complete rule of righteous living, the Lord has contained all of it in His law, leaving nothing for human beings to add. He did this for two reasons: first, because the whole substance of upright living consists in this — that all works be governed by His will as by a rule — so that He alone would be held by us as the teacher and director of life. And second, to show that He requires from us nothing beyond obedience. For this reason James says: 'He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy.' We see that God claims this as His sole prerogative: to rule us by the governance and laws of His word. Isaiah says the same, though somewhat more broadly: 'The Lord is our King, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our Judge. He will save us.' Both passages make the same point: the one who holds authority over souls holds the judgment of life and death. James states this plainly. No human being can take that upon himself. God must therefore be acknowledged as the only King of souls — the one to whom alone belongs the power to save and destroy, as Isaiah's words express, and who is King, Judge, Lawgiver, and Savior. This is why Peter, when instructing pastors about their duties, urges them to feed the flock — not exercising domination over 'the clergy,' by which he means God's inheritance, that is, the believing people. If we weigh this rightly — that what God claims as exclusively His own cannot be

transferred to human beings — we will understand that all the power these men claim when they command anything in the church apart from God's word is thereby stripped away entirely.

Since the whole case rests on this — that if God is the only Lawgiver, it is not lawful for men to take that honor to themselves — it is also important to keep in mind the two reasons we stated for why the Lord reserves this solely to Himself. The first is that His will may be for us a perfect rule of all righteousness and holiness — so that in knowing Him we have complete knowledge for living well. The second is that when the question arises of how to worship Him rightly, He alone may have authority over our souls, since He is the one we must obey and upon whose word we must depend. With these two reasons clearly in mind, it becomes easy to judge which human ordinances contradict God's word. All those that are presented as belonging to the true worship of God — and to which consciences are bound as though keeping them were necessary — fall into that category. Let us remember, then, to weigh all human laws by this standard, if we want a reliable test that will never lead us astray. Paul uses the first of these reasons in Colossians when contending against the false apostles who were trying to burden the churches with new requirements. He uses the second more prominently in Galatians for a similar purpose. His argument in Colossians is this: the teaching about the true worship of God is not to be sought from human beings, because the Lord has faithfully and fully instructed us how He is to be worshipped. To prove this in the first chapter, he says that the Gospel contains all the wisdom by which the man of God may be made complete in Christ. In the second chapter he says that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. From this he concludes:

let believers beware of being drawn away from Christ's flock by vain philosophy based on human traditions. At the close of the chapter he condemns with even greater boldness all 'ethelothreskia' — that is, all self-invented worship, whether devised by a person himself or received from others, and all the commandments that people dare to give concerning the worship of God. We have it on Paul's authority, then, that all ordinances claiming to constitute the worship of God are wicked. As for the passages in Galatians where he forcefully argues that consciences — which ought to be governed by God alone — must not be ensnared by human bonds, they are clear enough, especially in the fifth chapter. It is sufficient simply to point to them.

But since the matter will be better understood from examples, before going further it is good to apply this teaching to our own times. We say that the regulations called ecclesiastical constitutions — by which the pope and his associates burden the church — are harmful and wicked. Our opponents defend them as holy and conducive to salvation. There are two kinds: some concern ceremonies and rites, others pertain more to discipline. Is there good reason to challenge both? Better reason than we even need. First — do not the authors themselves openly declare that the very worship of God is contained in these regulations? For what purpose do they conduct their ceremonies, if not to worship God through them? And this is not simply the error of ignorant common people — it is the teaching of those who hold the office of teachers. I am not even touching the gross abominations by which they have worked to overthrow all godliness. But failing to observe even the smallest of their petty traditions would not be counted among them as so grave an offense, unless they had made the worship of God subject

to their invented requirements. What offense do we then commit by refusing to tolerate what Paul taught was intolerable — that the legitimate ordering of God's worship should be reduced to human will? Especially when they command people to worship according to the elements of this world, which Paul declares to be contrary to Christ. And it is well known with what precise and binding force they require compliance with everything they command. When we resist this, we stand with Paul — who would in no way allow faithful consciences to be brought into bondage to human authority.

What makes things even worse is that once religion begins to be defined by such vain inventions, there always follows a perverse and abominable consequence — the very one Christ charged against the Pharisees: the commandment of God is made void for the sake of human traditions. I will not use my own words to press this charge against today's lawmakers. Let them have the victory, if they can clear themselves of this accusation from Christ. But how could they excuse themselves when among them it is considered infinitely more serious to have skipped auricular confession at the appointed time of year than to have lived a thoroughly wicked life all year long? More serious to have touched one's lips with a bit of meat on a Friday than to have defiled one's body with sexual immorality all week? More serious to have done honest work on a day dedicated to some minor saint than to have continually exercised one's body in the most wicked offenses? For a priest to enter a lawful marriage is counted worse than being entangled in a thousand adulteries. Failing to make a vowed pilgrimage is worse than breaking faith in all one's promises. Not wasting money on the monstrous and useless excess and display of church buildings is worse than failing to meet the desperate needs of the poor. To pass

an idol without doing it honor is worse than treating all kinds of people with contempt. To fail to mumble through a prescribed number of words at certain hours without understanding is worse than never having formed a true prayer in one's heart. If this is not making void the commandment of God for the sake of human traditions, then what is? While they commend the keeping of God's commandments only coldly and in passing, they demand obedience to their own with all the urgency and earnestness of those who believe the whole substance of godliness rests in them. While they treat violations of God's law with light penalties of satisfaction, they punish even the smallest infraction of their own decrees with imprisonment, exile, fire, or sword. They are not particularly sharp or severe toward those who despise God — but toward those who despise themselves they pursue with relentless hatred to the utmost extreme. And they so instruct all those whose simplicity they hold captive that these people would more calmly see the whole law of God overturned than see a single small article — as they call it — of the church's commandments broken. First, there is great offense in the fact that over small and, by God's standard, entirely free matters, one person despises, judges, and condemns another. But beyond even that, those 'childish elements of the world' — as Paul calls them in Galatians (Galatians 4:9) — are weighed as more valuable than the heavenly oracles of God. A man who is practically cleared of adultery is condemned for what he ate; a man who has license to use a prostitute is forbidden to have a wife. This is the fruit that comes from the kind of obedience that turns so far from God as it inclines toward men.

There are two other significant failings we reject in these same ordinances. First, they prescribe for the most part useless and sometimes downright foolish observances. Second, godly consciences are crushed under their sheer endless number — and being drawn back into a kind of Judaism, they cling so to shadows that they cannot reach Christ. When I call these things foolish and useless, I know it will not seem credible to the worldly mind, which is so fond of them that it thinks the church would be completely ruined without them. But this is exactly what Paul means when he speaks of things that have 'the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion, and ascetic discipline, and severe treatment of the body' (Colossians 2:23). This is a most wholesome warning, one we must never let slip from our minds. Human traditions, Paul says, deceive under the appearance of wisdom. Where does this appearance come from? Because they are invented by human beings, the human mind recognizes its own in them — and recognizing what is its own, it embraces it all the more gladly than it would anything, however good, that is less agreeable to its own vanity. They also gain another commendation: they seem to be useful training in humility, pressing down the minds of men under their yoke. And finally, because they appear to restrain the indulgence of the flesh and subdue it by rigorous abstinence, they are thought to be wisely designed. But what does Paul say to all this? Does he not strip off these masks so that the simple will not be deceived by false appearances? He judged it sufficient to simply note that they were inventions of men. He passes over all these apparent virtues without argument, treating them as nothing. He knew that all self-made worship in the church stands condemned. He knew that it is the more suspicious to believers the more it pleases the human mind.

He knew that the artificial display of outward humility differs so widely from true humility that the difference can be easily seen. He knew that this childish training amounts to no more than physical exercise. Therefore he directed that the very qualities for which human traditions were commended among the ignorant should serve believers as a standing refutation of those traditions (Colossians 2:23).

So today, not only uneducated common people but every person puffed up with worldly wisdom is wonderfully delighted by the spectacle of ceremonies. Hypocrites and foolish women think that nothing more glorious or better could ever be devised. But those who search more deeply and weigh more carefully by the standard of godliness what all these ceremonies are truly worth come to understand two things. First, they are trivial, because they serve no real purpose. Second, they are deceptive, because their empty display only dazzles the eyes of onlookers. I am speaking of those ceremonies to which the Roman leaders want to attach great mysteries, but which we find by experience to be nothing more than sheer mockery. And it is no surprise that the inventors of these ceremonies have sunk so far as to fool both themselves and others with pointless nonsense. They partly took their model from the foolish practices of the pagans, and partly, like apes, they thoughtlessly imitated the ancient rituals of Moses' law -- rituals that have no more to do with us than the sacrifices of animals and similar things. Even if there were no other argument, no sensible person would expect anything good from such a badly assembled patchwork. And the reality plainly shows that many ceremonies serve no purpose other than to overwhelm the people rather than teach them. In the same way, when it comes to these newly invented reg-

ulations that pervert discipline rather than preserve it, the hypocrites place great importance on them. But if a person examines them more closely, he will find they are nothing but a fading shadow of discipline.

But now, to come to the other point: who does not see that traditions have been piled one on top of another until they have grown into such an enormous number that the Christian church can in no way bear them? This is why ceremonies have taken on a kind of Jewish character, and the other observances bring a devastating slaughter to Christian souls. Augustine complained that in his day, with God's commandments neglected, everything was overrun with so many human presumptions that a person was more severely rebuked for touching the ground with a bare foot during the octave than for burying his mind in drunkenness. He complained that the church, which the mercy of God intended to be free, was so weighed down that the condition of the Jews was far more tolerable. If that holy man had lived in our age, what protests would he have raised against the bondage that exists now? For the number of rules is ten times greater, and each small detail is a hundred times more strictly enforced than it was back then. This is what always happens: once these perverse lawmakers gain control, they never stop commanding and forbidding until they reach extreme pettiness. Paul expressed this perfectly in these words: If you have died to the world, why are you held bound as though you were still living in it, with rules like "Do not eat, do not taste, do not touch"? Now the Greek word *aptesthai* means both "to eat" and "to touch," and here it clearly refers to eating, so that there would not be an unnecessary repetition. Therefore Paul describes the methods of the false apostles brilliantly here. They be-

gin with superstition, forbidding not only eating but almost even chewing. When they have achieved that, they also forbid tasting. When this too is granted them, they declare it unlawful even to touch with a finger.

This tyranny of human ordinances deserves every condemnation we bring against it today — it has resulted in poor consciences being grievously tormented by countless decrees and the relentless demand that each one be kept. I have already addressed canons pertaining to discipline elsewhere. As for the ceremonies — what can I say? They have resulted in Christ being half-buried while we are sent back to Jewish figures. 'Our Lord Christ,' says Augustine, 'has bound the fellowship of the new people together with sacraments few in number, outstanding in their meaning, and easy in their observance.' How far the mass and variety of observances in which the church is today entangled departs from this simplicity cannot be fully stated. I know the clever excuse some subtle men offer for this corruption. They say that many among us are as unlearned as the people of Israel were, and that such elementary instructions were established for their sake — that the stronger may not need them, but should not neglect them since they see them as beneficial for the weaker. My answer is this: I am not ignorant of what we owe to our weaker brothers. But I insist that overwhelming them with great heaps of ceremonies is not the way to provide for them. The Lord did not without purpose make a distinction between us and the ancient people — His will was to instruct them like children through signs and figures, but to instruct us more simply without such outward trappings. 'As a child,' Paul says, 'is kept under a schoolmaster and in custody according to the capacity of his age — so the Jews are kept under the law.' But we are like

full-grown adults, freed from tutors and guardians, no longer in need of childish introductions. The Lord foresaw exactly what kind of people His church would contain and how they should be governed. And yet He made this distinction between us and the Jews in the manner we have described. It is therefore foolish, in seeking to provide for the ignorant, to revive a Judaism that Christ has abolished. Christ Himself pointed to this difference between the old and new people when He said to the Samaritan woman that the time had come when true worshippers would worship God in spirit and truth. This spiritual worship had always been the heart of true worship — but the new worshippers differed from the old in that under Moses, spiritual worship was clothed in and entangled with many ceremonies. Those ceremonies having been removed, God is now worshipped more simply. Those who blur this distinction overthrow the order Christ established. Shall there then be no ceremonies given to the less educated to help them in their ignorance? I am not saying that. I genuinely believe that this kind of help is useful for them. My only concern is that the means used should clearly display Christ rather than obscure Him. God has given us a few ceremonies — not burdensome ones — so that they might show Christ as present. The Jews were given more, to show Him as yet to come. Absent, I say, not in power, but in the manner of signifying. To maintain the right means, it is necessary to maintain that same fewness in number, ease in observance, and dignity in meaning — which consists in clarity. Has this been done? The answer is plain to everyone.

I will say nothing here about the pernicious opinions with which people's minds are filled — the idea that these ceremonies are sacrifices by which God is properly appeased, by which sins are

cleansed, and by which righteousness and salvation are obtained. They will deny that such foreign errors corrupt the ceremonies themselves, since a person can equally misuse even works commanded by God. But the greater offense is this: that so much honor is given to works rashly invented by human will that they are thought to deserve eternal life. For God-commanded works receive their reward because the Lawgiver Himself, out of respect for the obedience shown, accepts them. They do not receive their value from their own worthiness or merit, but because God so highly values our obedience toward Him. I am speaking here of the perfection of works that God commands — a perfection that human beings do not achieve. For even the works of the law that we do have no acceptance except through God's free goodness, since our obedience in them is weak and defective. But since we are not here debating what value works have apart from Christ, let us leave that question aside. I return to the matter directly at hand: whatever commendation works possess, they possess it with respect to the obedience to which the Lord alone looks, as He testifies through the prophet: 'I did not give commandment concerning sacrifices and burnt offerings, but only this: that you would hear My voice.' Of self-invented works He speaks elsewhere: 'You spend your silver on what is not bread.' And: 'They worship Me in vain with the precepts of men.' They therefore cannot excuse in any way the fact that they allow poor people to seek in outward trifles the righteousness by which they might stand before God and sustain themselves at the heavenly judgment seat. And is it not also a fault worth denouncing that they present ceremonies that are not understood — like a theatrical performance or a magical spell? For it is certain that all ceremonies are worthless and harmful unless

they direct people to Christ. But the ceremonies used under the papacy are separated from all teaching, so that they may more effectively hold people in signs without any meaning. Finally — so clever a craftsman is greed — it is clear that many of these ceremonies were invented by profit-hungry priests to serve as traps to extract money. Whatever their origin, they are all so freely dispensed for filthy gain that a great portion of them must be cut away if the church is to have any chance of not becoming a profane marketplace full of sacrilege.

Although what I am saying is applied directly to our own time, it may seem as though I am not presenting a continuous teaching about human ordinances in general — yet nothing I have said lacks relevance to every era. For as often as this superstition creeps in — that people will worship God with their own invented devices — whatever laws they make for that purpose immediately degenerate into those gross abuses. The Lord does not threaten this curse for one or two generations, but for all ages: He will strike with blindness and spiritual stupor all who worship Him with the doctrines of men. This persistent blindness ensures that those who, despite so many warnings from God, willfully entangle themselves in deadly snares will never be troubled by any absurdity, however obvious. But if, setting aside particular circumstances, you want a clear and simple definition of what human traditions in every age the church should reject and every godly person should refuse — here it is: all laws made by human beings without God's word, intended either to prescribe a manner of worshipping God, or to bind consciences with religious obligation as though commanding things necessary for salvation. And if to one or both of these faults others are also joined — such as that their sheer number darkens

the light of the Gospel; that they provide no edification but are merely pointless and trivial occupations rather than genuine exercises of godliness; that they are exploited for filthy and dishonest gain; that they are too difficult to keep; or that they are tainted with corrupt superstition — these additional faults will help us see even more clearly how much evil is in them.

I hear the answer they give in their own defense: that their traditions are not from themselves, but from God. They say the church is governed by the Holy Spirit, that it cannot err, and that its authority belongs to them. From this they conclude that their traditions are revelations of the Holy Spirit, and to despise them is wickedness and contempt of God. And to avoid appearing to have acted without serious authority, they want it believed that a large portion of their observances came from the apostles. They point to the Jerusalem Council's decree as an example — that assembly where the apostles commanded the Gentiles to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, and from what has been strangled. We have already shown elsewhere how falsely they claim the title of the church for themselves when they boast this way. As for the present matter: if we strip away all the disguises and false colors and look honestly at what we most need to care about — that is, what kind of church Christ desires, so that we may conform ourselves to that rule — it will be immediately clear that what overruns and tramples the word of God in manufacturing new laws is not the church. Does not the law once prescribed to the church remain permanent? 'What I command you, that you shall observe and do. You shall not add to it, nor take anything from it.' And again: 'Do not add to the word of the Lord, nor take anything away from it, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar.' Since they

cannot deny that this was spoken to the church, what are they saying but that the church they boast of was so bold as to add to and mix its own ideas with God's teaching, even after such prohibitions? That is an enormous slander on the church. But let us never agree with their lies. Let us recognize that the name of the church is falsely invoked whenever men's reckless inventions are in question — inventions that cannot contain themselves within God's prescribed boundaries but run wild into self-made additions. There is nothing tangled, nothing obscure, nothing doubtful in those words by which the whole church is forbidden to add to or take from God's word when worship of God and precepts concerning salvation are the subject. But, they say, this was spoken only of the law — after which came the prophecies and the whole ministry of the Gospel. I grant it — and I add that the prophecies and the Gospel are fulfillments of the law, not additions to or subtractions from it. But if the Lord permitted nothing to be added to or removed from the ministry of Moses — which was, so to speak, obscure because of many veiled types — until through His servants the prophets, and at last through His beloved Son, He provided clearer teaching: how much more strictly must we believe it is forbidden to add anything to the law, the prophets, the Psalms, and the Gospel? Has the Lord changed His nature? He who long ago declared that nothing offends Him so deeply as being worshipped with human inventions? Where did those remarkable words in the prophets come from — words that should ring continually in our ears? 'I did not speak to your fathers, in the day I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: Hear My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people, and walk in all the way that I command you.'

And again: 'I solemnly warned your fathers — hear My voice.' And this passage above all others: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.' Therefore, whatever human inventions in this area are defended with the authority of the church — since they cannot be excused from the charge of ungodliness — it is easy to prove that the church's name is falsely invoked in their defense.

For this reason we freely attack the tyranny of human traditions that is proudly pressed upon us under the name of the church. We do not scorn the church — though our opponents dishonestly tell that lie to make us look bad. On the contrary, we give the church the praise of obedience, than which she knows no greater honor. Those who do the church real wrong are those who make her obstinate toward her Lord — pretending she has gone further than God's word allows her. And I will say nothing of how conspicuously shameless it is, combined with equal malice, to constantly cry about the authority of the church while secretly hiding both what the Lord has commanded her and what obedience she owes Him. But if we truly desire to be in agreement with the church — as we ought — what matters most is to fix our eyes on what the Lord has commanded both us and the church, so that we may obey Him in common agreement. There is no doubt that we will be in true unity with the church when we show ourselves obedient to the Lord in all things. Now, to father these traditions on the apostles — traditions that have oppressed the church until now — is sheer deception. The apostles' teaching labors toward exactly the opposite goal: that consciences not be burdened with new re-

quirements, and that the worship of God not be defiled with our inventions. And if histories and ancient records can be trusted at all, the apostles not only never practiced but never even heard of what is attributed to them. They should not pretend that most of their decrees were quietly received into common practice without ever being written down — things, they say, that the apostles could not understand while Christ was still living, but learned by the Spirit's revelation after His ascension. We have already addressed that interpretation of the passage elsewhere. For the present purpose, this much is enough: they make themselves worthy of mockery by pretending that the great mysteries unknown to the apostles for so long were partly Jewish or pagan observances — the first category long published among the Jews, the second among the Gentiles — and partly foolish gestures and empty petty ceremonies performed very precisely by illiterate and witless priests. These are things that children and fools imitate so aptly that it seems as though there are no fitter ministers for such holy mysteries. Even without any historical records, people of sound judgment could tell by observing the thing itself that so great a pile of ceremonies and observances did not burst suddenly into the church, but crept in gradually. For after the holier bishops who came immediately after the apostles had established some things belonging to good order and discipline, their successors followed — men less wise, more curious, and more ambitious. The later each one came, the more he competed with his predecessors in foolish and envious imitation, striving not to fall behind in inventing new things. And because they feared their devices would quickly fall out of use — and with them any chance of winning praise from posterity — they became

all the more rigid in demanding strict compliance. This wrongful zeal has given us a great portion of the ceremonies they now present to us as apostolic. The historical records bear this out.

To avoid an exhaustive catalog, one example will suffice. In administering the Lord's Supper in the apostles' time, there was great simplicity. Their immediate successors, wishing to adorn the dignity of the mystery, added some things that were not entirely objectionable. But then came the foolish imitators who, by patching pieces together one after another, produced the priestly vestments we now see at the Mass, the ornaments of the altar, the elaborate gestures, and the whole apparatus of useless things. They object, however, that the ancient conviction was that whatever was done by universal consent throughout the church had come from the apostles themselves — and they cite Augustine as a witness to this. But I will find my answer from none other than Augustine's own words. 'Those things that are maintained throughout the whole world,' he says, 'we may understand to have been ordained either by the apostles themselves or by general councils whose authority is most beneficial to the church — such as the annual celebration of the Lord's passion, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and whatever similar observances are maintained throughout the whole church wherever it is spread.' When he offers so few examples, who cannot see that he meant to attribute apostolic authority to the observances actually in use — and only those simple, rare, and sober ones by which it was beneficial to maintain the church's order? How far this is from what the Roman masters want people to grant: that there is not a single petty ceremony among them that ought not to be considered apostolic.

To avoid going on too long, I will give only one example. If someone asks them where they get holy water, they immediately answer: from the apostles. As though the historical records do not attribute this invention to some bishop of Rome — who, had he consulted the apostles, would never have defiled baptism with a foreign and inappropriate sign. Though I do not think the origins of that consecration are quite as ancient as those records claim. For Augustine's comment that some churches in his time avoided the solemn foot-washing after Christ's example, fearing it might seem to pertain to baptism — this quietly suggests that at that time there was no form of washing that bore any resemblance to baptism. Whatever the case, I will not concede that it was of apostolic spirit to introduce a daily sign that recalls baptism in a way that practically repeats it. And I am not very concerned that elsewhere Augustine also attributes other things to the apostles. Since his grounds are no more than conjecture, no firm judgment on so important a matter should rest on them. Even granting them that everything Augustine mentions came from apostolic times — there is still a great difference between instituting an exercise of godliness that believers may use with a free conscience, or refrain from if it is not useful to them, and making a law that binds consciences with compulsion. Whatever their origin, since we now see that they have slid into such great abuse, nothing prevents us from abolishing them without offense to anyone — since they were never established as permanently and unalterably binding.

Nor does it help them much to excuse their tyranny by appealing to the example of the apostles. They say: the apostles and elders of the first church issued a decree beyond Christ's explicit commandment, ordering all Gentiles to abstain from things sacri-

ficed to idols, from what was strangled, and from blood. If this was lawful for them, why may their successors not do the same whenever occasion requires? I would to God that in this and in everything else they truly followed the apostles. For I deny that the apostles in that council instituted or decreed anything new — and this can be proved by a decisive argument. Peter in that council declares that to lay a yoke on the disciples' necks is to test God. If he then consents to have any yoke laid on the Gentiles, he contradicts himself. But a yoke would be laid on them if the apostles had decreed on their own authority that the Gentiles were forbidden from touching things sacrificed to idols, blood, and strangled animals. There does seem to be a difficulty here, since the decree does appear to forbid these things. But this difficulty dissolves on a closer look at what the decree actually says and does. The chief point of the decree is this: the Gentiles' liberty is to be preserved, and they are not to be troubled or burdened with the requirements of the law. On this point, the decree strongly supports our position. The exception that follows does not create any new law from the apostles — it applies the eternal commandment of God that love must not be broken. It does not diminish one bit of that liberty, but simply instructs the Gentiles how to conduct themselves toward their brothers, so that they do not abuse their liberty to give offense. Let this therefore be the second point: the Gentiles should use their liberty freely, but without causing offense to their brothers. The apostles do indicate certain specific things — they teach and specify, as far as was useful for that time, the kinds of things that could cause their brothers to stumble, so that the Gentiles would avoid them. But they added nothing new of their own to God's eternal law, which forbids causing offense to one's brothers.

Consider this parallel: if faithful pastors governing churches not yet fully reformed were to command their people that — until the weak among them grow stronger — they should not openly eat meat on Fridays, or openly work on holy days, or do similar things. For although these things, setting superstition aside, are indifferent in themselves, when a brother's offense is added to them, they cannot be done without fault. The times are such that the faithful cannot act this way openly before their weaker brothers without badly wounding those brothers' consciences. Who but a quibbler would say that in doing this the pastors are creating a new law? It is clear they are simply preventing offenses that the Lord explicitly forbids. The same is true of the apostles, whose purpose was simply to apply God's law concerning offense — in effect saying: 'The Lord commands you not to cause your weak brother to stumble. You cannot eat things sacrificed to idols, strangled meat, and blood without causing your weak brothers to stumble. Therefore we command you in the Lord's name not to eat these things with offense.' Paul is the best witness that this was the apostles' intention, and he writes in full agreement with the spirit of that council: 'Concerning food offered to idols — we know that an idol is nothing. But some, with a weak conscience toward the idol, eat it as something actually offered to an idol, and their weak conscience is defiled. See to it that your liberty does not become a stumbling block to the weak.' Anyone who weighs these things carefully will not afterward be deceived by the false pretense our opponents make when they cite the apostles to defend their tyranny — as though the apostles had begun with this decree to chip away at the church's liberty. But to prevent them from escaping this conclusion and force them to accept this solution on their own terms: let them answer by what au-

thority they felt free to abolish that very decree. Their answer is that there was no longer any danger of the offenses and divisions the apostles were addressing, and they know that a law must be weighed according to its purpose. Since this law was made in the interest of love, it prescribes nothing beyond what love requires. When they admit that violating this law is nothing but a failure of love, do they not also acknowledge that it was not an invented addition to God's law, but simply a direct and practical application to the time and circumstances for which it was given?

But although such laws may be unjust and harmful to us a hundred times over, they insist they must be obeyed without exception — arguing that the issue is not whether we agree with the errors, but simply that as subjects we must bear the hard commands of our rulers, and it is not our place to refuse them. But here again the Lord very effectively opposes them with the truth of His word and delivers us from that bondage into the liberty He purchased for us with His holy blood — a benefit He has confirmed more than once in His word. For what is at stake here is not merely (as they maliciously pretend) some bodily hardship we must endure — but the stripping of consciences of their liberty, which is the benefit of Christ's blood, reducing them to servile torment. But let us set even that aside as though it were a small matter. Yet how serious is it that the Lord's kingdom is taken from Him — which He claims for Himself with such firmness? It is taken from Him whenever He is worshipped according to laws invented by men, when He alone will be recognized as the Lawgiver of His own worship. Lest anyone think this is a trivial matter, let us hear how highly the Lord values it. 'Because this people fears Me with commandments and doctrines of men,' He says, 'behold, I will do a marvelous work

among this people, a wonderful and astonishing thing. For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their discerning men shall be hidden.' And elsewhere: 'They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' And indeed, when the children of Israel defiled themselves with many idolatries, the root cause of all that evil is traced to this corrupt mixture — that they abandoned God's commandments and devised new forms of worship. The sacred history records that the foreigners transplanted by the king of Babylon to inhabit Samaria were torn apart and consumed by wild animals because they did not know the ordinances and judgments of the God of that land. Even though they had not offended in the formal ceremonies themselves, God would not have tolerated empty pomp — and the whole time He continued to take vengeance for the corruption of His worship, because people were introducing practices foreign to His word. It is then recorded that, frightened by that punishment, they received the ceremonies prescribed in the law — but because they still did not worship the true God purely, it is twice said of them that they feared Him and did not fear Him. From this we gather that the reverence owed to Him consists in this: that in worshipping Him we follow simply what He commands, mixing in none of our own inventions. This is why the godly kings are often praised for doing according to all of God's commandments and turning neither to the right nor to the left. I go further still: even where a self-invented form of worship does not openly display ungodliness, the Holy Spirit condemns it severely the moment people depart from God's commandment. The altar of Ahaz — whose design was brought from Samaria — might have seemed to enhance the beauty of the temple. His intention was to offer sacrifices to God

alone on it, in a more honorable manner than on the old original altar. Yet we see how the Spirit condemns this presumption for no other reason than that human inventions in the worship of God are corrupt defilements. And the more clearly God's will has been made known to us, the less excusable our stubbornness in attempting anything beyond it. This is why the specific circumstances add weight to the crime of Manasseh, who built a new altar in Jerusalem — the very city about which God had declared, 'I will place My name there' — because in doing so, the authority of God was as good as deliberately rejected.

Many people wonder why God so sharply threatens to do astonishing things to the nation that worshiped Him with man-made commandments, and why He declares that He is worshiped in vain with human rules. But if they considered what it means in the realm of religion -- that is, of heavenly wisdom -- to depend on the mouth of God alone, they would see that there is no small reason why God so despises these corrupt acts of worship done according to human invention. For although those who obey such laws for worshiping God display a certain appearance of humility in their obedience, they are not truly humble before God, since they impose on Him the same laws they have chosen to keep. This is the reason Paul urges us so earnestly to guard against being deceived by human traditions and what he calls *ethelothreskia* -- that is, self-imposed worship invented by people apart from the teaching of God. This is certainly true: both our own wisdom and all human wisdom must become foolishness to us, so that we allow Him alone to be wise. Those who try to earn His approval through petty observances invented by human will do not follow this path. They force upon Him, against His will, a transgressing obedience that is

really given to human authority, not to God. This has been the case in many ages past, in the time within our own memory, and continues today in those places where the authority of the creature is valued more than that of the Creator. In those places, religion -- if it even deserves to be called religion -- is stained with increasingly distasteful superstitions, worse than any pagan wickedness. For what could human cleverness produce except things that are worldly, foolish, and truly resemble their authors?

When the defenders of superstition argue that Samuel sacrificed at Ramah, and that although this was done outside the law it still pleased God, the answer is simple. He was not setting up a rival altar against the one true altar. Rather, because the place for the ark of the covenant had not yet been designated, he appointed the town where he lived as the most suitable location for sacrifices. The holy prophet certainly had no intention of introducing anything new in sacred matters, since God had so strictly forbidden adding anything or taking anything away. As for the example of Manoah, I say it was an extraordinary and unique case. Though he was a private citizen, he offered sacrifice to God -- and not without God's approval. He did not undertake it from a rash impulse of his own mind but by heavenly prompting. But how much the Lord hates the things that people invent on their own to worship Him is powerfully illustrated by another example no less significant than Gideon's, whose ephod became a source of destruction not only for him and his family but for the whole people. In the end, every newly invented practice by which people try to worship God is nothing but a corruption of true holiness.

Why then, they ask, did Christ say that those unbearable burdens the scribes and Pharisees placed on people should be carried? But why did the same Christ elsewhere tell people to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees -- calling it "leaven," as Matthew the Evangelist explains, because they mixed their own teaching into the purity of God's word? What could be plainer than the fact that we are commanded to flee from and guard against all their teaching? This makes it absolutely clear that in the other passage as well, the Lord did not want the consciences of His people to be tormented by the Pharisees' own traditions. And the words themselves, if they are not twisted, do not mean anything of the sort. For the Lord, intending to strongly criticize the Pharisees' behavior, first simply instructed His listeners that even though they saw nothing in the Pharisees' lives worth imitating, they should still do what the Pharisees taught in words while they sat in the seat of Moses -- that is, while they were explaining the law. Therefore He meant nothing more than to ensure that ordinary people would not be led by the bad examples of their teachers to despise the teaching itself. But since many people are not moved at all by reasoning and always demand a recognized authority, I will quote Augustine's words, which say the very same thing. The Lord's sheepfold has governors: some faithful, and some hirelings. The faithful governors are true pastors. But understand this: the hirelings also are necessary. For many in the church pursue earthly gain yet still preach Christ, and through them the voice of Christ is heard. The sheep follow not the hireling but the pastor, through the hireling's voice. Listen to how the Lord Himself identifies the hirelings. The scribes and the Pharisees, He says, sit in the seat of Moses. Do what they say, but do not do what they do. What else

did He say but: hear the voice of the pastor through the hirelings? For by sitting in that seat they teach the law of God, and therefore God teaches through them. But if they teach their own ideas, do not listen; do not follow. This is what Augustine says.

Many people, when they hear that consciences are wickedly bound and that God is worshiped in vain through human traditions, immediately conclude that all church laws must be abolished altogether. We need to address that error. At first glance, it is easy to be deceived, because the difference between legitimate and illegitimate laws is not immediately obvious. But I will lay out the whole matter plainly so that no one is misled by the surface similarity. First, let us hold this principle: every human community needs some form of order to preserve peace and maintain agreement. In carrying out shared activities, there must always be some structure — one that befits public decency and basic human dignity. This is especially true in churches, which are best maintained by well-ordered arrangement and which cannot exist at all without agreement. If we want the church's health to be properly secured, we must diligently pursue what Paul commands: that all things be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). But since human habits vary so greatly, minds differ so widely, and judgments are so diverse, no community is stable without established laws, and no orderly practice can be observed without a defined structure. We are therefore far from condemning laws that serve this purpose. We actually affirm that when such laws are removed, churches lose their backbone and fall into disorder and disarray. Paul's requirement that all things be done decently and in order cannot be fulfilled unless that order and decency are established with specific observances that serve as their support. There is only

one condition that must always be maintained for such observances: they must not be regarded as necessary for salvation — binding consciences through religious requirement — nor applied to the worship of God in such a way that godliness is thought to consist in them.

We have a reliable and trustworthy test for distinguishing wicked ordinances — those that corrupt true religion and enslave consciences — from legitimate church observances. Lawful observances always serve one or both of the following purposes: that in the holy assembly of believers everything is done with dignity and proper reverence, and that the common life of the community is maintained in good order through bonds of mutual consideration and moderation. Once it is understood that a law exists for the sake of public decency, the superstition is removed — the superstition into which people fall when they measure the worship of God by human inventions. Likewise, once it is known that a law serves the common good, the false notion of strict necessity is overthrown — the notion that used to strike great terror into consciences when traditions were thought to be required for salvation. For all that is required in such cases is that love be nourished among us through shared and considerate practice. Still, it is good to define more precisely what is meant by the comeliness Paul commends, and also by order. The purpose of comeliness is twofold: first, that ceremonies which promote reverence for holy things may stir us up to godliness; second, that the modesty and gravity which should mark all honorable conduct may be especially visible in sacred gatherings. The first point of order is that those who govern know the rule and standard of good governance, and that the people un-

der their care are trained in obedience to God and sound discipline. Then, with the church well ordered, peace and quietness may be secured.

Comeliness, then, is not something that produces nothing but empty visual pleasure — such as the theatrical vestments the papists use in their ceremonies, which amount to nothing more than a pointless display of ornament without any spiritual fruit. Rather, comeliness is whatever is fitting for reverence toward sacred mysteries in a way that genuinely exercises godliness — or at least appropriately adorns its celebration — and that is not without fruit, reminding the faithful with what great modesty, reverence, and solemn care they ought to handle holy things. For ceremonies to be genuine exercises of godliness, they must point us directly to Christ. Likewise, order does not consist in trivial pomp that has nothing to offer beyond a fleeting appearance of grandeur. It consists in an orderly arrangement that removes confusion, crudeness, stubbornness, and all strife and division. Examples of the first kind are found in Paul: that common meals must not be mixed with the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:21); that women should not come into the assembly unveiled; and many others in common use — such as that we pray kneeling and bare-headed, that the Lord's Supper is administered not carelessly but with appropriate dignity, that the burial of the dead is conducted with proper honor, and similar things. Examples of the second kind include the hours set aside for public prayers, sermons, and the celebration of the sacraments; silence and attentiveness during sermons; designated places; the singing of hymns together; days appointed for the Lord's Supper; Paul's instruction that women are not to teach in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34); and similar prac-

tices. Especially important are those things that concern discipline: the teaching of the catechism, church censures, excommunication, fasting, and related matters. So all the church's constitutions that we recognize as holy and beneficial can be grouped under two main headings: some pertain to rites and ceremonies, and the rest to discipline and peace.

There is a danger here on two sides: on one side, false bishops might use this framework as a pretense to excuse their wicked and tyrannical laws; on the other, some overly cautious people, alarmed by the evils already described, might refuse to allow any laws at all, however holy. For this reason, it is important to clarify that I approve only those human ordinances that are grounded in God's authority, drawn from Scripture — and are in that sense entirely God's own. Take kneeling during common prayer as an example. Is it a human tradition that any person may lawfully refuse or ignore? I would say it is both of human origin and of God. It is of God in that it is part of the decency and order the apostle commends to our care. It is of human origin in that it gives specific expression to something that God has pointed to in general terms rather than spelled out in detail. From this one example we can judge the whole class of such practices. The Lord has faithfully and clearly set forth in His holy Word the complete substance of true righteousness, every aspect of worship, and everything necessary for salvation. In all these matters, He alone is to be heard as our teacher. But in matters of external discipline and ceremony, His will was not to prescribe every specific detail we should follow — because He knew these things would depend on the circumstances of each era and that no single form would suit every age. In these areas, we must appeal to the general rules He has given us and use

them to evaluate whatever the church's needs require to be established for order and decency. Furthermore, since He has given no explicit direction on these matters precisely because they are not necessary for salvation and must be adapted differently for each nation and era to build up the church — it is appropriate, as the church's benefit requires, to change and abolish existing practices or to establish new ones. I certainly grant that we should not rush into change rashly, frequently, or for trivial reasons. But love is the best judge of what may harm or help — and if we let love govern, all will be well.

It is the duty of Christians to observe such ordinances — those established according to this rule — with a free conscience and without superstition, yet also with a willing and humble readiness to obey. They should not despise these ordinances or neglect them carelessly, much less break them openly with pride and stubbornness. But how, you might ask, can conscience truly be free under such careful and detailed observance? It can stand firmly when we recognize that these are not permanent, binding laws but outward forms suited to human weakness. We may not all personally need every one of them, but we use them together because we owe it to one another to nurture love. We can see this in the examples already mentioned. Does religion consist in a woman's veil, such that going out without covering her head is forbidden? Is the rule about silence in worship so absolute that breaking it is a grave offense? Is there some sacred mystery in kneeling or in the burial of the dead that cannot be set aside without sin? No. If a woman urgently needs to help her neighbor and has no time to cover her head, she does not sin by going out uncovered. There may be occasions when it is just as fitting for her to speak as it is at other times

for her to remain silent. There is no reason why a person who cannot kneel due to illness may not pray standing. And it is better to bury a person promptly than to let the body decay unburied for lack of a shroud or attendants. Nevertheless, in these matters there is something that the customs and ordinances of the country — and basic natural decency and modesty — require to be done or avoided. If someone deviates from them unintentionally or through forgetfulness, no serious wrong is done. But if someone acts out of contempt, that stubbornness deserves rebuke. Similarly, the specific days, hours, the design of church buildings, and which Psalms are sung on which day — none of these details is essential in itself. Yet it is fitting that there be appointed days, set hours, and a meeting place large enough to hold everyone — if the goal is to preserve peace. Consider how much quarreling a lack of such structure would cause, if everyone were free to change whatever belongs to the common life of the community as they pleased. It will never happen that the same arrangement pleases everyone if everything is left as an open choice for each person. If anyone objects to this and thinks himself wiser than he should, let him consider how he will answer to the Lord for his own exactness. As for us, Paul's word is sufficient: we have no custom of contention, and neither do the churches of God.

Great care must be taken to prevent any error from creeping in that would corrupt or obscure this pure use of church ordinances. This can be achieved if all observances, whatever they are, have a clear and evident purpose, if they are kept to a small number, and especially if the pastor faithfully teaches about them in a way that closes the door to false interpretations. This understanding preserves each person's freedom in all these things, while at the same

time allowing them to willingly limit their own freedom to the degree that the decency we have described — or the order of love — requires. Furthermore, we ourselves should practice these observances without superstition and should not press them on others so strictly that we imagine the worship of God is made better by a greater number of ceremonies. One church should not despise another for differences in practice. And we should not set any of these observances in stone as permanent laws, but should direct the whole point and purpose of such observances to the building up of the church — so that when the church's needs require it, we can allow not only individual practices to be changed but, if necessary, all previously existing observances to be abolished without any offense. Our own time shows clearly that certain rites, which are not in themselves ungodly or indecent, may rightly be abolished when circumstances call for it. The blindness and ignorance of earlier ages was so great that churches clung to their ceremonies with such corrupted conviction and such stubborn attachment that the churches can barely be sufficiently purged of their monstrous superstitions without removing many ceremonies — ceremonies that may well have been originally established for good reasons and that contain no obvious wickedness in themselves.

CHAPTER 11: OF THE JURISDICTION OF THE CHURCH, AND THE ABUSE THEREOF, SUCH AS IS SEEN IN THE PAPACY



We now come to the third part of church power — and in a well-ordered community, the most important part — which we said consists in jurisdiction. The church's entire jurisdiction concerns the discipline of conduct, which we will treat shortly. Just as no city or town can stand without a magistrate and government, the church of God also needs its own form of spiritual governance — yet one completely separate from civil government, so that it in no way hinders or diminishes civil government, but rather helps and supports it. This jurisdiction, in short, is nothing other than a system of order designed to maintain that spiritual governance. For this purpose, judicial structures were established in churches from the beginning — structures that could examine conduct, correct sins, and exercise the office of the keys. Paul refers to this order in his letter to the Corinthians when he mentions governing. Again, in his letter to the Romans, he says: let the one who leads, lead with diligence. He is not speaking to civil magistrates (since at that time there were no Christian magistrates),

but to those who were joined with pastors in the spiritual governance of the church. In his letter to Timothy, he also distinguishes two kinds of elders: those who labor in the word, and those who do not preach but still govern well. By this second group he doubtless means those appointed to oversee conduct and to exercise the keys in practice. This power we are now describing rests entirely on the keys Christ gave to the church in Matthew 18, where He commands that those who refuse private admonitions be solemnly confronted in the name of the whole church — and if they remain obstinate, He instructs that they be put out of the fellowship of the faithful. These admonitions and corrections require an examination of the matter, and so some form of judgment and order is necessary. Therefore, unless we want to nullify the promise of the keys and do away entirely with excommunication, solemn admonitions, and all related practices, we must allow the church some form of jurisdiction. Readers should note that this passage does not concern the general authority of doctrine — as in Matthew 16 and John 21 — but that the governing power of the synagogue is now transferred to the flock of Christ. Until that point, the Jews had their own system of governance. Christ now establishes this in His church — and with serious consequences, as far as the pure institution of it is concerned. This was necessary, for otherwise the judgment of an ordinary and seemingly insignificant congregation might be despised by rash and arrogant men. To prevent confusion among readers regarding the fact that Christ uses similar language in two somewhat different contexts, it will be helpful to resolve this difficulty. There are two passages that speak of binding and loosing. The first is in Matthew 16, where Christ, after promising to give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, immediately adds

that whatever he binds or looses on earth will be confirmed in heaven. By these words He means nothing other than what He says in different words in John, when sending His disciples to preach — after breathing on them, He said: whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins you retain, they are retained in heaven. I will offer an interpretation that is not subtle, forced, or strained, but natural, straightforward, and evident. This command to forgive and retain sins, and the promise of binding and loosing made to Peter, must be understood as referring to the ministry of the word — which, when the Lord committed it to the apostles, He also equipped with this office of binding and loosing. For what is the heart of the Gospel, if not that we, all being slaves to sin and death, are released and set free through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus — and that those who do not receive or acknowledge Christ as their deliverer and redeemer are condemned and bound over to everlasting bondage? When the Lord gave this message to His apostles to carry into all nations, He honored it with this remarkable testimony — to confirm that it was His own and proceeded from Him — to powerfully strengthen both the apostles themselves and all who would receive it. The apostles needed firm and solid confidence in their preaching, which they would carry out with endless labor, care, hardship, and danger, and finally seal with their own blood. That they might know it was not empty or powerless, but full of strength and effect, they needed to be persuaded in such great difficulty, hardship, and danger that they were doing God's work; that when the whole world opposed and attacked them, God stood on their side; and that even without Christ the author of their doctrine visibly present on earth, they would know He was in heaven confirming the truth of the doctrine

He had given them. It was also necessary that the hearers be fully assured that the Gospel message was not the word of the apostles but of God Himself — not a voice born on earth but come down from heaven. For these things — the forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life, the message of salvation — are not within human power to bestow. Therefore, Christ testified that in the preaching of the Gospel the apostles contribute nothing but their ministry — that it was He Himself who spoke and promised all things through their mouths as instruments. Consequently, the forgiveness of sins they proclaimed was the true promise of God, and the condemnation they announced was the certain judgment of God. This testimony is given to all ages and remains in force to assure all people that the Gospel word, by whatever man it is preached, is the very sentence of God — published from the supreme judgment seat, written in the book of life, ratified, firm, and fixed in heaven. We see, then, that in these passages the power of the keys is nothing but the preaching of the Gospel, and that it is not so much a power as a ministry, when we consider how it relates to people. For Christ has not given this power to people directly, but to His own word — of which He has made people ministers.

The other passage we mentioned concerning binding and loosing is in Matthew 18, where Christ says: 'If any brother will not listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose shall be loosed.' This passage is not exactly the same as the first; it is to be understood a little differently. Yet I do not separate them so completely that they have no close connection. The common ground is this: both passages contain a general statement; both always involve the same power

of binding and loosing — by the word of God — the same commission, and the same promise. But they differ in this: the first passage specifically belongs to preaching, which the ministers of the word carry out; this second passage concerns the discipline of excommunication, which is committed to the church. The church binds the one she excommunicates — not to cast him into perpetual ruin and despair, but because she condemns his life and conduct, and, unless he repents, already warns him of his condemnation. She looses the one she receives back into fellowship, because she makes him a participant, as it were, in the unity she has in Christ Jesus. So that no one would stubbornly despise the church's judgment or think little of being condemned by the united voice of the faithful, the Lord testifies that such judgment of the faithful is nothing other than a declaration of His own sentence — and that whatever they do on earth is confirmed in heaven. For they have the word of God by which they may condemn the obstinate; they have the word by which they may receive the repentant back into grace. They cannot err or diverge from God's judgment, because they judge only according to the law of God — which is not an uncertain or earthly opinion, but the holy will of God and a heavenly word. From these two passages, which I believe I have explained briefly, clearly, and accurately, these reckless men indiscriminately — driven by their own confused thinking — attempt to establish sometimes confession, sometimes excommunication, sometimes jurisdiction, sometimes the power to make laws, sometimes pardons. As for the first passage, they use it to establish the supremacy of the See of Rome. They are so skilled at fitting their keys to every lock and door that one might say they have spent their whole lives practicing the locksmith's trade.

Many people think that church discipline was only temporary — relevant when civil rulers were still outside the Christian faith. But they are mistaken, because they fail to recognize the great difference between ecclesiastical and civil power. The church has no sword to punish or restrain, no governing authority to command, no prisons, and no penalties of the kind magistrates impose on people. Furthermore, church discipline does not aim to punish the offender against his will, but to lead him to willingly confess his repentance. There is therefore a very different order at work: the church takes nothing that properly belongs to the magistrate, and the magistrate cannot do what the church does. An example will make this clearer. Suppose someone is drunk. In a well-ordered city, imprisonment is the punishment. Has he committed fornication? He will receive a similar or even greater punishment. The laws, the magistrate, and the civil court will thus be satisfied. But the offender may show no sign of repentance — he may even grumble and resist. Should the church do nothing in this case? Such a person cannot be admitted to the Lord's Supper without doing wrong to both Christ and His holy institution. Reason also requires that the one who has offended the church by a bad example should make a public declaration of repentance to remove the offense he has caused. The argument made by those who hold the opposite view is too weak. Christ, they say, committed these matters to the church when there was no magistrate to carry them out. But it often happens that the magistrate is negligent — and sometimes even that the magistrate himself needs to be disciplined, as happened with Emperor Theodosius. The same point could be made about the ministry of the word. If their reasoning held, pastors should stop rebuking open wickedness, stop correcting, re-

proving, and denouncing — because Christian magistrates exist who ought to deal with these things through laws and force. But just as the magistrate ought to purge the church of offenses through punishment and forcible restraint, so the minister of the word must on his part assist the magistrate so that fewer offenses occur. Their work must work together — each being a help, not a hindrance, to the other.

Anyone who looks more carefully at Christ's words will easily see that these passages describe a permanent, enduring order for the church — not something temporary. For it would not be fitting to report offenders to the magistrate if they refuse to obey our admonitions — yet that is exactly what would be necessary if the magistrate were meant to take over the church's role. And consider the promise: is it a promise valid for only a year or two? 'Truly, truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth...' Moreover, Christ did not institute anything new here — He followed the practice always observed in the ancient church of His own people. By this He indicated that the church cannot be without spiritual jurisdiction, which has existed from the beginning. This has been confirmed by the agreement of every era. When emperors and magistrates began to profess Christ, the spiritual jurisdiction was not immediately abolished. It was simply arranged so that it would neither diminish civil jurisdiction nor be confused with it. And rightly so. A godly magistrate will not exempt himself from the common submission of God's children — and part of that submission is placing himself under the church's judgment by the word of God. He certainly should not abolish the order of judgment. For, as Ambrose says, what is more honorable for the emperor than to be called a son of the church? A good emperor is within the church, not above it.

Therefore, those who strip the church of this power in order to honor the magistrate not only corrupt Christ's words with a false interpretation, but also pass no small condemnation on the many holy bishops from the apostles' time onward — charging them with having falsely usurped the honor and office of the magistrate.

On the other side, it is important to examine what the true use of church jurisdiction was in ancient times, and how great an abuse has crept in — so that we may know what must be abolished and what must be restored from antiquity, if we are to overthrow the kingdom of antichrist and restore the true kingdom of Christ. The goal to aim for is this: that offenses be prevented, and if any offense does arise, that it be corrected. In practice, two things must be observed: first, this spiritual power must be entirely separate from the power of the sword; second, it must not be exercised by the will of one man alone, but by a lawful assembly. Both of these were observed in the purer church. The holy bishops did not exercise their power through fines, imprisonments, or other civil punishments — they used only the word of the Lord, as was proper. For the most severe action the church can take — its ultimate measure, as it were — is excommunication, and this is used only when absolutely necessary. It requires no force or physical coercion; it is content with the power of the word of God. In short, the jurisdiction of the ancient church was nothing other than what we might call the practical application of what Paul teaches about the spiritual power of pastors. He says: 'We have been given power to demolish strongholds, to bring down every proud barrier that sets itself against the knowledge of God, to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and to be ready to punish all disobedience.' As this is accomplished through the preaching of

Christ's doctrine, so — that the doctrine may not be treated with contempt — those who claim membership in the household of faith must be judged according to what is taught. That cannot be done without granting the ministry the power to summon those who need private admonition or stronger correction, and also the power to exclude from the Lord's Supper those who cannot be admitted without profaning so great a mystery. Therefore, when Paul says elsewhere that it is not our place to judge outsiders, he makes believers subject to the church's discipline — which may correct their faults — and implicitly indicates that judicial structures were already in force from which none of the faithful was exempt.

But this authority, as we have said, was not in the hands of one man to do as he pleased — it belonged to a council of elders, which served the church as a senate serves a city. Cyprian, when speaking of those who exercised this authority in his day, regularly joins the entire clergy with the bishop. But he also shows elsewhere that even the clergy governed in such a way that the people were not excluded from hearing matters. He writes: 'From the beginning of my episcopate I have been determined to do nothing without the counsel of the clergy and the consent of the people.' The common and ordinary practice was that the church's jurisdiction was exercised by a council of elders — of which, as I have said, there were two kinds: some ordained for teaching, and others who served only as overseers of conduct. Little by little this institution declined from its original form, so that by the time of Ambrose, only clergy served as judges in ecclesiastical cases. Ambrose himself laments this in these words: 'The ancient synagogue, and after it the church, had elders, without whose counsel nothing was done. By what negligence this has fallen out of use I do not know — unless

perhaps by the laziness or rather the pride of teachers, while they wanted to appear the only ones who mattered.' We see how greatly this holy man was grieved that anything of the better order had decayed — even though at that time they still maintained at least a tolerable arrangement. What would he say if he saw the ruined state of things today, which shows almost no trace of the original structure? What lamentation would he raise? First, against all right and justice, the bishop claimed for himself alone what had been given to the whole church. It is as if a consul, having driven out the senate, seized sole power for himself. However much the bishop stands above the rest in honor, a full assembly has more authority than any one man. It was therefore a deeply wicked act when one man removed this shared power and claimed it for himself — opening the door to tyrannical ambition, stripping the church of what rightfully belonged to her, and suppressing and discarding the assembly ordained by the Spirit of Christ.

But as one evil always breeds another, the bishops, disdaining this work as beneath their dignity, handed it off to others. This gave rise to officials appointed to fill that role. I will not yet speak of what kind of men they are — only that they are no different from secular judges. And yet they still call it spiritual jurisdiction, even though the disputes they handle involve nothing but earthly matters. Even if there were no other fault, how dare they call a quarrelsome courtroom the judgment of the church? They do use warnings and excommunication, it is true. But in doing so, they make a mockery of God. Does a poor man owe a small debt? He is summoned. If he appears, he is condemned. Once condemned, if he does not pay, he is warned. After the second warning, they move a step toward excommunication. If he fails to appear, he is warned

again to come and submit to judgment. If he continues to delay, he is warned once more, and then immediately excommunicated. Tell me — does any of this resemble the institution of Christ, or the ancient practice, or any form of ecclesiastical order? They also claim to correct vices. But how? They not only tolerate but in a certain quiet way nurture and confirm adultery, indecency, drunkenness, and similar wickedness — and not only among the common people, but among the clergy themselves. Out of many offenders they summon a few — either to avoid appearing completely negligent in overlooking everything, or to squeeze some money out of them. I will not speak here of the plunder, robbery, bribery, and sacrilege that is gathered by these means, nor of what kind of men are for the most part chosen for this office. This much is enough and more than enough: when the Romanists boast that their jurisdiction is spiritual, it is easy to demonstrate that nothing is more contrary to the order Christ established, and that it bears no more resemblance to ancient practice than darkness does to light.

Though we have not said everything that could be said on this subject, and what we have said has been stated briefly, I trust we have argued the case well enough that no one should have any remaining doubt that the spiritual power of which the pope and his entire kingdom so proudly boast is wicked before God and an unjust tyranny over His people. Under the term 'spiritual power' I include the boldness in fabricating new doctrines — by which they have led the simple people away from the plain meaning of God's word — the wicked traditions by which they have ensnared them, and also the false ecclesiastical jurisdiction they exercise through their subordinates and officials. For if we grant Christ a kingdom among us, all this kind of dominion must inevitably be overthrown

at once. As for the power of the sword, which they also claim for themselves — since it is not exercised over consciences, it does not directly concern our present discussion. Yet in this regard it is also worth noting that they are always true to their character — they are nothing at all like what they would be taken for, that is, pastors of the church. I am not blaming the personal faults of individuals, but the common wickedness of the entire order — indeed the very disease of the order — since it is thought the order would be crippled unless it is adorned with wealth and prestigious titles. If we look to Christ's own authority on this matter, it is clear that His intention was to bar the ministers of His word from civil power and earthly government, when He said: 'The kings of the Gentiles rule over them, but you shall not be so.' He is saying not merely that the office of pastor is distinct from the office of a prince, but that they are things so separate they cannot meet in one person. When Moses held both offices together, that was first a rare miracle, and second only a temporary arrangement until things were more fully ordered. When God prescribed a definite form, civil government was left to Moses, and he was commanded to hand the priesthood over to his brother. And rightly so. For it is beyond human capacity that one person should bear both burdens adequately. This principle was carefully observed in the church throughout every age. No bishop, so long as the true form of the church lasted, ever thought of seizing the power of the sword — so much so that in Ambrose's day there was a common saying that emperors coveted the priesthood more than priests coveted imperial power. What Ambrose said afterward was embedded in everyone's mind: that palaces belong to the emperor, and churches to the priest.

But once a system was devised by which bishops could hold the title, honor, and wealth of their office without the work and responsibility — lest they be left completely idle — the power of the sword was given to them, or rather they seized it for themselves by usurpation. What pretense can they offer to defend this shamelessness? Was it the duty of bishops to entangle themselves with court hearings, the governance of cities and provinces, and to meddle across vast territories in matters entirely foreign to their calling? — men who have so much work within their own proper office that if they gave themselves to it wholly and without interruption, they could scarcely fulfill it? But such is their perverseness that they do not hesitate to boast that by this arrangement the church flourishes as it deserves, and that they themselves are not thereby drawn too far from their calling. On the first point: if being elevated to such heights that the greatest monarchs stand in fear of them is a fitting adornment for the sacred office, then they have reason to quarrel with Christ — who, in their view, severely diminished their honor. For what, at least in their opinion, could have been more demeaning than these words: 'The kings of the Gentiles and princes rule over them, but you shall not be so'? Yet He laid no harder law on His servants than He first received Himself. 'Who,' He said, 'made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?' He plainly refused the role of judge — which He would not have done if it were compatible with His office. Will His servants not allow themselves to be brought under the same order to which their Lord submitted? As for the second point, I wish they could prove it in practice as easily as they speak it. But since the apostles judged it unacceptable to leave the word of God and serve tables, those who refuse to be taught by this example stand convicted: being a good bishop

and a good prince at the same time is not one person's work. For if the apostles — who, given the extraordinary gifts they had received, were capable of carrying more and greater responsibilities than any who have come since — confessed that they could not simultaneously devote themselves to the ministry of the word and the ministry of tables without being crushed by the burden: how could these men, who are infinitely inferior to the apostles, surpass the apostles a hundredfold in output? To attempt it was an act of the most shameless and reckless arrogance. Yet it has been attempted. And the result is plain to see. For it could not turn out otherwise: by abandoning their own calling, they were inevitably drawn into other people's business.

There is no doubt that their power grew from small beginnings through gradual increases. It was impossible for them to leap to such heights in a single step. Sometimes by cunning and devious means they quietly advanced themselves, so that no one could foresee what was happening until it was already done. Sometimes when the opportunity arose they used threats and intimidation to wring additional power from princes. And sometimes, when they saw princes were inclined toward generosity, they exploited that naive and unthinking goodwill. In earlier times, when disputes arose, godly people would submit the matter to the bishop's arbitration in order to avoid litigation — since they had no doubt of his integrity. The ancient bishops were often burdened with such arbitrations, and it greatly displeased them, as Augustine testifies in one place. But to keep the parties from running to contentious lawsuits, the bishops reluctantly took the burden on themselves. These men transformed those voluntary arbitrations — which were nothing like the noise of formal courts — into a regular judicial ju-

risdiction. Shortly afterward, when cities and territories were beset by various severe hardships, people turned to the bishops for protection and trusted them to provide faithful assistance. By remarkable cunning, the bishops turned themselves from protectors into lords. It cannot be denied that they also acquired a large portion of their power through violent and seditious scheming. As for the princes who willingly granted jurisdiction to bishops — they were moved to do so by various motives. But granting that their generosity had some appearance of godliness, their wrongful liberality did not serve the church well. By it they corrupted — or to tell the truth, utterly destroyed — the church's ancient and true discipline. And those bishops who exploited that princely goodwill for their own gain gave more than enough proof by that single act that they are not truly bishops. If they had had even a spark of the apostolic spirit, they would certainly have answered with Paul's words: 'The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but spiritual.' But blinded by greed, they destroyed themselves, their successors, and the church.

At last the bishop of Rome, not content with modest lordships, first laid hold on kingdoms and then on the empire itself. To give some color to the possession he had seized by outright robbery, he sometimes boasts that he holds it by the law of God, sometimes claims the gift of Constantine, and sometimes invents some other title. My first answer is from Bernard: even if the pope were to claim this authority on whatever other grounds, he still does not hold it by apostolic right. For Peter could not give what he did not have — what he gave to his successors was what he had: the care of the churches. But when the Lord and Master says He was not appointed judge between two men, a servant and student ought not

think it beneath him to be excluded from judging all people. Bernard is speaking of civil judgments, and he adds: 'Therefore your power is over crimes, not over possessions, because it was for crimes, not possessions, that you received the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' 'Which seems to you the greater dignity — to forgive sins or to divide up land?' 'There is no comparison.' 'Kings and princes of the earth have their own judges for these base and earthly things. Why do you intrude on someone else's territory?' Again: 'You have been made a superior' — he is speaking to Pope Eugenius — 'but to what end? Not to dominate, I think. Therefore, however highly we think of ourselves, let us remember that a ministry has been laid upon us, not a lordship given to us. Learn that you need a pruning hook, not a scepter, so that you may do the work of a prophet.' Again, plainly: 'Lordship is forbidden to the apostles. Go, then, and presume to claim for yourself either — being a lord, an apostleship; or being an apostle, a lordship.' And shortly after: 'The pattern of the apostleship is this: lordship is forbidden them; service is commanded.' Though these things are said by a man, yet it is clear to everyone that the very truth speaks through him — and the thing itself is obvious without any words. And yet the bishop of Rome was not ashamed to decree at the Council in Orleans that supreme power over both swords belongs to him by the law of God.

As for the gift of Constantine — anyone moderately acquainted with the history of that period needs no instruction in how not merely false but actually laughable that claim is. But setting aside the historical records, Gregory himself is a sufficient and full witness to the truth of the matter. Whenever he speaks of the emperor, he calls him his most noble Lord and describes himself as

his unworthy servant. Again, in another place he writes: 'But let not our Lord, by earthly power, be the sooner moved to anger against the priests; but with excellent consideration, for the sake of Him whose servants they are, let him so govern them that he also show them due reverence.' We see how, in common subjection, he counts himself as one of the people — for he is pleading not anyone else's cause but his own. In another place: 'I trust in the Almighty God that He will give a long life to our godly lords and will order us under your hand according to His mercy.' I have not cited these things to thoroughly debate the question of the gift of Constantine, but only so that readers may notice in passing how childishly the Romanists lie when they attempt to claim an earthly empire for their bishop. All the more shameless, then, is the conduct of Augustine Steuchus, who in such a desperate cause dared to sell his labor and pen to the bishop of Rome. Valla — as was not difficult for a man both learned and sharp-minded — had powerfully demolished that fable. Yet, as someone not deeply versed in church affairs, he had not said everything that could have been said. Steuchus then charged in and scattered foul trivialities in an attempt to smother the clear light of Valla's argument. In truth, he handles his master's cause so feebly that it is as if some clever jester, pretending to argue the same side, were actually working for Valla all along. It is truly a cause worthy of the pope — that he should hire advocates for pay. And those hired scoundrels are no less worthy of being cheated of their expected reward, as happened to Eugubinus.

If anyone wants to know when this invented empire began to rise, it has not yet been five hundred years since bishops were still subject to princes and no pope was appointed without the

emperor's authority. Emperor Henry IV — a reckless and impulsive man with no foresight, bold in action but dissolute in life — gave Gregory VII his first opportunity to overthrow this order. Henry had been selling or plundering the bishoprics of all Germany through his court, and Hildebrand, who had been personally offended by him, seized on this as a fine pretext for revenge. Because the cause he appeared to champion was honest and godly, many gave him their support. Henry, moreover, was widely hated among the princes because of his arrogant manner of governing. In the end, Hildebrand — who called himself Gregory VII — revealed the true malice of his heart, and this caused many of his allies to abandon him. But he succeeded in this much: his successors were able not only to throw off the imperial yoke with impunity, but actually to bring emperors under their dominion. Added to this was the fact that many of the emperors who followed were more like Henry than like Julius Caesar — men easily subdued, who sat at home idle and indifferent to everything when they most needed the courage and resolve to restrain the bishops' greed. This shows us clearly what kind of cover conceals the so-called generous gift of Constantine, by which the pope pretends that the Western Empire was handed over to him.

Meanwhile the popes never stopped invading the territories of others — sometimes by fraud, sometimes by treachery, and sometimes by force. The very city of Rome, which had previously been free, they brought under their control within about a hundred and thirty years. By these means they reached the power they hold today — a power for the gaining and expanding of which they have troubled Christendom for two hundred years (for they began before they seized dominion over the city), very nearly destroying it

in the process. In earlier times under Gregory, the administrators of church property would seize lands they claimed belonged to the church and, after the manner of claiming them for the prince's use, place ownership titles on them as a sign of claim. Gregory convened a council of bishops and, sharply rebuking this profane practice, asked whether they judged any clergy member accursed who, on his own initiative, by writing a title deed, attempted to lay claim to any property. They all declared: accursed. If laying claim to a piece of land by drawing up a title is an offense worthy of a curse for a clergy member, then when popes for two full centuries practice nothing but warfare, bloodshed, the destruction of armies, the sacking and razing of cities, the overthrow of nations, and the ruin of kingdoms — all simply to seize other people's possessions — what curses could possibly be sufficient to punish such conduct? It is entirely plain that they seek the glory of Christ least of all. For if they were to willingly surrender all the secular power they hold, there would be no danger to God's glory, no danger to sound doctrine, no danger to the church's safety. But they are driven blindly and headlong by nothing but a lust for dominion, because they think nothing secure unless they can rule with harshness — as the prophet says — and with force.

Connected to jurisdiction is the immunity that the Roman clergy claimed for themselves. They consider it beneath their dignity to answer in personal legal matters before a civil judge, and they believe that both the liberty and dignity of the church consist in being exempt from ordinary courts and laws. But the ancient bishops — who were otherwise very firm in defending the rights of the church — judged that neither they nor their order were harmed by being subject to civil authority. Godly emperors, without any-

one objecting, regularly summoned clergy before their courts whenever the need arose. Constantine writes in his letter to the Nicomedians: 'If any bishop should conduct himself recklessly, his boldness shall be restrained by the execution of God's minister — that is, by my execution.' And Valentinian says: 'Good bishops do not oppose the emperor's authority, but sincerely both keep the commandments of God the great King and obey our laws.' At that time, everyone agreed on this without dispute. But ecclesiastical causes were referred to the bishop's judgment. If a clergy member had not violated civil law but was charged only under the canons, he was not summoned to the ordinary court — in such a case the bishop served as his judge. Similarly, if a question of faith was in dispute, or some matter that properly belonged to the church, the judgment was committed to the church. This is the sense of what Ambrose writes to Valentinian: 'Your father of honored memory not only said in words but decreed by law that in a cause of faith, the judge should be one neither unfit in office nor unlike in standing.' Again: 'If we look to the Scriptures or ancient examples, who can deny that in a cause of faith — in a cause of faith, I say — bishops are accustomed to judge Christian emperors, and not emperors to judge bishops?' Again: 'I would have come, O Emperor, to your court, if the bishops or the people would have permitted me to go, saying that a cause of faith ought to be debated in the church before the people.' He rightly affirms that a spiritual cause — that is, a matter of religion — ought not to be dragged into a civil court where secular cases are pleaded. Everyone rightly praises his steadfastness in this. Yet even in a good cause he goes only so far — saying that if it comes to violence and force, he will yield. 'Willingly,' he says, 'I will not forsake the post committed to me,

but when compelled I know not how to resist — for our weapons are prayers and tears.' Let us note the remarkable modesty and wisdom of this holy man, combined with courage and boldness. The empress Justina, unable to win him over to the Arian side, sought to drive him from the governance of the church — and this would have succeeded if he had gone to the palace to plead his case when summoned. He therefore denied that the emperor was a competent judge of so great a controversy. Both the necessity of the moment and the very nature of the matter required this approach. He judged it better to die than to allow such a precedent to be set with his consent. Yet if violence were offered, he did not contemplate resistance — he declared it unworthy of a bishop to defend the faith and the rights of the church by force of arms. In other matters, however, he showed himself ready to do whatever the emperor commanded. 'If he demands tribute,' he says, 'we do not deny it — the church's lands pay taxes. If he asks for lands, he has power to claim them, and none of us resists.' Gregory speaks in the same way: 'I am not unaware of the mind of our most noble sovereign Lord, that he is not accustomed to involve himself in matters belonging to priests, lest he should in any way share in our sins.' He does not generally exclude the emperor from judging priests — he is simply saying that there are certain causes the emperor ought to leave to the church's judgment.

By making this exception, the holy men sought nothing other than to prevent princes who were less zealous for religion from using tyrannical force and willfulness to interrupt the church in carrying out her work. For they did not object if princes sometimes exercised their authority in church matters — provided it was done to preserve the church's order, not to disrupt it; to establish disci-

pline, not to dissolve it. Since the church does not have the power to compel — nor ought to claim it (I mean civil compulsion) — it is the duty of godly kings and princes to uphold religion through laws, proclamations, and judicial proceedings. In keeping with this, when Emperor Maurice commanded certain bishops to receive back neighboring bishops who had been driven out by barbarian invasions, Gregory confirmed that command and urged obedience. When the same emperor admonished Gregory to come to agreement with John, bishop of Constantinople, Gregory explains his reasons for not being blamed — but he does not claim immunity from the secular court. Instead he promises to be obedient as far as his conscience allows, and adds that Maurice acted as a godly prince should in giving such instructions to the priests.

¶ THE .XII. CHAPTER. OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THE CHIRCH, WHEREOF THE CHEFE VSE IS IN THE CENSURES AND EXCOMMUNICATION.



Church discipline, the discussion of which we have saved for this point, must now be briefly described before we move on to the remaining topics. For the most part it rests on the power of the keys and spiritual jurisdiction. To make this easier to understand, let us divide the church into two main groups: the clergy and the people. By 'clergy' I mean, in the usual sense, those who perform public ministry in the church. We will first speak of the common discipline to which all should be subject, and then turn to the clergy, who — beyond that common discipline — have a particular discipline of their own. Because many people, out of hatred for discipline, recoil even at the word: let them hear this. If no community — not even a household with only a few members — can be maintained in good order without discipline, then discipline is far more necessary in the church, whose order ought to be the most excellent of all. Therefore, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, discipline is like the sinews — by which the members of the body are held together, each in its proper place.

Whoever desires to abolish discipline, or hinders its restoration — whether deliberately or carelessly — is truly working toward the complete ruin of the church. For what will happen if every person is free to do whatever he pleases? That is exactly what would happen if the preaching of doctrine were not supported by private admonitions, corrections, and other aids that sustain the teaching and prevent it from being ignored. Discipline, then, is like a bridle to hold back and restrain those who stubbornly resist Christ; like a spur to stir up those who are too sluggish; and sometimes, like a father's rod, by which those who have fallen more seriously may be corrected with mercy and in the gentleness of Christ's Spirit. Since we now see the beginning of a terrible ruin in the church — because there is no care or order to keep the people in check — the urgent need for a remedy is plain. This is the only remedy: the one Christ has commanded and that has always been used among godly people.

The foundation of discipline is that private admonitions must have their place. That is: if any person neglects his duty, lives recklessly or dishonorably, or has done something deserving of correction, he should allow himself to be admonished — and every person should make it his practice to admonish his brother when the need arises. Above all, pastors and elders must be watchful in this, since their office is not only to preach to the congregation but to warn and exhort in every household when general teaching has not been sufficient. Paul teaches this when he describes how he taught privately from house to house, and declares that he is innocent of the blood of all people because he never stopped, day and night with tears, admonishing each person individually. For teaching gains its force and authority when the minister not only declares to

the whole congregation what their duty is to Christ, but also has the responsibility and means to call to account those he sees are either disobedient to the teaching or negligent. If someone stubbornly refuses or, by continuing in his faults, despises such admonitions, then after a second admonition with witnesses present, Christ commands that the matter be brought before the church — that is, the assembly of elders — where the person is to be more solemnly admonished with public authority, so that, if he has any reverence for the church, he may submit and obey. But if even this does not subdue him and he continues in his wickedness, Christ commands that, as a despiser of the church, he be put out of the fellowship of the faithful.

But because Christ speaks here only of secret faults, we must draw this distinction: some sins are private, and some are public or openly known. Regarding the first kind, Christ says to every private person: 'Rebuke him between you and him alone.' Regarding open sins, Paul says in his letter to Timothy: 'Rebuke them before everyone, so that the rest may stand in fear.' Christ had previously said: 'If your brother has sinned against you.' The phrase 'against you' — unless you want to argue for argument's sake — can only mean that it is known to you privately, with no others aware of it. What the apostle teaches Timothy about openly rebuking those who sin openly, he himself practiced with Peter. When Peter sinned in a way that caused a public offense, Paul did not admonish him privately — he brought him forward before the whole church. Therefore the right order is this: for private faults, follow the steps Christ set out; for open and public offenses, proceed immediately to the church's solemn rebuke.

Here is another distinction to make: some sins are failures or faults, while others are wicked acts or serious offenses. For correcting this latter kind, admonishment and rebuke alone are not sufficient — a more severe remedy is needed. Paul demonstrates this: when he learned of the incest committed by the Corinthian, he did not merely rebuke him with words but punished him with excommunication. We now begin to see more clearly how the spiritual jurisdiction of the church — which punishes sins according to the word of the Lord — is the best safeguard of health, the foundation of order, and the bond of unity. When the church therefore excludes from her fellowship open adulterers, fornicators, thieves, robbers, troublemakers, perjurers, false witnesses, and others like them — along with obstinate people who, when properly admonished even for minor faults, show contempt for God and His judgment — she is not acting without authority. She is exercising the jurisdiction given to her by the Lord. Furthermore, so that no one should despise such judgment of the church or think little of being condemned by the united voice of the faithful, the Lord has testified that such judgment is nothing other than a pronouncement of His own sentence, and that whatever they do on earth is confirmed in heaven. For they have the word of the Lord by which they may condemn the obstinate, and the word by which they may receive the repentant back into favor. Those who think churches can long stand without this bond of discipline are deceived — unless we are willing to do without the help the Lord Himself saw that we would need. How great that necessity is will become clearer as we consider the many uses of discipline.

There are three purposes the church has in view in such corrections and excommunications. The first is that those who lead a filthy and sinful life should not be counted among Christians — to God's dishonor — as though His holy church were a gathering of wicked people. Since the church is the body of Christ, it cannot be defiled by such corrupt members without some shame falling on the Head. Therefore, to prevent anything in the church that could stain His holy name with reproach, those whose conduct would bring scandal on the Christian name must be removed from the household of faith. Consideration must also be given to the Lord's Supper, that it not be profaned by being given indiscriminately to all. For it is absolutely true that the one entrusted with distributing it, if he knowingly and willingly admits an unworthy person when he could lawfully exclude him, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had thrown the Lord's body to dogs. Chrysostom therefore sharply rebukes the priests who, fearing powerful men, dare not exclude anyone. 'The blood,' he says, 'shall be required at your hands. If you fear man, he will mock you; if you fear God, you will be respected even among men. Let us not fear clubs or purple robes or crowns — we have a greater power here. I would rather give my own body to death and let my blood be shed than be made a participant in this defilement.' Therefore, so that this most holy mystery is not stained with scandal, great care in distributing it is required — and that care cannot be exercised without the church's jurisdiction. The second purpose is to prevent the good from being corrupted by continual association with the wicked — as so easily happens. For, given our natural tendency to go astray, nothing is easier than being led away from the right path by bad examples. The apostle touches on this purpose when he commands the

Corinthians to remove the incestuous man from their community. 'A little leaven,' he says, 'corrupts the whole batch of dough.' He saw such great danger in this that he forbade even ordinary social contact with such a person. 'If anyone among you who is called a brother is a fornicator, or greedy, or an idolater, or a drunkard, or a slanderer — do not even eat with such a person.' The third purpose is that those disciplined may be brought to shame and thus begin to repent of their wickedness. It benefits even them to have their sin corrected — so that the experience of the rod may awaken those who, if handled too gently, would only become more obstinate. The apostle has this in mind when he says: 'If anyone does not obey our teaching, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him, so that he may be put to shame.' And in another place, when he writes that he has delivered the Corinthian to Satan so that his spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord — that is, as I understand it, handed over to condemnation for a time so that he might be saved eternally. He says he delivers him to Satan because the devil is outside the church, just as Christ is within it. As for those who interpret this as referring to some physical affliction, I consider that interpretation quite uncertain.

With these purposes set before us, we now need to consider how the church carries out this aspect of discipline — that which consists in jurisdiction. Let us keep the earlier distinction: some sins are public, others are private or more hidden. Public sins are those committed openly, giving offense to the whole church — not witnessed by just one or two people. By private I mean not sins that are entirely hidden from others (as the sins of hypocrites are, which do not come before the church's judgment), but those of a middle kind — not without witnesses, yet not publicly known. The

first kind does not require the steps Christ describes; when such a case comes to light, the church should do her duty by summoning the offender and correcting him in proportion to the offense. In the second kind, following Christ's rule, the matter does not come before the church until obstinacy is also present. Once the case has come to light, the further distinction between wicked acts and ordinary faults must also be observed. For lighter sins, such severe measures are not appropriate — a verbal correction is sufficient, and one that is gentle and fatherly: not to harden or crush the offender, but to bring him to himself, so that he is more glad than sorry to have been corrected. But serious offenses require a sharper remedy. It is not enough for the person who, by a wicked deed of bad example, has gravely offended the church to receive only a verbal rebuke — he must for a time be excluded from the Lord's Supper until he has given evidence of his repentance. With the Corinthian offender, Paul used not only verbal rebuke but expelled him from the church, and he also rebuked the Corinthians for having tolerated him so long. The ancient and better church maintained this order when proper governance flourished: if anyone had done a wicked deed by which offense had spread, he was first commanded to abstain from the Lord's Supper. Then he was required to humble himself before God and testify to his repentance before the church. There were also certain solemn practices imposed on those who had fallen as evidence of their repentance. When they had done this to the church's satisfaction, the bishop received them back through the laying on of hands. Cyprian often calls this restoration 'peace' and describes the practice briefly. He writes: 'They perform penance for a set period, then they come to confession, and by the laying on of hands of the bishop and the

clergy they receive permission to come to communion.' Yet the bishop and clergy exercised control over reconciliation in such a way that they still required the consent of the people, as he shows in another place.

No one was exempt from this discipline — even princes, along with common people, submitted to it. And rightly so, since it was clearly the discipline of Christ, to whom it is fitting that all scepters and crowns bow. So when Theodosius was barred by Ambrose from the communion because of the massacre committed at Thessalonica, he set aside all the royal insignia with which he was clothed, publicly lamented in the church the sin that had been brought upon him through the deception of others, and begged for forgiveness with groaning and tears. Great kings should not consider it any dishonor to humbly bow before Christ the King of kings, and they should not resent being subject to the church's judgment. For since at their own courts they hear nothing but flattery, it is more than necessary for them to be rebuked by the Lord through the mouths of priests. Rather, they ought to desire that the priests spare them nothing — so that the Lord may spare them. I will not speak here of who should exercise this jurisdiction, as that is addressed elsewhere. I will add only this: the lawful way to proceed in excommunicating someone is the method Paul describes — the elders must not act alone on their own, but with the church informed and approving. That is to say, the congregation does not govern the process, but serves as witness and guardian to ensure that nothing is done by a few out of personal bias. The entire proceeding, besides the invocation of God's name, must be car-

ried out with such gravity as befits the presence of Christ — so that it is beyond doubt that He Himself presides over and directs the judgment.

One thing must not be passed over: the severity that becomes the church must always be joined with a spirit of gentleness. We must always be careful, as Paul teaches, that the one being punished is not overwhelmed with sorrow — for then what was meant as a remedy becomes destruction. A rule of moderation is best drawn from the purpose of discipline. Since excommunication requires that the sinner be brought to repentance and bad examples be removed — so that neither Christ's name be spoken against nor others be provoked to follow those examples — keeping these aims in view will help us easily judge how far severity ought to go and where it should stop. Therefore, when a sinner gives evidence of his repentance and by this testimony, as far as he is able, removes the offense, he must not be pressed any further. If he is pressed further, the rigor has exceeded its bounds. In this respect, the excessive severity of the ancient church fathers cannot be excused — it both departed from the Lord's prescribed order and was dangerously harmful. When they burdened a sinner with solemn penance and exclusion from the Lord's Supper for sometimes seven years, sometimes four, sometimes three, and sometimes for life — what else could follow but either great hypocrisy or utter despair? Likewise, the practice of refusing any second repentance to those who had fallen a second time and casting them out of the church permanently was neither beneficial nor reasonable. Any person who weighs the matter with sound judgment will see the lack of wisdom in these practices. I am more inclined to disapprove of the public system itself than to condemn everyone who practiced it —

since it is clear that many of them disliked it but went along with it because they could not change it. Cyprian himself makes clear how much he went along with this severity against his own wishes. He writes: 'My patience and gentleness and kindness are ready for those who come. I wish all to return to the church. I wish all our fellow soldiers to be gathered within the tents of Christ and in the houses of God the Father. I forgive all things, I overlook many things — for zeal and desire to gather the brotherhood together, I do not examine with full judgment even things committed against God. In pardoning faults more than I ought, I am myself almost at fault. I embrace with ready and full love those who return with repentance, confessing their sins with humble and honest satisfaction.' Chrysostom is somewhat stricter, yet even he says: 'If God is so kind, why should His priest seem so harsh?' We also know how gently Augustine dealt with the Donatists — he did not hesitate to receive back into the episcopate those who returned from schism, even immediately upon their repentance. But because a contrary custom had become established, they were forced to set aside their own judgment and follow it.

But just as this gentleness is required of the whole body of the church — that it punish those who have fallen mercifully, not with extreme harshness, but rather confirm love toward them as Paul commands — so also each private person must govern himself with this same mercy and gentleness. It is not our place to write off those expelled from the church as no longer among the elect, or to despair of them as though they were already lost. We may indeed regard them as strangers to the church, and therefore strangers from Christ — but only for as long as they remain separated. Even if during that time they show more signs of stubbornness than of

softening, let us still commit them to the Lord's judgment, hoping better of them in time than we can see at present. Let us not cease to pray to God for them. And — to say it all in one word — let us not condemn to destruction the person himself, who is in the hand and judgment of God alone, but rather let us judge by the Lord's law what kind of works each person produces. By following this rule, we stand on God's judgment rather than pronouncing our own. Let us not take more freedom in judging than we ought — lest we confine God's power within boundaries of our making and prescribe limits to His mercy. For at His pleasure, when He sees fit, the worst of people are turned into the best; outsiders are grafted in and foreigners are chosen into the church. This is how the Lord puts human opinion to shame and humbles human rashness — which, if not restrained, presumes to claim more authority in judging than it rightly possesses.

When Christ promises that whatever His people bind on earth will be bound in heaven, He limits this power of binding to the church's censure — by which those who are excommunicated are not cast into everlasting ruin and damnation. Rather, when their lives and conduct are condemned, they are also warned of their own eternal condemnation unless they repent. For excommunication differs from a curse: a curse, removing all possibility of pardon, condemns a person and sentences him to eternal destruction. Excommunication, by contrast, addresses and punishes conduct. And though it does punish the person, it does so in a way that, by warning him of the condemnation to come, calls him back to salvation. If that goal is achieved, reconciliation and restoration to the fellowship is readily given. A formal curse, by contrast, is very rarely — if ever — used. Therefore, although church discipline does

not permit close or friendly association with those who are excommunicated, we must still use every available means to bring them to amendment so that they may return to the fellowship and unity of the church — as the apostle also teaches. 'Do not regard them as enemies,' he says, 'but correct them as brothers.' Unless this gentleness is maintained both in private and in public, there is danger that discipline will quickly turn into brutality.

This too is essential to the moderation of discipline, as Augustine argues against the Donatists: private individuals who see faults not being corrected diligently enough by the council of elders should not therefore immediately depart from the church. Likewise, pastors who cannot purge everything that needs correction as fully as they would like should not abandon the ministry or trouble the whole church with unusual harshness. For it is very true what he writes: that whoever either corrects what he can by rebuke, or — when he cannot correct it — excludes the offender while preserving the bond of peace, or — when he cannot exclude without breaking the bond of peace — disapproves with fairness and bears it with steadfastness: that person is free and released from blame. He gives the reason in another place: every godly order and manner of church discipline must always have regard for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace — which the apostle commands us to keep through mutual forbearance. When it is not kept, the medicine of correction ceases to be merely unnecessary; it becomes actively harmful, and is therefore no longer medicine at all. 'The one who diligently considers these things,' he says, 'neither neglects the strictness of discipline in maintaining unity, nor breaks the bond of fellowship by excessive correction.' He grants that not only pastors but every person should labor to see that no

fault remains in the church. He plainly declares that whoever neglects to admonish, rebuke, and correct the wicked — even if he does not approve of them or join in their sin — is still guilty before the Lord. And if that person is in a position where he could also exclude them from the sacraments and fails to do so, he now sins not through another's evil but through his own. He only requires that this be done with the discretion the Lord Himself requires, lest in pulling up the weeds, the wheat be damaged. From this he draws Cyprian's conclusion: 'Let a person mercifully correct what he can, and what he cannot, let him patiently endure — and with love groan and lament over it.'

He says this in response to the rigidity of the Donatists, who — when they saw faults in the churches that bishops rebuked in words but did not punish with excommunication (because they judged this approach ineffective) — bitterly attacked the bishops as traitors to discipline and separated themselves from the flock of Christ in an ungodly schism. The Anabaptists do the same today: refusing to acknowledge any congregation as belonging to Christ unless it shines in every point with angelic perfection, they use their zeal as a pretext to tear down all genuine building up. Such people, says Augustine, do not act out of hatred for other people's wickedness, but out of a desire to maintain their own quarrels. They seek either to draw away or at least to divide the weak people, who are snared by the boasting of their name. Swollen with pride, frenzied with stubbornness, treacherous in their slanders, disruptive with their agitations — lest it become obvious that they lack the light of truth — they hide behind a pretense of harsh severity. And the things Scripture commands to be done with measured and restorative discipline for correcting brothers' faults, preserving

genuine love, and maintaining the unity of peace: these they twist into sacrilege of schism and grounds for division. This is how Satan transforms himself into an angel of light — using the occasion of what looks like righteous severity to advocate unmerciful cruelty. His only goal is to corrupt and break the bond of peace and unity. While that bond holds fast, all his power to harm Christians is weakened, his traps of treachery are broken, and his plans for destruction come to nothing.

Augustine especially emphasizes this one thing: if the infection of sin has spread through the whole congregation, then a severe yet merciful discipline is necessary. 'For,' he says, 'schemes of separation are vain, harmful, and full of sacrilege — because they are ungodly and proud, and they trouble the weak who are good far more than they reform the hardened who are wicked.' And what he taught others, he himself faithfully practiced. Writing to Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, he laments that drunkenness — so severely condemned in Scripture — runs unchecked throughout Africa, and he urges Aurelius to call a council of bishops to provide a remedy. He adds shortly after: 'These things, I think, should be addressed not harshly, not rigidly, not in an imperious manner — more by teaching than by commanding, more by exhortation than by threatening. For this is how we must deal with a crowd of offenders — but severity is to be used against the sins of a few.' Yet he does not mean that bishops should therefore close their eyes or remain silent about public faults simply because they cannot punish them severely — as he himself explains later. Rather, he wants the measure of correction to be so calibrated that, as much as possible, it brings health to the body rather than destruction. He therefore concludes: 'Therefore the apostle's command must in no way be

neglected — to separate the wicked when it can be done without endangering the peace. But this must also be kept: that bearing with one another, we should endeavor to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'

The remaining aspect of discipline — which is not strictly part of the power of the keys — consists in this: that pastors, according to the needs of the times, should call the people to fasting, or to public prayers, or to other exercises of humility, repentance, and faith. The word of God prescribes no fixed time, measure, or form for these things; they are left to the church's judgment. The observance of this aspect has always been practiced by the ancient church from the time of the apostles — and it is just as beneficial today. However, the apostles themselves were not its originators — they took their example from the law and the prophets. There we see that whenever any weighty matter arose, the people were assembled, public prayers were called, and fasting was commanded. The apostles therefore followed a practice that was not new to God's people and that they foresaw would be beneficial. The same holds for other exercises designed to stir the people to their duty or to maintain their reverence and obedience. Examples of this are plentiful throughout the sacred histories and need not be collected here. In sum, this is the principle to hold: whenever there arises a controversy of religion that must be resolved by a synod or ecclesiastical judgment; whenever a minister is to be chosen; whenever any difficult or weighty matter is at hand; and again whenever signs of God's wrath appear — such as plague, war, or famine — it is a holy and beneficial practice for every age that pastors call the people to public fasting and special prayers. If anyone refuses to accept the Old Testament evidence as applicable to the Christian

church, the apostles themselves also did the same things. As for prayer itself, I think scarcely anyone will raise a question about that. So let us say something about fasting — since many, not understanding its value, consider it unnecessary; some dismiss it entirely as superfluous; and when its proper use is not well understood, it is easy to slide into superstition.

Holy and true fasting serves three purposes. We fast either to weaken and subdue the flesh so it does not grow unruly, or to be better prepared for prayer and holy meditation, or as an expression of our humbling before God when we wish to acknowledge our guilt before Him. The first purpose does not apply as often to public fasting, since people differ greatly in physical condition and health — it therefore fits better with private fasting. The second purpose applies to both: both the whole church and every individual believer needs this kind of preparation for prayer. The third purpose is equally common to both. There will be times when God strikes a nation with war, plague, or some other calamity — in such a shared affliction the whole people must examine themselves and openly confess their guilt. But if the Lord's hand strikes an individual, he must do the same either alone or with his household. This rests primarily on the disposition of the heart. But when the heart is affected as it ought to be, it will almost inevitably express itself outwardly — and especially when the goal is common edification, so that together in public confession of sin all may give praise to God for His righteousness, and each may encourage the others by example.

Therefore fasting, as a sign of humility, has more frequent use in public settings than among private individuals — although it is relevant to both, as already said. So in the discipline we are now

discussing: whenever we must make supplication to God in any weighty matter, it is fitting to combine fasting with prayer. When the Antiochians laid hands on Paul and Barnabas, they joined fasting to prayer in order to commend to God more effectively their ministry of such great importance. So also afterward, when they appointed ministers over churches, they regularly prayed with fasting (Acts 14:3; Acts 14:23). In this kind of fasting they had one aim: to be fresher and more undistracted for prayer. Experience confirms this: when the stomach is full, the mind is not lifted toward God as readily — neither carrying itself to prayer with wholehearted and fervent affection, nor sustaining it. This is the sense of what Luke records about Anna: that she served the Lord with fastings and prayers (Luke 2:37). He is not saying that her worship consisted in fasting, but that the holy woman practiced fasting as a way of sustaining herself in prayer. Such also was the fasting of Nehemiah when he prayed to God with earnest zeal for the deliverance of his people (Nehemiah 1:4). For this reason Paul says that it is good for married people to abstain for a time from relations so that they may give themselves more freely to prayer and fasting (1 Corinthians 7:5). By linking fasting with prayer as a supporting aid, he reminds us that fasting has no value except as it serves this purpose. Furthermore, in that same passage, when he gives married couples the rule that they should fulfill their duty to one another, it is clear he is not speaking of daily prayers, but of those that require more earnest and concentrated attention.

Likewise, if plague, famine, or war begins to spread, or if some calamity seems to threaten a country or people — it is the duty of pastors to call the church to fasting, so that they may humbly entreat the Lord to turn away His wrath. For He signals that He is

prepared, and in a sense armed for judgment, when He causes any danger to appear. Therefore, just as accused men in former times would let their beards grow long, leave their hair unkempt, and dress in dark clothing to humble themselves and seek the judge's mercy — so when we stand accused before the judgment seat of God, it honors His glory, serves common edification, and is genuinely beneficial and healing for us to present ourselves in a sorrowful manner, pleading to escape His severity. That this was practiced among the people of Israel is easy to gather from the words of Joel. When he commands a trumpet to be sounded, the congregation to be assembled, fasting to be appointed, and the rest that follows — he is speaking of things established in common practice. He had just before announced that the people's wicked deeds had been examined and that the day of judgment was at hand, summoning them as the accused to plead their cause. He then cries out that they should hasten to sackcloth and ashes, to weeping and fasting — that is, that they should also express their prostration before the Lord with outward signs. Sackcloth and ashes may have suited those times more particularly, but there is no doubt that the assembling together, the weeping, the fasting, and the like also apply to our own era whenever our circumstances call for it. For since this is a holy practice — both for humbling people and for confessing that humility — why should we use it less than the ancient people did in similar need? We read that not only the people of Israel, who had been formed and instructed by God's word, but also the Ninevites — who had no teaching other than the preaching of Jonah — fasted as a sign of sorrow. What reason is there, then, for us not to do the same? But, it is said, fasting is an outward ceremony that came to an end, along with the

rest, in Christ. Even so, to this day it is — as it has always been — a very good aid for the faithful and a beneficial reminder to rouse themselves, so that they do not by carelessness and sluggishness increasingly provoke God when He chastises them with His afflictions. Therefore when Christ excuses His apostles for not fasting, He does not say that fasting has been abolished — He simply assigns it to times of sorrow and calamity. 'The time will come,' He says, 'when the bridegroom will be taken away from them.'

But to avoid confusion about what fasting means, let us define it clearly. We do not mean here simply abstinence and frugality in food and drink — but something more specific. The life of the godly should certainly be marked by honest restraint and sobriety, so that throughout its entire course it resembles a kind of fasting as much as possible. But beyond this there is another kind of fasting — a temporary fasting in which we cut back from our usual food and drink for a day or a period of time, placing ourselves under a stricter and more austere abstinence than normal. This consists in three things: timing, quality of food, and quantity. By timing I mean that we should engage in the activities for which fasting is appointed while actually fasting — for example, if a person fasts for a time of public prayer, he should come to it empty. Quality means that all rich and delicate food should be absent; we should be content with plain and simple food, and not stimulate the appetite with fine things. The rule of quantity is that we eat more sparingly and less than we are accustomed — only for necessity, not for pleasure.

We must always be especially on guard against superstition creeping in, as it has in the past to the great harm of the church. It would be far better to have no fasting at all than to practice it dili-

gently while at the same time corrupting it with false and harmful ideas — which the world is always prone to fall into unless pastors guard against it with great faithfulness and wisdom. The first priority, therefore, is to insist on what Joel teaches: that people should cut their hearts, not their garments. That is, pastors must warn the people that God places little value on fasting in itself, unless it is accompanied by an inward disposition of the heart — genuine hatred of sin and of oneself, genuine humility, and genuine sorrow arising from the fear of God. Fasting is beneficial for no other reason than that it serves as a supporting aid to these inward realities. For there is nothing God abhors more than when people use outward signs and visible displays in place of genuine purity of heart, laboring under a false pretense to deceive themselves. This is why Isaiah sharply rebukes the Jews' hypocrisy — they thought they had satisfied God by fasting, while continuing to nurture wickedness and impure thoughts in their hearts. 'Is this,' he says, 'the fast the Lord requires?' And so on. Hypocritical fasting, therefore, is not merely unprofitable and pointless effort — it is a great abomination. A related error must also be carefully avoided: that fasting be treated as a meritorious work or a form of worship. Since fasting is in itself a neutral practice and has value only by reference to the ends it is meant to serve, it is most harmful superstition to lump it together with the works God commands as intrinsically necessary. This was the error of the Manichaeans of old, and when Augustine refutes them he teaches plainly enough that fasting is to be judged by no other ends than those I have described — and is acceptable to God only when directed to those ends. The third error, though not as impious, is still dangerous: pressing fasting as one of the chief duties, to be observed with

great strictness and rigor, and praising it so extravagantly that people think they have accomplished something remarkable when they have fasted. In this regard I cannot entirely excuse the ancient church fathers — they planted seeds of superstition and provided the occasion for the tyranny that arose later. Sometimes we find sound and wise teachings on fasting in their writings, but then we also encounter excessive praises of fasting that rank it among the chief virtues.

By that time the superstitious observance of Lent had become widespread: the common people thought they were doing something noteworthy in God's service by it, and the pastors commended it as a holy following of Christ. Yet it is plain that Christ did not fast to set an example for others to imitate, but rather to demonstrate at the very outset of His proclamation of the Gospel that this was not a human doctrine but had come down from heaven. It is remarkable that so obvious an error — one refuted by so many clear arguments — could have crept in among people of such sharp judgment. Christ did not fast regularly (which He would necessarily have done if He intended to establish a law of annual fasting), but only once — when He was preparing Himself for the proclamation of the Gospel. Furthermore, He fasted not in the manner of ordinary people, as He would have done if His intention were to provoke others to follow Him. Instead His fast was such as to inspire wonder at Him rather than imitation of Him. And there is no other reason for this fast than for the fast of Moses when he received the law at the Lord's hand. Since the miracle was given through Moses to establish the authority of the law, it could not be absent from Christ — lest the Gospel appear to rank below the law. Yet after Moses' time, no one ever thought to use Moses as

a basis for requiring that form of fasting from the people of Israel. None of the holy prophets and fathers followed it — and they certainly had zeal and devotion enough for godly exercises. As for what is said of Elijah — that he went forty days without food and drink — that served no other purpose than to show the people that he had been raised up to restore the law from which almost all Israel had departed. Therefore, presenting fasting under the title and pretext of following Christ was sheer wrongheaded zeal and full of superstition. In the practice of fasting there was, however, great diversity even then, as Cassiodorus records from Socrates in the ninth book of his history. The Romans, he says, fasted only three weeks, but during those weeks the fast was continuous except on Sundays and Saturdays. The Slavonians and Greeks fasted six weeks; others seven — but their fasting was observed at intervals. They differed no less in the kinds of food allowed: some ate nothing but bread and water; some added vegetables; some did not abstain from fish and fowl; some made no distinction in food at all. Augustine also mentions this diversity in his later letter to Januarius.

Then came worse times. To the misguided zeal of the people was added both the ignorance and crudeness of the bishops, along with a lust for control and a tyrannical harshness. Wicked laws were made that bound consciences with destructive requirements. Eating meat was forbidden, as though it made a person unclean. Sacrilegious ideas were piled on top of each other until they reached the bottom of all error. And to leave no form of perverseness untried, they began, under a most absurd pretense of abstinence, to mock God. For what is sought at those times is praise for fasting — amid the finest and most exquisite foods. No delicacies

are considered too much; there is never greater abundance, variety, or richness of food. In such lavish preparation they imagine they are serving God rightly. I will not even speak of how they gorge themselves more disgracefully during their would-be holy seasons than at any other time. In short, they consider it the highest form of worshiping God to abstain from meat while indulging freely in every other kind of luxury. Conversely, they treat it as the most extreme wickedness — almost beyond remedy — if a person so much as tastes a tiny piece of bacon or plain meat with coarse bread. Jerome records that even in his time there were some who mocked God with such foolishness: unwilling to eat oil, they had the most lavish delicacies brought to them from every direction. To overcome the natural desire for water, they abstained from drinking it but had sweet and expensive drinks prepared — which they sipped not from a cup, but from a shell. What was then the fault of a few is now the common practice of all wealthy people: they fast for no other reason than to feast more sumptuously and lavishly afterward. But I will not waste many words on a matter that is not in doubt. This much I will say: in fasting as in every other part of discipline, the papists have nothing right, nothing pure, nothing well-ordered — nothing that could give them any reason for pride, as though anything praiseworthy remained among them.

There follows another part of discipline, which belongs specifically to the clergy. This is contained in the canons the ancient bishops established for themselves and their order — such as: no clergy member should engage in hunting, gambling, or excessive banqueting; no one should practice usury or trade; no one should attend immodest dances; and similar ordinances. Penalties were added to give the canons authority, so that none should break

them without consequence. To this end, each bishop was entrusted with the governance of his own clergy — to rule his ministers according to the canons and keep them to their duty. For this purpose, yearly reviews and synods were established, so that anyone negligent in his duty would be admonished, and anyone who had offended would be punished in proportion to his offense. The bishops themselves also had their annual provincial synods — and in ancient times, two synods per year — by which they were held accountable if they had done anything contrary to their duty. If any bishop had been too harsh or oppressive toward his clergy, an appeal could be made to those synods even on the complaint of a single person. The most severe punishment was removal from office and temporary exclusion from the Lord's Supper. Because this was a continuous practice, they never dismissed a synod without appointing the time and place for the next one. The calling of a general council belonged to the emperor alone, as all ancient council summons attest. As long as this discipline flourished, the clergy required of the people in words no more than they themselves performed in example and deed. Indeed, they were considerably stricter with themselves than with the people. And rightly so — the people are appropriately governed with a gentler, more lenient discipline, while the clergy must exercise sharper judgment among themselves and be less tolerant of their own failures than of others'. How completely all this has fallen out of use need not be rehearsed, since today nothing can be imagined more unrestrained and dissolute than the clergy — their licentiousness has become so open that the whole world speaks of it. To prevent all antiquity from seeming utterly buried among them, they do maintain certain shadows that deceive the eyes of the simple — but these shadows

come no closer to ancient practice than an ape's mimicry comes to what people do through reason and deliberate intention. There is a notable passage in Xenophon where he describes how disgracefully the Persians had departed from the ordinances of their ancestors and had fallen from a rigorous way of life into softness and self-indulgence — while still claiming to keep the ancient customs. In the time of Cyrus, sobriety and self-restraint so thoroughly prevailed that there was no need to wipe one's nose — and to do so was considered shameful. But with later generations this became a pious observance: no one was to blow his nose, but he was free to sniff back the foul humors built up by gluttonous eating until they rotted inside him. The ancient rule forbade bringing wine jars to the table — but drinking until being carried away drunk was perfectly acceptable. The rule was to eat only once a day; these worthy successors did not abolish it, but they allowed the feasting to continue from midday to midnight. The custom was for travelers to complete their day's journey before eating — but it became acceptable, to avoid fatigue, to shorten the journey to two hours. Whenever the papists hold up their counterfeit rules to claim resemblance to the holy fathers, this example will sufficiently expose their foolish imitation — no painter could portray it more vividly.

In one thing they are excessively rigid and unyielding: they do not permit priests to marry. But how freely they allow fornication to go unpunished among themselves need not be spelled out. Emboldened by their supposed celibacy, they have hardened themselves against all manner of wickedness. This prohibition clearly shows how pestilent all their traditions are — it has not only stripped the church of good and qualified pastors, but has introduced a terrible flood of evils and driven many souls into despair.

The prohibition of marriage for priests is a wicked tyranny, contrary not only to God's word but to all fairness. First, it was never lawful for men to forbid what the Lord had left free. Furthermore, God has expressly provided by His word that this freedom must not be violated — this is so clear it requires no lengthy demonstration. I will not even mention how Paul in several places commands that a bishop should be the husband of one wife. But what could be said more forcefully than this: the Holy Spirit declares through Paul that in the last times there will be wicked men who forbid marriage — and he calls them not merely deceivers, but agents of the devil. This, then, is a prophecy, a holy word of the Holy Spirit, by which He armed the church beforehand against this danger: the prohibition of marriage is the teaching of demons. They think they have cleverly escaped this by applying the passage to Montanus, the Tatians, the Encratites, and other ancient heretics. 'Only those men condemned marriage outright,' they say. 'We do not condemn it — we simply exclude the clergy from it, for whom we consider it unsuitable.' As though the prophecy, first fulfilled in those ancient heretics, could not also apply to them — or as though the childish evasion were worth hearing, that they claim not to forbid marriage because they do not forbid it to everyone. This is like a tyrant arguing that a law is not unjust simply because it only oppresses one part of the population.

They argue that the priest must be distinguished from the people by some special mark. As though the Lord had not already foreseen this — and established precisely what distinctive qualities priests ought to have. By this they effectively accuse the apostle of disrupting order and defacing the beauty of the church — since when Paul drew out the complete picture of a good bishop, he

dared to include marriage among the other qualities he required. I know how they interpret this passage — namely, that only a man who has not had a second wife may be chosen. And I grant that this is not a new interpretation. But that it is a false interpretation is plain from the text itself, which shortly after describes the qualities the wives of bishops and deacons ought to have. Paul counts marriage among the virtues of a bishop; these men teach that it is an intolerable blemish in the clergy. And — good heavens — not content with this general degradation, they call it in their canons 'uncleanness' and 'defilement of the flesh.' Let everyone consider from what workshop these ideas have come. Christ honored marriage so highly that He made it an image of His holy union with the church. What could be said more honorably to establish the dignity of marriage? With what face, then, can that be called unclean or defiled in which shines a likeness of the spiritual grace of Christ?

Now when their prohibition so plainly contradicts the word of God, they nevertheless find something in Scripture to defend it. The Levitical priests were required to be separated from their wives whenever their turn came to minister, so that they might handle the holy things in a state of purity. Therefore, they argue, it would be most unfitting for our sacred rites — which are far more noble and performed daily — to be handled by married men. As though the minister of the Gospel stood in the same position as the Levitical priesthood. Those priests, as symbolic figures, represented Christ — who, as the mediator between God and people, would reconcile the Father to us with complete purity. Since sinners could not in every respect embody the image of His holiness, they were commanded to purify themselves beyond ordinary hu-

man practice when they came to the sanctuary — because they were at that moment specifically representing Christ, appearing at the tabernacle as peacemakers to reconcile the people to God, in the image of the heavenly judgment seat. Since the pastors of the church today do not carry that symbolic role, comparing them to the Levitical priests is pointless. Therefore the apostle speaks without qualification and with confidence: marriage is honorable among all people, but for fornicators and adulterers the judgment of God awaits. The apostles themselves confirmed by their own example that marriage is not incompatible with the holiness of any office, however excellent — for Paul testifies that they not only had wives but carried them along on their journeys.

It was also astonishing arrogance for them to present this requirement of celibacy as a necessity — to the great reproach of the ancient church, which, though it excelled in remarkable learning about God, excelled even more in holiness. For if they do not respect the apostles (as they sometimes boldly dismiss them), what will they do with all the ancient fathers, who clearly not only permitted but actively approved of marriage in the episcopal order? Their stance amounts to accusing the ancient church of nurturing a corrupt profaning of sacred things, because the Lord's mysteries were not properly revered among them. The question of requiring celibacy was raised at the Nicene Synod — as there are always certain overly scrupulous people who invent new things to draw admiration to themselves. But what was actually decreed? The council agreed with the judgment of Paphnutius, who declared that a man's living with his own wife is chastity. Therefore marriage remained holy among them — it brought them no shame and was not considered to tarnish the ministry.

Then came times in which an excessively superstitious devotion to celibacy took hold. With it came those frequent and extravagant praises of virginity, to the point where the people could scarcely think any other virtue comparable to it. And although marriage was not condemned as unclean, its dignity was so diminished and its holiness so obscured that a person who did not abstain from marriage seemed not to have enough ambition for perfection. From this arose the canons that first forbade those who had already been ordained as priests from marrying, and then refused ordination to any but unmarried men or those who had left their wives altogether. These things, because they appeared to add dignity to the priesthood, were received with great approval — I grant — even from ancient times. But if our opponents appeal to antiquity against us, my first answer is this: the freedom for bishops to be married remained both in the apostles' time and for some ages afterward. The apostles themselves, and other highly authoritative pastors who succeeded them, made use of this freedom without hesitation. The example of that earlier church ought to carry more weight with us than to make us think something is either unlawful or unsuitable that was then practiced with approval. My second point is that the era which, out of an exaggerated love for virginity, became biased against marriage, did not impose the requirement of celibacy on priests as though it were intrinsically necessary — they simply preferred unmarried men over married ones. My third answer is that they did not enforce this so strictly as to compel with force and necessity those who were not suited for celibacy to remain continent. For while they punished

fornication with very severe laws, of those who contracted marriage they decreed no more than that they must step down from their office.

Therefore, whenever the defenders of this new tyranny appeal to antiquity to justify their celibacy requirement, we will answer them by demanding that they first restore the old purity to their priests: that they remove adulterers and fornicators; that they not allow those who are forbidden the lawful and chaste use of marriage to run unpunished into every form of lust; that they revive the discontinued discipline that once restrained all such licentiousness; and that they free the church from the foul corruption by which it has long been disfigured. When they have done all this, they must then be reminded not to boast as necessary what is in itself free and depends on what is beneficial for the church. I say this not because I think any circumstance justifies imposing the burden of celibacy on the clergy through canons — but so that thoughtful people may see with what face our opponents slander the holy marriage of priests by invoking the name of antiquity. As for the fathers whose writings survive — even they, when expressing their own judgment (with the exception of Jerome), did not so spitefully degrade the honor of marriage. We will be content with one commendation from Chrysostom — because since he was a leading champion of virginity, he cannot be suspected of having been more generous than others in praising marriage. He says this: 'The first degree of chastity is pure virginity; the second is faithful marriage. Therefore, the second kind of virginity is the chaste love of matrimony.'

¶THE .XIII. CHAPTER. OF VOWES, BY
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It is truly grievous that the church — for whom freedom was purchased at the immeasurable price of Christ's blood — has been so oppressed by cruel tyranny and nearly buried under a vast heap of traditions. Yet in the meantime, every person's private foolishness shows that God has, with very good reason, permitted so much to Satan and his agents. It was not enough, apparently, for people to neglect Christ's commands and bear whatever burdens false teachers laid on them — each person also had to create his own additional burdens and thereby dig his own pit to fall into. This happened as people competed to devise vows by which they could add even greater and more binding obligations on top of the ones they already bore. Since we have already shown that through the boldness of those who ruled under the title of pastors, God's worship was corrupted by unjust laws that ensnared helpless consciences, it is fitting here to consider a related evil — so that it becomes plain how the world, according to its own perverse inclination, has always used whatever means available to push away the

helps that would bring it to God. To make it clearer how seriously harmful vows have been, readers should keep in mind the principles we established earlier. First, we taught that everything required for living a godly and holy life is contained in the law. We also taught that the Lord, in order to draw us away from devising new works, has enclosed the whole substance of righteousness in simple obedience to His will. If these things are true, it follows easily that all invented forms of worship we devise to earn God's favor are not acceptable to Him — however pleasing they may appear to us. And indeed, God Himself in many places not only openly rejects such worship but deeply abhors it. This raises the question of what to think about vows made beyond what God's word expressly commands — whether Christians may rightly make such vows, and how far such vows are binding. What people call a promise toward each other is, in relation to God, called a vow. When we make promises to people, we promise either what we think will please them or what we owe them by duty. Far greater care, therefore, is required in vows directed to God Himself, with whom we must deal with utmost seriousness. Superstition has in every age run wild in this area — people, without judgment or discernment, vowed to God whatever came into their minds or onto their lips. From this came the follies — indeed the monstrous absurdities — of the vows among the pagans, by which they so shamelessly mocked their gods. Would to God that Christians had not followed their example. They should not have — but we see that in certain eras nothing was more common than this wickedness: the people everywhere, despising God's law, burned with a reckless eagerness to vow whatever pleased them in their imagination. I will not press the point harshly or catalog all the ways and means in which peo-

ple have offended here. But I thought it right to say this in passing, so it may be clear that our discussion of vows is not an unnecessary matter.

If we want to judge correctly which vows are lawful and which are wrongful, three things must be weighed: to whom the vow is made, who we are who make it, and with what intention we make it. The first consideration requires that we remember we are dealing with God — whose delight in obedience is so great that He pronounces all self-invented worship to be accursed, however fine and impressive it may appear to people. If all voluntary worship that we devise for ourselves without His command is abominable to God, then no worship can be acceptable to Him except what His word approves. Therefore let us not take such great liberty as to dare to vow to God something for which we have no warrant from His word about how He regards it. Paul's teaching that whatever is done without faith is sin applies to all actions — but it applies with special force when one's aim is directed straight toward God. For if we fall into error even in the smallest things (as Paul argues in the case of differences in food) where certainty of faith does not guide us — how much more restraint is required when we are attempting something of the greatest weight? Nothing ought to concern us more earnestly than the duties of religion. Therefore let this be the first rule in making vows: never vow anything until conscience has first firmly determined that it is not acting rashly. Conscience will be free from the danger of rashness when God goes before it — when, as it were, His word informs it of what is good and profitable to do.

The second consideration we mentioned requires that we assess our own strength, keep our calling in view, and not disregard the gift of freedom God has given us. One who vows what is beyond his power, or contrary to his calling, acts rashly. One who despises the generosity of God — by which He has appointed us as stewards over His gifts — acts ungratefully. When I say this, I do not mean that anything is so thoroughly within our own capability that we may confidently promise it to God from our own strength. It was rightly decreed at the Council of Orange that nothing is rightly vowed to God except what we have received from His hand, since everything offered to Him is His own gift in the first place. But since some things are given to us by God's goodness and others are withheld by His wise design, let every person — as Paul commands — consider the measure of grace given to him. My point here is simply that vows must be calibrated to the measure the Lord prescribes through His giving. If you reach beyond what He permits, you will pull yourself down by taking on too much. For example: when those conspirators mentioned in Acts vowed to eat nothing until Paul was killed — even if the plan had not been wicked, the rashness itself was inexcusable, since they made another man's life and death subject to their own power. So Jephthah suffered for his folly when in reckless haste he made a thoughtless vow. Among all these, the vow of celibacy holds the foremost place as an act of reckless arrogance. Priests, monks, and nuns, forgetting their own weakness, imagine themselves capable of maintaining celibacy throughout their entire lives. But by what oracle have they been assured that they will have the gift of chastity to the very end of the life they vow it for? They hear God's word concerning the universal condition of humanity: 'It is not good for man to be

alone.' They know — and would to God they did not feel — that sin remaining in us is never without sharp and persistent stings. With what confidence do they dare to reject the general calling for their entire lives, when the gift of continence is more often granted for a limited season as circumstances require? In such stubbornness, let them not expect God to be their helper — let them rather remember what is written: 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' And to tempt God is to strive against the nature He placed in us and to despise the gifts He has given as though they had nothing to do with us. Not only do they do this, but they dare to call marriage itself — which God did not think beneath His majesty to institute, which He has declared honorable among all people, which Christ our Lord sanctified with His presence, and which He honored with His first miracle — they dare to call it defilement, and do so only to exalt their brand of celibacy with extravagant praise. As though they themselves did not plainly demonstrate in their own lives that being unmarried is one thing, and being chaste is quite another. Yet they most shamelessly call their manner of life angelic — doing a profound injustice to the angels of God by comparing them with fornicators, adulterers, and things far worse and more vile. No arguments are needed here — the thing itself is a plain refutation. We see clearly with what terrible consequences the Lord commonly punishes such arrogance and such contempt for His gifts through self-reliance. I will spare the details of the more hidden sins — even what is already visible is more than enough. It is beyond dispute that we must vow nothing that would hinder us from fulfilling our calling. For example: if a householder should vow to abandon his wife and children and take on other burdens — or if a man suited for public office, when chosen, should vow to remain a

private citizen. But what it means that our liberty must not be despised requires some clarification. Here is a brief explanation: since God has made us stewards of all things and has placed everything in subjection to us for our benefit, there is no reason to suppose it is acceptable to God when we bind ourselves in servitude to outward things that were meant to serve us. I say this because many seek the reputation of humility by entangling themselves in many observances — observances from which God has, for good reason, set us free. If we wish to avoid this danger, let us always remember that we must not depart from the order the Lord has established in the Christian church.

Now I come to the third point I mentioned: that the intention behind a vow matters greatly if it is to be acceptable to God. Since the Lord regards the heart and not the outward show, the very same action may please Him and be acceptable at one time, and deeply displease Him at another — depending on the purpose of the mind behind it. If you vow to abstain from wine as though there were some holiness in the abstinence itself, you are being superstitious. If you have some other legitimate purpose in mind, no one can rightly object. In my judgment, there are four proper ends to which vows may rightly be directed. For teaching purposes, I assign two of these to the past and two to the future. The vows relating to the past either testify to our thankfulness to God for benefits received, or they involve our own self-discipline as a response to offenses we have committed in seeking to avert His wrath. Let us call the first kind exercises of thanksgiving, and the second exercises of repentance. An example of the first kind is the tithe Jacob vowed if the Lord would bring him safely home from exile. Another example is the peace offerings that godly kings and com-

manders vowed to offer if they obtained victory in a just war, or when they were under great distress and the Lord delivered them. This is also the sense of all those passages in the Psalms that speak of vows. Such vows are still fitting for us today, whenever the Lord has delivered us from calamity, serious illness, or any other danger. At such times it is entirely appropriate for a godly person to offer a vowed gift to God as a solemn acknowledgment of His goodness — lest one appear ungrateful. One example is sufficient to illustrate the second kind. If someone has fallen into an offense through gluttony, nothing prevents him from temporarily giving up all rich food to discipline his excess — and he may add a vow to bind himself with a stronger obligation. I am not laying down a universal law for everyone who has similarly offended. I am only showing what is permissible for those who find such a vow personally beneficial. I therefore affirm such a vow as lawful, while at the same time leaving it as a matter of free choice.

The vows that look toward the future serve partly — as we have already said — to make us more watchful, and partly to spur us forward in our duty. A person may recognize that he is so prone to a certain vice that in something otherwise not wrong in itself, he cannot restrain himself from falling into sin. In that case, he does nothing inappropriate by temporarily cutting himself off from that thing through a vow. For example: if a man knows that a certain style of clothing is dangerous for him, and yet is strongly attracted to it — what could he do better than to put a bridle on himself, that is, to bind himself to abstain from it, thus freeing himself from the ongoing temptation? Likewise, if a person is forgetful or sluggish about necessary duties of godliness, why may he not by taking a vow both sharpen his memory and shake off his laziness? I grant

that in both cases this is a somewhat childish form of discipline — but even as aids to weakness, they are not without benefit for those who are still raw and unformed in their faith. Therefore we may say that vows are lawful when they are directed to one of these ends — especially in outward matters — provided they are grounded in what God approves, fit with our calling, and are proportionate to the measure of grace God has given us.

It is now also not difficult to determine what should be thought of vows in general. There is one common vow of all the faithful — the vow made in baptism, which we confirm and as it were seal through catechism and participation in the Lord's Supper. For the sacraments are like documents by which the Lord conveys to us His mercy and thereby eternal life, while on our part we in return promise Him our obedience. The essence of this vow is this: that renouncing Satan, we give ourselves to God's service, to obey His holy commandments and not to follow the corrupt desires of our flesh. There can be no doubt that this vow, having the testimony of Scripture and being required of all of God's children, is both holy and beneficial for salvation. The fact that no one in this life renders the perfect obedience to the law that God requires does not change this. For since this form of covenant is part of the covenant of grace — which includes both the forgiveness of sins and the Spirit of sanctification — the promise we make there is joined with a plea for pardon and a request for help. In evaluating particular vows, the three earlier rules must be kept in mind, by which any vow can be safely weighed. Do not take my approval of certain vows as a commendation for making them daily. Though I would not presume to set a fixed rule about their number or frequency, if anyone follows my counsel, he will take on only sober, temporary vows.

For if you frequently break forth in making many vows, all sense of reverence will wear away with repetition and you will drift into superstition. And if you bind yourself with a permanent vow, you will either suffer great pain and grief in breaking it, or you will grow weary over time and at some point allow yourself to breach it.

It is also plain how deeply the world has been possessed by superstition in this area in certain past ages. One man vowed to abstain from wine — as though abstaining from wine were in itself a form of worship acceptable to God. Another bound himself to fasting, another to abstaining from meat on certain days, imagining with vain belief that those days possessed a special holiness above others. And some things still more childish were vowed — and not by children. It was considered great wisdom to undertake vowed pilgrimages to holy sites, sometimes traveling the entire journey on foot, or with the body half naked, as though greater hardship would earn greater merit. All of these, and others like them — for which the world for a time burned with incredible enthusiasm — when examined by the rules we have set out above, will be found not only vain and trivial but full of manifest ungodliness. For however the flesh may judge, God abhors nothing more than invented worship. Added to this are the destructive and damnable beliefs that accompany such practices: hypocrites who perform these trifles imagine they have gained no small measure of righteousness; they place the whole substance of godliness in outward observances; and they look down on everyone who is less devoted to such things.

There is no point in cataloging every specific form. But since monastic vows are held in greater reverence — because they appear to have the approval of the church's general judgment — it is

worth addressing them briefly. First, to prevent anyone from defending monasticism as it exists today based on long-standing custom, it should be noted that in ancient times the order of life in monasteries was very different. Those who were drawn to the most rigorous discipline and self-denial went there. The discipline the Spartans practiced under the laws of Lycurgus resembled what was practiced among the monks then — in fact, monastic discipline was considerably stricter. They slept on the ground. Their drink was water. Their food was bread, herbs, and roots. Their finest fare was oil and chickpeas. They abstained from all delicate food and bodily adornment. These things might seem exaggerated if they were not recorded by eyewitnesses such as Gregory Nazianzus, Basil, and Chrysostom. But through these disciplines they prepared themselves for more important responsibilities. For the monasteries of that time served as nurseries for the order of church ministers. The men just named are proof enough of this — all were raised in monasteries and called from there to the office of bishop — as were many other outstanding men of that era. Augustine also shows that in his day monasteries supplied clergy to the church. He writes to the monks of the island of Capraea: 'Brothers, we exhort you in the Lord to hold to your purpose and persevere to the end. And if at any time our mother the church requires your service, do not take it on with greedy pride, nor refuse it with flattering laziness, but obey God with a humble heart. Do not place your own peaceful leisure above the necessities of the church — to whose service, if no good men had been willing to give themselves in her labor, you would not have found where you could be spiritually born.' And to Aurelius: 'Both an occasion of falling is given to themselves, and a most serious wrong is done to

the clergy, if those who have left the monastery are chosen for ordained service. For even from those who remain in the monastery, we take into the clergy only the most approved and best. Unless perhaps, as the common people say, a man is a bad fencer but a good fiddler — and so it might be jestingly said of us: he is a bad monk, but a good minister. It is much to be lamented if we exalt monks to such ruinous pride and think clergy worthy of such contempt — when sometimes even a good monk does not make a good minister if he has sufficient self-control but lacks the necessary learning.' From these passages it appears that godly men customarily used monastic discipline to prepare themselves for the governance of the church, so that they might take up so great an office more fittingly and with better preparation. Not all of them aimed at or achieved this end — since most were uneducated men — but those who were suited for it were selected.

But Augustine chiefly portrays the form of ancient monasticism in two places: in the book *On the Manners of the Catholic Church*, where he sets the holiness of that way of life against the slanders of the Manichaeans; and in another book entitled *On the Work of Monks*, where he reproves certain degenerate monks who had begun to corrupt the order. I will summarize what he says here, using his own words as closely as I can. 'Despising the enticements of this world,' he says, 'gathered into one most pure and holy life, they spend their time together, living in prayers, readings, and discussions — not puffed up with pride, not quarrelsome with stubbornness, not restless with envy.' 'No one possesses anything of his own. No one is a burden to anyone.' 'By working with their hands they earn what feeds the body without distracting the mind from God.' 'They hand their work to those they call deans.'

'Those deans, valuing nothing for themselves, carefully account for everything to one they call Father.' 'These Fathers — holy in conduct and excellent in learning, superior in everything — provide for those they call their children without any pride, exercising great authority in commanding and receiving great willingness in being obeyed.' 'At the very last hour of the day, all come together from their separate dwellings, still fasting, to hear that Father. At least three thousand men gather to each of these Fathers' — he is speaking chiefly of Egypt and the East. 'Then they refresh their bodies with only what is sufficient for life and health, each person restraining himself from even the things available, eating sparingly of plain food.' 'So they abstain not only from meat and wine, as far as is needed to control their desires, but also from the things that more greedily provoke appetite, however much such things may seem cleaner to others — under the cover of which the shameful craving for elaborate food, though not involving meat, is foolishly and foully defended.' 'Whatever remains above necessary sustenance — and much often remains both from their labor and their frugal eating — is distributed to the poor with more care than it was gathered by those who distribute it.' 'For they do not labor in order to accumulate — they do everything they can to ensure that whatever they have in abundance does not remain with them.' He then recounts hardships of which he himself had witnessed examples at Milan and elsewhere: 'In all of this, no one is forced to anything he cannot bear. No one is required to do what he refuses. Nor is he condemned by the others for acknowledging his own weakness in following their way — for they remember how greatly charity is commended, and they remember that to the pure all things are pure.' 'Therefore all their diligence is directed not to

treating certain foods as unclean, but to subduing desire and maintaining love for one another.' 'They remember: food for the stomach, and the stomach for food.' 'Yet many who are strong do abstain for the sake of the weak — not that they need to do so, but because it pleases them to sustain themselves on simpler, plainer food.' 'Therefore they themselves, who when healthy choose to abstain, when ill take food without scruple if their health requires it.' 'Many drink no wine, yet do not think themselves polluted by it. They gently see to it that the weaker receive it, and those who cannot recover health without it — and those who foolishly refuse it they brotherly admonish, lest they make themselves weaker by vain superstition rather than holier.' 'So they diligently exercise godliness, but they know that physical exercise is of limited benefit.' 'Charity is kept above everything else. Diet, speech, clothing, and expression are all shaped to serve charity. They meet and unite in one love. To offend it is counted as grievous as offending God. If anyone resists charity, he is cast out and avoided. If anyone offends charity, he is not suffered to remain a single day.' Since in these words, as in a painted portrait, this holy man appears to have depicted what monastic life was like in ancient times — though the passage is somewhat long — I was content to include it here. For I saw that I would have been even more lengthy had I gathered the same material from various sources, however much I aimed at brevity.

But my purpose here is not to treat the whole subject — only to point out briefly what kind of monks the ancient church had, and what the monastic profession was at that time, so that thoughtful readers may judge by comparison what those look like who appeal to antiquity to defend present-day monasticism. When Augustine

depicts for us a holy and genuine monasticism, he requires the complete absence of rigorous enforcement of things the word of the Lord leaves to our freedom. But there is nothing today more harshly enforced than precisely these things. They treat it as an unforgivable offense if anyone departs even slightly from the prescribed rules concerning the color or cut of the habit, the kind of food, or other trivial and hollow ceremonies. Augustine firmly maintains that it is wrong for monks to live in idleness at others' expense. He denies that any well-ordered monastery in his day practiced this. Our monks make idleness the chief substance of their holiness. For if you take away their idleness, where is the contemplative life by which they boast that they surpass all other people and approach the angels? In the end, Augustine demands a monasticism that is nothing other than a practice and support for the duties of godliness commended to all Christians. And when he makes charity the chief — indeed almost the only — rule of that life, does anyone think he is praising a private alliance by which a few men, bound together among themselves, are cut off from the whole body of the church? On the contrary — he wants monks to give light to others by their example and thereby maintain the unity of the church. In both of these respects, present-day monasticism differs so greatly that one can scarcely find anything more unlike it — I will not even say contrary. For our monks, not content with the godliness to which Christ commands all His people to apply themselves continually, imagine some new kind of godliness, through the pursuit of which they aim to be more perfect than others.

If they deny this, I would like to know why they give to their own order alone the title of perfection and deny it to all the callings of God. I am not unaware of their clever reply: that their order is not called perfect because it contains perfection within it, but because it is the best path for attaining perfection. When they want to impress the crowd, when they want to ensnare naïve and unwary young people, when they want to defend their privileges, when they want to elevate their own dignity at others' expense — then they boast that they are in the state of perfection. When they are pressed so hard they can no longer defend this vain arrogance, they retreat to the escape hatch: they have not yet attained perfection, but they are in the state most conducive to aspiring toward it above others. Meanwhile, the popular admiration remains: as though the monastic life alone were angelic, perfect, and free from all fault. By this pretense they do very profitable business — but this 'modesty' lies buried in a few books. Who cannot see that this is an intolerable mockery? But let us reason with them as though they claimed nothing more for their profession than that it is a state of striving toward perfection. Even in giving it this name, they mark it out with a special distinction from other ways of life. Who can accept that such great honor is given to an institution that is nowhere approved by even a single word of Scripture — while at the same time, all the callings of God, which He not only commanded but commended with remarkable words of praise, are considered by comparison to be unworthy? What great wrong is done to God when some newly invented thing is preferred above all the ways of life He Himself has established and praised with His own testimony?

But let them say my earlier charge is a slander — that they are not content with the rule God has prescribed. Even if I say nothing, they accuse themselves more than adequately. For they openly teach that they take upon themselves a greater burden than Christ laid on all His people — specifically, they promise to keep the 'counsels of the Gospel' concerning loving enemies, not seeking revenge, not swearing, and the like, to which they claim ordinary Christians are not generally bound. On what ancient authority do they rely for this? This idea never entered the minds of any of the ancient fathers. They all declare with one voice that there was not a single word uttered by Christ that ought not to be necessarily obeyed by all. Without hesitation they teach everywhere that the very things these clever interpreters dismiss as merely counsel were in fact commandments. But since we have already shown that this is a most pestilent error, it is enough here to note briefly that present-day monasticism is built on the very opinion all godly people should rightly abhor — namely, the idea that there is some more perfect rule of life than the common rule God has given to the whole church. Whatever is built on that foundation cannot be anything but abominable.

But they bring another proof of their perfection, which they consider their strongest argument. The Lord said to the young man who asked about the perfection of righteousness: 'If you wish to be perfect, sell all that you have and give it to the poor.' I will not debate here whether they actually do this — let it be granted for now. They therefore boast that they are made perfect by renouncing all their possessions. But if perfection consists in this, what does Paul mean when he teaches that one who gives all his goods to the poor but has no love is nothing? What kind of perfection is

this, which if love is absent amounts to nothing? They must respond here that renunciation is indeed the chief, but not the only, work of perfection. But Paul contradicts them again — he does not hesitate to call love the bond of perfection, entirely without any such renunciation. Since it is certain that there is no disagreement between the Master and His apostle, and since Paul plainly denies that human perfection consists in renouncing all possessions and affirms that perfection can exist without it — we need to examine what Christ's words actually mean. The sense will not be obscure if we weigh — as we always should in all of Christ's teaching — to whom the words are addressed. A young man asks what works will bring him into eternal life. Christ, since the question is about works, rightly points him to the law — for the law is the way of eternal life in itself, and is unable to save us only because of our own perverseness. By this answer Christ showed that He teaches no other rule for ordering life than what had long been taught in the law of the Lord — thereby both honoring the law of God as the doctrine of perfect righteousness, and answering slanders that He was drawing people away from the law with some new rule. The young man — not an evil person, but puffed up with vain confidence — answered that he had kept all the commandments from his youth. He was certainly infinitely far from what he boasted of having attained. Yet if his boast had been true, he would have lacked nothing for the highest perfection — for the law contains perfect righteousness in itself, as shown by the fact that keeping it is called the way of eternal salvation. To teach him how little he had actually progressed in the righteousness he so boldly claimed to have fulfilled, it was useful to expose a particular fault of his. He was rich, and his heart was fastened on his wealth. Since he did

not feel this hidden wound, Christ lanced it. 'Go,' He said, 'sell all that you have.' Had he been as diligent a keeper of the law as he imagined, he would not have gone away sad at hearing this. For whoever loves God with his whole heart regards anything that competes with that love not merely as garbage but as something destructive. Therefore when Christ commands this greedy rich man to give up all his possessions, it is equivalent to commanding an ambitious man to give up his honors, a pleasure-lover to give up his indulgences, and an unchaste man to give up the tools of his lust. This is how consciences that feel no response to general admonition must be brought to feel the specific pain of their own particular sin. They are therefore wrong to draw this particular case into a general principle — as though Christ were making human perfection consist in renouncing possessions — when His only aim was to drive the young man who thought too highly of himself to recognize his own wound, so he might see that he was still far from the perfect obedience to the law he falsely claimed to have rendered. I grant that some of the fathers misunderstood this passage, and that from it grew a longing for voluntary poverty, so that only those were thought blessed who, renouncing all earthly things, dedicated themselves naked to Christ. But I trust that all fair-minded and peaceable readers will be satisfied with this explanation and will no longer doubt what Christ meant. In any case, the fathers' intention was nothing like the system later constructed by the hooded scholastics — a system designed to create a double Christianity. For that sacrilege-filled doctrine had not yet been born which compares the monastic profession to baptism and openly declares it a form of second baptism. Who can doubt that the fathers would have detested this blasphemy with their whole

hearts? Now, as for that last point Augustine makes concerning the ancient monks — that they devoted themselves entirely to love — need I say in words how far removed present monasticism is from this? The very thing itself declares it: all who enter monasteries depart from the church. Why? Do they not separate themselves from the lawful fellowship of the faithful by taking upon themselves a private ministry and separate administration of the sacraments? If this is not dissolving the communion of the church, what is? And — to follow the comparison I began and bring it to a conclusion — what do they have in common with the ancient monks in this regard? The ancient monks, though they lived apart from other people, did not have a separate church. They shared the sacraments with others. They appeared at the public gatherings. They were part of the congregation. What have these present monks done by erecting their own private altars except break the bond of unity? They have both excommunicated themselves from the whole body of the church and despised the ordinary ministry through which the Lord willed peace and love to be maintained among His people. Therefore however many monastic orders there are today, I say there are that many assemblies of schismatics — ones that, by disrupting the order of the church, have cut themselves off from the lawful fellowship of the faithful. And lest this departure be hidden, they have given themselves various sectarian names. They were not even ashamed to boast of something that Paul denounces with the strongest possible language. Or perhaps we think that Christ was divided among the Corinthians when one gloried in one teacher and another in another — and that now no injury is done to Christ when, instead of being called Christians, some are called Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans — and they are so called

precisely because, eager to be set apart from the common body of Christians, they take these titles to themselves with great pride as the designation of their religion.

The differences I have rehearsed between the ancient monks and the monks of our era are not differences in personal behavior — they are differences in the profession itself. Readers should therefore understand that I have been speaking about monasticism rather than about individual monks, and have addressed not faults that cling to a few people's lives but faults that cannot be separated from the very form of the institution itself. But what difference is there in their conduct — why should I need to catalog that in detail? This much is certain: there is no class of people more defiled by every kind of vice. Nowhere are factions, hatreds, party loyalties, and ambitions more intense than among them. In a few monasteries they live chastely — if it can even be called chastity when lust is suppressed only enough that it cannot be openly spoken of. Yet one will scarcely find one monastery in ten that is more of a holy house of chastity than a brothel. But what restraint is there in their diet? Pigs in their pens are fed no differently. But lest they complain that I treat them too harshly, I will go no further. Yet in these few things I have touched on, anyone who knows the reality will confess that nothing has been said in an exaggerated manner. Even in Augustine's day — when by his testimony monks excelled in great purity — he complains about the many vagabonds who, through evil schemes and deceptions, cheated simple people out of their money; who carried relics of martyrs around for filthy profit; who displayed the bones of random dead people in place of martyrs' relics; and who through many such wicked practices brought disgrace on the order. As he reports having seen no better

men than those who truly benefited from monastic life, so he laments having seen no worse men than those who failed to benefit from it. What would he say if today he saw all monasteries swelling — nearly bursting — with so many desperate vices? I say nothing but what is well known to everyone. Yet this reproach does not apply to absolutely everyone without exception. Just as no rule and discipline of holy living in monasteries has ever been so perfectly established that no corrupt exceptions remained: so I am not saying that monks have so completely departed from their holy origins that there are no good men at all among them. But those good men lie hidden — few and scattered in that vast multitude of wicked men. They are not merely overlooked; they are mocked and sometimes cruelly mistreated by others who — as the Milesian proverb goes — believe there should be no place for any honest person among them.

By this comparison of ancient and present-day monasticism, I trust I have accomplished my purpose: it is plain that our hooded monks falsely invoke the example of the early church to defend their profession, since they differ from the early monks no less than apes differ from people. At the same time, I do not hesitate to say that even in that ancient form that Augustine commends, there are things that do not fully please me. I grant that they were not superstitious in enforcing outward exercises of harsh physical discipline — but I say that an excessive zeal and misguided eagerness was not absent. It is a fine thing to renounce possessions and be free from all earthly anxiety. But God values more highly the godly governance of a household, where a holy head of family — free from greed, ambition, and the other desires of the flesh — labors in a definite calling to serve God. It is a fine thing to practice philoso-

phy in the wilderness, far from human society. But it is not consistent with Christian love to flee into solitude as though out of hatred for other people — and besides, to abandon the duties the Lord has chiefly commanded. Even if we were to grant that there was no other fault in that ancient way of life, this alone was no small evil: it brought an unprofitable and dangerous example into the church.

Let us now examine what kind of vows monks make when they are professed into this noble order. First, since their intention is to establish a new, invented form of worship to earn God's favor, I conclude from what has been said above that whatever they vow is abominable before God. Second, without any regard for God's calling and without His approval, they devise for themselves a way of life that pleases themselves. I say this is rash and therefore unlawful — because their conscience has no ground on which to stand before God, and whatever is not of faith is sin. Furthermore, when they bind themselves to the many perverse and wicked forms of worship that today's monasticism contains, I declare they are consecrated not to God but to the devil. After all, why was the prophet able to say that the Israelites offered their children to demons and not to God — simply because they had corrupted the true worship of God with profane ceremonies? May we not say the same of monks, who by putting on the cowl place upon themselves a snare of a thousand wicked superstitions? Now what are these vows? They promise God perpetual virginity, as though they had made a bargain with Him beforehand to exempt them from needing marriage. They may argue that they make this vow only in trust in God's grace — but since God has declared that He does not give this gift to everyone, it is not within our power to presume upon a

special gift. Let those who have it use it. If at any time they feel the stirrings of the flesh, let them flee to His help, by whose power alone they can resist. If they cannot overcome it, let them not despise the remedy He offers. For those to whom the power of continence is denied are called by God's certain word to marriage. By continence I mean not merely keeping the body from physical immorality, but keeping the mind from an unclean inward desire — for Paul commands us to avoid not only outward indecency but also the burning of the mind. They say this has been observed from the most ancient times — that those who wished to dedicate themselves wholly to the Lord bound themselves by a vow of continence. I grant that this practice is indeed ancient — but I do not grant that that era was so free from fault that everything done then must be taken as a rule. And little by little a merciless severity crept in, allowing no room for repentance after such a vow was made. This is evident from Cyprian: 'If virgins have in faith dedicated themselves to God, let them continue modestly and chastely without deception. Being strong and steadfast, let them look forward to the reward of virginity. But if they will not or cannot continue, it is better for them to marry than to fall into the fire through their desires.' What insults would they hurl at anyone to-day who would temper the vow of continence with such equity? They have departed far from that ancient spirit — refusing not only any moderation or allowance for those unable to keep their vow, but openly declaring that a person sins more grievously by remedying the weakness of the flesh through marriage than by defiling both body and soul through fornication.

They press the matter further, however, and attempt to show that such a vow was in use in the apostles' time — pointing to Paul's statement that widows who, after being received into the public ministry, remarried, had denied their first faith. But I do not deny that the widows who bound themselves and their service to the church thereby also took on the obligation of permanent celibacy — not because they placed any religious value in it as later became the practice, but because they could not bear that office while bound by the yoke of marriage. But if, after having once given their pledge, they looked back toward new marriages, what was this but abandoning the calling of God? It is no wonder, then, that Paul says that through such desires they were growing wanton against Christ. He further amplifies the point by saying they not only fail to fulfill what they have promised to the church, but also break and nullify their first faith given in baptism — which includes the commitment that each person should answer his calling. Or perhaps you prefer to understand it this way: that having lost all sense of shame, they had at that point cast aside all care for honorable conduct and given themselves over to all manner of wantonness and unchastity, living in a licentious and dissolute manner utterly unlike Christian women — an interpretation I find quite plausible. Therefore my answer is this: those widows who were then received into public ministry did place upon themselves an obligation to remain unmarried. If they afterward married, we can readily see that what Paul describes happened to them — that casting aside shame they became more wanton than became Christian women — and that in doing so they not only broke their pledge to the church but also departed from the common standard of godly women. But first, I deny that they professed celibacy for

any other reason than that marriage was incompatible with the ministry they had undertaken. I deny that they bound themselves to a single life for any reason beyond what the necessity of their calling required. Second, I do not grant that they were so bound that it was not still better for them to marry, rather than be tormented by the stirrings of the flesh or fall into any kind of uncleanness. Third, Paul specifies an age at which women are generally past such danger — and in any case commands that only those be chosen who, having been married once, have already given evidence of their self-restraint. We disapprove of this vow of celibacy for no other reason than that it is both wrongfully treated as an act of service to God and rashly vowed by those who have not been given the gift of continence.

But how could this passage from Paul rightly be applied to nuns? The deaconesses were created not to entertain God with singing and muttered prayers no one could understand and then spend the rest of their lives in idleness — but to carry out public ministry to the poor, applying themselves with all earnestness and diligence to the duties of love. They did not vow celibacy in order to offer God a form of worship through abstaining from marriage — but only because celibacy made them less encumbered in fulfilling their responsibilities. And they did not vow it at the beginning of their youth or even in the middle of their active years, so that they would only learn too late, by experience, into what headlong ruin they had thrown themselves. Rather, when they had passed what appeared to be all danger — then they made a vow that was as prudent as it was holy. But without even pressing the first two points, I say it was not permissible to receive women to a vow of celibacy before the age of sixty — since the apostle accepts only

women of sixty years old and commands the younger to marry and have children. Therefore neither the later lowerings of this threshold — to forty years, then twenty, then thirty — can be excused in any way. Still less tolerable is the practice of drawing poor young girls, before they have any knowledge of themselves by age or experience, not merely by deception but by force and threats, into putting on those wretched snares. I will not pause to refute the other two vows in detail. This much I will say: beyond being entangled with no small number of superstitions as things now stand, they appear designed so that those who make them may mock both God and people. But rather than appear too eager to examine every small detail with malice, we will be content with the general refutation already given above.

I believe it has been sufficiently established what kinds of vows are lawful and acceptable to God. Yet because uninformed and anxious consciences sometimes, even when they dislike or disapprove of a vow, still doubt whether they are bound by it — and are greatly tormented, fearing on the one hand to break their word to God and on the other fearing they will sin further by keeping it — they need help so they can free themselves from this distress. To remove all doubt at once: I say that all vows that are not lawful and rightly made are worthless before God and should therefore be treated as void by us. For if in human contracts only those promises bind that the contracting party actually wanted us to be bound by — then it is absurd to be compelled to keep things God does not require of us. This is especially so since our actions are only right when they please God and when our consciences have that testimony. For this remains certain: whatever is not of faith is sin. By this Paul means that a work undertaken with doubt is therefore

faulty — because faith is the root of all good works, by which we are assured they are acceptable to God. Therefore if a Christian must not undertake anything without this assurance, and if by ignorance he has taken something on — why may he not give it up when he is delivered from error? Since vows rashly made are of this kind, they not only bind in no way but must necessarily be abandoned. And what if they are not merely worthless but actually abominable in God's sight, as has been shown above? There is no need to discuss the matter further. This one argument seems sufficient to quiet godly consciences and free them from all doubt: that whatever works do not flow from a pure source and are not directed to a lawful end are rejected by God — and so rejected that He forbids us to continue in them no less than to begin them. From this it follows that vows proceeding from error and superstition are both void before God and are to be abandoned by us.

Furthermore, one who understands this solution will have the means to defend against the charges of wicked people those who leave monasticism for an honest way of life. Such people are grievously accused of faithlessness and perjury, because they have broken what is commonly thought to be an unbreakable bond they made to God and the church. But I say there was no bond at all, since God himself nullifies what people confirm in such cases. Moreover, even if they were bound when they were ensnared in ignorance of God and in error — now that they have been enlightened by the knowledge of truth, I say they are thereby freed by the grace of Christ. For if the cross of Christ has such power that it frees us from the curse of God's own law, by which we were bound, how much more will it deliver us from foreign bonds that are nothing but Satan's snaring nets? To everyone, therefore, on whom

Christ shines with the light of His Gospel — there is no doubt that He frees them from all the snares they had placed on themselves through superstition. Yet they have another defense as well, if they are not suited for celibacy. For if an impossible vow leads to the certain destruction of the soul — when the Lord wills us to be saved, not destroyed — then we must not continue in it. How impossible the vow of continence is for those who have not been given the special gift of it, we have already taught — and experience speaks plainly even if I say nothing. For it is well known with what filthiness nearly all monasteries swarm. And if some among them appear more decent and restrained than others — they are not thereby chaste, for they merely suppress and conceal the fault of unchastity. So indeed does God punish with terrible examples the arrogance of those who, forgetting their own weakness, covet against nature what has been denied them, and despising the remedies the Lord has placed readily at hand, trust that by sheer stubbornness and willpower they can overcome the disease of incontinence. For what else shall we call it but stubbornness — when a person, warned that he needs marriage and that God has given it to him as a remedy, not only despises it but even binds himself by oath to reject it?

¶ THE .XIIII. CHAPTER. OF SACRAMENTES,



Alongside the preaching of the Gospel, there is another aid of the same kind: the sacraments. A clear teaching about them is very necessary for us, so that we may learn both the purpose for which they were ordained and how they are to be used. First, we should consider what a sacrament is. It seems to me that this will be a plain and fitting definition: a sacrament is an outward sign by which the Lord seals to our consciences the promises of His goodwill toward us, to sustain the weakness of our faith — while we in turn testify our godliness toward Him, before Him and the angels and before other people. We can also define it more briefly: a testimony of God's favor toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, accompanied by our own mutual testimony of godliness toward Him. Whichever of these definitions you prefer, neither differs in meaning from Augustine's definition — that a sacrament is a visible sign of a sacred thing, or a visible form of invisible grace. But our definition expresses the matter better and more precisely. The brevity of Augustine's definition leaves some obscurity by which many less experienced readers are misled, and so I thought it better to state the matter more fully so that no doubt remains.

It is not hard to see why ancient writers used the word 'sacrament' in this way. Whenever the old Latin translator rendered the Greek word *mysterion* — that is, mystery — especially in discussing divine matters, he translated it *sacramentum*. So in Ephesians: 'That He might make known to us the mystery of His will' (Ephesians 1:9; 3:2). Again: 'If you have indeed heard of the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that by revelation the mystery was made known to me.' To the Colossians: 'The mystery that has been hidden from ages and generations but has now been revealed to His saints, to whom God chose to make known the riches of this mystery' (Colossians 1:26; 1 Timothy 3:16). Again to Timothy: 'Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.' He chose not to say 'secret,' lest the word seem too small for so great a subject. He therefore used 'mystery' in place of 'secret' — but a holy secret. The word is found in this sense among the ecclesiastical writers as well. It is well known that what is called a sacrament in Latin is called a mystery in Greek — and this equivalence of two words for one thing settles all dispute. From this it came about that the word was applied to those signs that make a reverent representation of high and spiritual things. Augustine also notes this in one place: 'It would take too long,' he says, 'to discuss the diversity of signs, which when they pertain to divine things are called sacraments.'

From the definition we have set out, we understand that a sacrament never exists without a preceding promise — rather, it is joined to the promise as a kind of supplement, designed to confirm and seal the promise itself and make it more fully ratified in our experience. The Lord foresaw this need because of our ignorance and weakness — though to speak precisely, He intended it not so

much to confirm His holy word as to establish us in faith in it. For God's truth is in itself sound and certain enough, and cannot receive better confirmation from any other source than from itself. But our faith, being small and weak, unless it is supported on every side and upheld by every means, is quickly shaken, wavers, staggers, and even collapses. And here the merciful Lord, in His great tenderness, accommodates Himself to our capacity: since we are by nature earthly creatures, always clinging to the ground and stuck in the flesh — unable to conceive of anything spiritual — He is pleased to guide us to Himself through earthly elements, and to present a mirror of spiritual gifts in the very things of the flesh. For if we had no bodies, says Chrysostom, He would have given us these things in their naked spiritual form. But since our souls are placed within bodies, He gives us spiritual things under visible ones. This is not because such gifts are inherent in the natural properties of the things used in the sacraments — but because God has appointed those things as signs pointing to the gifts.

This is what is commonly said: that a sacrament consists of the word and the outward sign. But we must understand 'the word' to mean not something whispered without meaning or faith — as if a magical incantation had power to consecrate the element by sound alone — but something preached so that it enables people to understand what the visible sign means. What was typically done under papal tyranny was therefore a profound profaning of the mysteries. It was thought sufficient if the priest mumbled the words of consecration while the people stood gazing in bewilderment without understanding anything. In fact, they deliberately ensured that no part of the teaching would reach the people — everything was spoken in Latin before those who had no knowledge of it.

Superstition then went so far that they believed the consecration was not properly performed unless done in a barely audible hoarse whisper that only a few could hear. But Augustine teaches something very different about the sacramental word. 'Let the word be added to the element,' he says, 'and a sacrament is made. For whence comes this great power in the water, to touch the body and wash the soul, but through the word? Not because it is spoken, but because it is believed. For in the word itself, the passing sound is one thing and the abiding power is another.' 'This is the word of faith which we preach,' says the apostle (Romans 10:8). And so in Acts it is said, 'He cleansed their hearts by faith' (Acts 15:9). And Peter the apostle says: 'Baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God' (1 Peter 3:21). 'This is the word of faith which we preach — by which, without doubt, baptism is also sanctified so that it may cleanse.' You see that Augustine requires preaching so that faith may arise from it. We need not labor much to prove this, since it is plain what Christ did, what He commanded, what the apostles followed, and what the purer church observed. From the very beginning it has been evident that whenever God offered any sign to the holy fathers, it was joined by an inseparable bond to teaching — without which our senses would be left bewildered by a bare outward spectacle. Therefore when we hear mention of the sacramental word, let us understand it as the promise — proclaimed aloud by the minister — which may lead the people by the hand to wherever the sign points and directs us.

Nor should we listen to those who attempt to combat this with a double-pronged argument that is clever but unsound. They say: either we know, or we do not know, that the word of God preced-

ing the sacrament is the true will of God. If we know it, we learn nothing new from the sacrament that follows. If we do not know it, neither will the sacrament teach it, since all its force rests in the word. The brief answer is this: the seals attached to patents and other public documents are in themselves nothing — they would be useless if there were nothing written on the parchment. Yet when added to written documents, they do confirm and ratify what is written. Nor can they say that this analogy was invented by us recently — Paul himself used it, calling circumcision a seal, precisely in the course of arguing that circumcision did not establish righteousness for Abraham but was a seal of the covenant through faith by which he had already been justified (Romans 4:11). And what, I ask, should trouble anyone in our teaching that the promise is sealed by the sacraments, when it is plain that even promises themselves confirm one another? For the clearer a promise is, the better it sustains faith. The sacraments bring the clearest of promises, and they have this distinct advantage over the word alone: they vividly picture the promises before us as if painted on a panel. Nor should we be troubled by the objection sometimes raised — the distinction between sacraments and seals on legal documents: that while both use physical elements of this world, the former cannot adequately seal the promises of God, which are spiritual and eternal, as the latter are attached to seal princes' grants concerning passing and fragile things. For a faithful person, when the sacraments are before his eyes, does not remain fixed on the outward physical sight — through those graduated steps of proportion I have described, he rises with spiritual understanding to the high mysteries hidden in the sacraments.

And since the Lord calls His promises 'covenants' and His sacraments 'seals of covenants,' an analogy may rightly be drawn from human covenants. What can the killing of a sow accomplish if no words precede it? For sows are killed all the time without any deeper mystery. What does the joining of right hands accomplish, when hands are often joined in enmity? But when words have gone before, such signs seal the terms of agreements — even though those agreements were first conceived, made, and settled in words. Therefore sacraments are exercises that make the trustworthiness of God's word certain to us — and because we are earthly by nature, they are presented through earthly things, to instruct us according to our limited capacity and to lead us by the hand as teachers guide children. For this reason Augustine calls a sacrament a 'visible word,' because it represents the promises of God as if painted on a panel and sets them before our sight in a vivid image. Other comparisons may also be used to illustrate sacraments more clearly — for example, calling them pillars of our faith. For as a building stands on its foundation, yet is made more secure by pillars set beneath it, so faith rests on the word of God as on a foundation, but when sacraments are added, it rests yet more firmly on them as on supporting columns. Or we might call them mirrors in which we may behold the riches of God's grace that He gives us — for as we have said, in them He reveals Himself to us as fully as our limited capacity allows, and testifies His goodwill and love toward us even more expressly than He does through His word alone.

Their argument does not hold when they attempt to prove that sacraments are not testimonies of God's grace on the grounds that they are also given to the wicked — who feel no greater favor from God by receiving them, but only bring more serious condemnation

on themselves. By the same reasoning, the Gospel — which is heard and despised by many — would not be a testimony of God's grace; nor would Christ Himself, who was seen and known by many but received by very few. We can see the same in legal documents: a large portion of people mock and scoff at the authentic royal seal, even when they know it comes from the prince to express his will. Others disregard it as something irrelevant to them. Others even detest it. So given this equal parallel, the analogy I used above should become all the more fitting. It is certain, then, that the Lord offers us mercy and a pledge of His grace in both His holy word and in the sacraments — but this is received only by those who receive the word and sacraments with genuine faith. Just as Christ is offered by the Father for the salvation of all, yet is not acknowledged and received by all. Augustine, intending to express the same point, said that the effectiveness of the word is demonstrated in the sacrament — not because it is spoken, but because it is believed. Therefore Paul, when speaking to the faithful, treats of sacraments in a way that includes communion with Christ in them — as when he says: 'All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.' And again: 'We who were baptized into Christ are all one body and one Spirit.' But when speaking of the wrong use of sacraments, he allows them nothing more than cold and empty signs. By this he indicates that however the wicked and hypocrites, through their perverseness, may suppress, obscure, or obstruct the working of God's grace in the sacraments, this does not prevent those sacraments — wherever and whenever it pleases God — from bearing true testimony to union with Christ, and from the Spirit of God Himself delivering and fulfilling what they promise. We conclude, therefore, that

sacraments are rightly called testimonies of God's grace and as it were certain seals of the goodwill He bears toward us — which, by sealing it to us, sustain, nourish, confirm, and increase our faith. The objections some raise against this conclusion are too trivial and weak. They say that if our faith is good, it cannot be made better — for they define faith as that which, without wavering, steadfastly and without withdrawal, rests on the mercy of God. Such people would have done better to pray with the apostles that the Lord would increase their faith, rather than carelessly claiming such a perfection of faith that no child of Adam has ever attained or ever will attain in this life. Let them answer: what kind of faith did the man have who said, 'I believe — help my unbelief'? Even that faith, though it was only a beginning, was genuine faith and could be made better when unbelief was removed. But they are refuted by no more certain argument than their own conscience. For if they admit they are sinners — which they cannot deny whether they want to or not — they must trace that back to the imperfection of their faith.

But they say: Philip told the eunuch that he could be baptized if he believed with all his heart. What room is there for baptism to strengthen faith when faith already fills the whole heart? I ask them in return: do they not feel a good portion of their hearts empty of faith? Do they not daily acknowledge new growth? A pagan philosopher boasted that he had grown old still learning. We Christians would be three times miserable if we grow old and make no progress — we whose faith should advance through every stage of life until it reaches full maturity. Therefore in this passage, 'to believe with all the heart' does not mean to believe in Christ with perfect completeness, but only to embrace Him from the heart and

with a sincere mind — not to be full of Him, but to hunger and thirst and long after Him with fervent affection. This is how Scripture speaks: it says a thing is done 'with the whole heart' when it means it is done sincerely and wholeheartedly. Of this sort are these sayings: 'I have sought You with my whole heart'; 'I will praise You with my whole heart'; and similar ones. On the other side, where Scripture rebukes deceitful people, it reproaches them with having a divided heart. They then argue further that if faith is increased by sacraments, the Holy Spirit is given in vain — since it is the Spirit's work to begin, sustain, and perfect faith. To this I grant that faith is the Spirit's own proper work — enlightened by Him, we know God and the treasures of His goodness, and without His light our mind is so blind it can see nothing, so dull it perceives nothing of spiritual things. But where they set out one benefit of God, we consider three. First, the Lord teaches and instructs us through His word. Then He strengthens us through the sacraments. Finally, He shines into our minds with the light of His Holy Spirit and opens an entry for the word and sacraments into our hearts — which otherwise would only strike our ears and stand before our eyes without moving anything within.

On the matter of the confirmation and increase of faith, I want to be clear — and I believe I have already stated this plainly — that when I assign this ministry to the sacraments, I do not mean that there is some perpetual secret force inherent in them by which they can on their own advance or confirm faith. Rather, they are ordained by the Lord precisely for the purpose of establishing and increasing faith. But they perform this purpose only when the inward teacher, the Spirit, accompanies them — by whose power alone hearts are pierced, affections are moved, and entry is opened

for the sacraments into our souls. If He is absent, the sacraments can do no more for our minds than sunlight shining on blind eyes or a voice sounding to deaf ears. Therefore I distinguish between the Spirit and the sacraments in this way: the power of working belongs to the Spirit, and to the sacraments belongs only the ministry — and that ministry is empty and pointless without the Spirit's working, but deeply effectual when He works inwardly and exerts His power. It is now clear in what sense a godly mind is strengthened in faith through sacraments — in the same way that eyes see by the brightness of the sun and ears hear by the sound of a voice. Eyes perceive no light unless they have natural sight to be illuminated; ears are knocked at in vain by any voice unless they are naturally equipped to hear. But if it is true — as it must be settled among us — that what sight does in our eyes for seeing light and what hearing does in our ears for perceiving sound is exactly what the Holy Spirit does in our hearts for conceiving, sustaining, cherishing, and establishing faith: then these two things follow equally: that sacraments profit nothing without the power of the Holy Spirit, and that in hearts already taught by that inward teacher, the sacraments may make faith both stronger and more fully developed. The one difference is this: the capacity for hearing and sight is naturally placed in ears and eyes, while Christ — beyond the measure of nature — works the same capacity in our minds by special grace.

This also resolves objections that trouble some people: that if we attribute the increase or confirmation of faith to creatures, we are doing wrong to the Spirit of God, whom we should acknowledge as the sole author of faith. We do not thereby take away any praise from Him either for confirming or increasing faith. Rather,

we affirm that even this work of increasing and confirming faith is nothing other than His inward illumination preparing our minds to receive the confirming that is presented by the sacraments. If this is still too obscure, a comparison will make it very clear. If you intend to persuade someone to do something by argument, you will gather every reason that might draw him to your view and lead him to accept your counsel. But you will have made no progress unless he also has a sharp and penetrating mind capable of weighing your arguments, an open and teachable disposition, and such confidence in your integrity and wisdom that it predisposes him to agree. For there are many stubborn minds that no reasoning can bend — and where trust is doubted and authority is despised, little good is accomplished even with a willing learner. But where all those things are present, they will truly bring it about that the listener takes the counsel you offer — counsel he might otherwise have laughed off. The Spirit works the same way in us. So that the word may not beat our ears in vain, so that the sacraments may not strike our eyes to no effect, He shows us that it is God who speaks through them, softens the stubbornness of our hearts, and shapes them toward the obedience the Lord's word requires. Finally, He carries those outward words and sacraments from the ears into the soul. Therefore both the word and the sacraments confirm our faith by setting before our eyes the heavenly Father's goodwill toward us — on the knowledge of which all the stability of our faith rests and by which its strength increases. The Spirit confirms it by engraving that same confirmation in our minds and making it effective. Meanwhile, the Father of lights cannot be pre-

vented — just as He illuminates our bodily eyes with the rays of the sun, so He illuminates our minds through the sacraments, as through an intermediate brightness.

The Lord illustrated this property of His outward word when in the parable He called it seed. Just as seed cast on barren, untilled ground will do nothing but die, but thrown on cultivated and well-prepared soil will bring forth fruit in great abundance — so the word of God, if it falls on a hardened heart, will be as fruitless as seed sown on sand. But if it falls on a soul cultivated by the hand of the heavenly Spirit, it will be most fruitful. But if the analogy between seed and the word holds, and we say that grain sprouts, grows, and ripens from the seed — why may we not say that faith takes its beginning, increase, and perfection from the word of God? Paul expresses both aspects well in different places. When he wishes to remind the Corinthians how powerfully God used his labor, he boasts of having the ministry of the Spirit — as though the power of the Holy Spirit were bound to his preaching with an inseparable knot, to illuminate and thoroughly move the mind. But in another place, when he means to show them what force the word of God has in itself when preached by human beings, he compares the ministers themselves to farmers who, once they have done their work of tilling, can do nothing more. But what does tilling, sowing, and watering accomplish unless what is sown receives life from heaven's gift? He therefore concludes that both the one who plants and the one who waters are nothing — all must be ascribed to God, who alone gives the increase. Therefore the apostles, in their preaching, bring forth the power of the Spirit to the degree that God uses the instruments He has ordained for the

communication of His spiritual grace. Yet we must always maintain the distinction, remembering what belongs to human beings and what belongs to God alone.

The sacraments are such confirmations of our faith that when the Lord intends to remove confidence in the very things promised through the sacraments, He removes the sacraments themselves. When He strips Adam of the gift of immortality and drives him away, He says: 'Let him not eat of the fruit of life, lest he live forever.' What is He saying? Could that fruit have restored to Adam the incorruption he had now lost? No. But it is as if He said: 'Lest he retain a false hope by keeping hold of the sign of my promise, let that be removed from him which might still bring him some expectation of immortality.' In the same way, when the apostle urges the Ephesians to remember that they had been strangers to the covenants, foreigners from the fellowship of Israel, without God, without Christ — he says they had no part in circumcision. By this figure of speech he indicates they had been excluded from the promise itself, since they had not received the sign of the promise. To the other objection — that God's glory is conveyed to creatures, and thereby diminished, when so much power is attributed to the sacraments — our answer is ready: we attribute no power to the creatures themselves. We say only that God uses means and instruments as He sees fit, so that all things may serve His glory, since He is Lord and ruler of all. Just as He nourishes our bodies through bread and other food, illuminates the world through the sun, and warms it through fire — yet bread, the sun, and fire are nothing in themselves except as God distributes His blessings to us through these instruments — so He nourishes faith spiritually through the sacraments, whose only office is to set His promises

before our eyes, and indeed to serve as pledges of them. Just as we must not fasten our confidence in other creatures — which by God's generosity are ordained for our use and serve as the means by which He delivers His gifts — nor admire or praise them as the causes of our good: so neither should our confidence rest in the sacraments, nor God's glory be transferred to them. Leaving all things else, both our faith and our praise should rise up to Him — the author of the sacraments and of all things.

The argument some draw from the very word 'sacrament' itself is not very strong. They say: the word 'sacrament,' among its various recognized meanings, has one that fits signs — namely, the solemn oath by which a soldier pledges his allegiance to his commander upon entering military service. Just as soldiers by this military oath bind their loyalty to their commander and declare themselves his soldiers, so by our signs we declare Christ our commander and testify that we serve under His banner. They add comparisons to illustrate the point. Just as a toga distinguished Romans from Greeks who wore cloaks, and as the different ranks at Rome were marked by different signs — senators from knights by the purple-edged toga and pointed shoes, knights from commoners by a ring — so we bear our signs to distinguish us from those who are outside the faith. But from what has been said above, it is sufficiently clear that the ancient writers who gave the name 'sacrament' to the signs had no concern for how the word was used in Latin literature — they coined a new meaning for their own purposes, by which they designated simply 'holy signs.' If we examine the matter more closely, it appears that they applied this word in a similar way to how they shifted the meaning of 'faith' to the sense in which it is now used. For whereas 'faith' originally meant keep-

ing one's promises, they transferred the word to mean the firm confidence or assurance one has of the truth itself. Similarly, whereas 'sacrament' was the soldier's act of pledging himself to his commander, they made it the commander's act of receiving soldiers into his service. For in the sacrament, the Lord promises that He will be our God and that we will be His people. But we will set aside such subtleties, since I think I have shown plainly enough that the early writers meant nothing other than to signify that these are signs of holy and spiritual things. We accept the comparisons they offer from outward marks and tokens — but we do not allow what is secondary in the sacraments to be presented as the primary, indeed the only, thing. The first and primary purpose is to serve our faith before God; the secondary purpose is to testify our confession before people. The comparisons mentioned apply only to this secondary purpose. But let the primary purpose stand firm — for otherwise, as we have already demonstrated, the mysteries would be cold and empty unless they served as aids to our faith and additions to doctrine ordained for the same end.

We must also be warned that just as some people weaken and completely undermine the proper use of the sacraments, so on the other side there are those who attribute to the sacraments some unknown secret virtues that are nowhere said by God to be placed in them. This error dangerously deceives the simple and uninformed, since it teaches them to seek God's gifts where they cannot be found, and gradually draws them away from God to embrace mere illusion in place of His truth. The scholastic schools have taught with great consensus that the sacraments of the new law — those now in use in the Christian church — justify and give grace, as long as we do not place an obstacle of mortal sin in the way. It is

impossible to overstate how pernicious and deadly this opinion is — all the more so because for many ages it has prevailed to the great harm of the church over much of the world. It is truly a diabolical teaching. For by promising righteousness apart from faith, it drives souls headlong into destruction. And by locating the cause of righteousness in the sacraments, it binds the wretched minds of people — already too much bent toward earth on their own — with a superstition that leads them to rest in the sight of a physical thing rather than in God Himself. Would to God we had not proved both of these things so thoroughly in experience — for then they would scarcely need such extensive proof. But what is a sacrament received without faith but the surest path to the church's destruction? Since nothing is to be expected from the sacrament apart from the promise, and the promise threatens wrath toward the faithless no less than it offers grace to the faithful — whoever thinks more is given to him by the sacraments than what he receives by faith through the word of God is deceived. From this another conclusion also follows: the confidence of salvation does not hang on receiving the sacrament, as though justification consisted in it. We know justification rests in Christ alone and is communicated to us no less through the preaching of the Gospel than through the sealing of the sacrament — and cannot truly stand without it. So true is what Augustine also writes: that invisible sanctification may exist without a visible sign, and a visible sign may exist without true sanctification. For as he writes elsewhere, people put on Christ in two ways — sometimes only to the point of receiving the sacrament, and sometimes all the way to the sanctification of life. The first can be true of both good and bad people; the second belongs only to the good and godly.

From this — if it is properly understood — comes the distinction Augustine has often noted between the sacrament and the thing of the sacrament. This distinction means not merely that the sign and the truth it points to are both contained there, but that they do not so cohere that they cannot be separated — and that even when they are joined, the thing must always be distinguished from the sign, so we do not give to one what belongs to the other. He speaks of the separation when he writes that the sacraments produce in the elect alone the reality they signify. Again, when writing about the Jews: 'When the sacraments were common to all, the grace was not common — which is the power of the sacraments.' 'So also now, the washing of regeneration is common to all, but the grace itself, by which the members of Christ are regenerated along with their Head, is not common to all.' Again, in another place on the Lord's Supper: 'We also at this day receive visible food. But the sacrament is one thing, and the power of the sacrament another. What is this — that many receive from the altar and die, and die in the very act of receiving? For the morsel of the Lord was poison to Judas — not because he received an evil thing, but because, being evil, he received a good thing evilly.' A little later: 'The sacrament of this thing — that is, of the unity of the body and blood of Christ — is prepared on the Lord's table daily in some places, at set intervals in others. From it some receive life and some receive destruction. But the thing itself, of which it is a sacrament, is received unto life by all who receive it, and unto destruction by no one, whoever partakes of it.' And just before this he had said: 'He shall not die who eats — but he who pertains to the power of the sacrament, not merely the visible sacrament; who eats inwardly, not outwardly; who eats with the heart, not he who

merely presses it with his teeth.' You hear everywhere, then, that a sacrament is so severed from its own truth by the unworthiness of the receiver that nothing remains but a vain and unprofitable sign. But to have not a sign void of truth but the thing together with the sign, you must receive by faith the word enclosed therein. So much as you profit through the sacraments in union with Christ, so much benefit you will take from them.

If this is somewhat difficult because of its brevity, I will state it at greater length. I say that Christ is the matter — or if you prefer, the substance — of all sacraments, since in Him they have all their perfection and promise nothing apart from Him. This makes the error of Peter Lombard all the more intolerable, for he expressly makes the sacraments causes of righteousness and salvation, of which they are only parts. Therefore, setting aside all the causes that human ingenuity invents for itself, we ought to rest in this one source. So much as we are helped by the sacraments in nourishing, confirming, and increasing the true knowledge of Christ in us — in possessing Him more fully and enjoying His riches — so much effectiveness they have for us. But this happens only when we receive with genuine faith what is offered there. Do the wicked then, you might ask, by their ungratefulness make God's ordinance void and empty? I answer that what I have said should not be taken to mean that the force and truth of the sacrament depend on the condition or willingness of the receiver. For what God has ordained remains firm and keeps its own character regardless of how people may vary. But since offering is one thing and receiving is another, nothing prevents the sign — hallowed by the word of God — from being in reality what it is called and retaining its own proper force, while at the same time bringing no benefit to an evil and wicked

person. Augustine settles this question neatly in a few words: 'If you receive it carnally, it does not cease to be spiritual — but it is not so to you.' And just as Augustine has shown in the passages cited that a sacrament is worthless when severed from its truth, so in another place he warns that even when joined together a distinction is still necessary, lest we be too captivated by the outward sign. 'To follow the letter and take signs in place of the things they signify,' he says, 'is a mark of slavish weakness. But to interpret signs unprofitably is a mark of wandering error.' He names two faults to be avoided here. The first is when we treat signs as though they were given in vain, and by belittling or diminishing their hidden meaning we ensure they bring us no benefit at all. The second is when, by failing to lift our minds above the visible sign, we transfer to the sacrament the praise for all those good things that come to us only through Christ, by the Holy Spirit who makes us partakers of Christ Himself — and indeed by means of the outward signs. If those signs draw us to Christ, but we twist them in a different direction, all their benefit is shamefully wasted.

Let this remain certain: the sacraments have no other office than the word of God — to offer and present Christ to us, and in Him the treasures of heavenly grace. But they profit nothing unless received by faith — just as wine, oil, or any other liquid, however generously poured, will run off and be wasted unless the vessel's mouth is open to receive it, and the vessel, though wet on the outside, remains empty and void within. Beyond this, we must be careful that the somewhat exaggerated praises the ancient writers heaped on the sacraments to honor their dignity do not lead us into a similar error: namely, supposing that some secret power is tied and fastened to the sacraments so that they may of themselves

deliver the graces of the Holy Spirit, as wine is poured into a cup. Their only God-appointed office is to testify and confirm God's goodwill toward us — and they profit no further unless the Holy Spirit joins Himself to them to open our minds and hearts and make us partakers of that testimony, in which also the distinct and varied graces of God shine clearly. For the sacraments are to us from God what heralds of good news or pledges in the sealing of agreements are among people — they do not of themselves convey any grace, but they announce, show, and as pledges and tokens ratify for us the things given to us by the generosity of God. The Holy Spirit — whom the sacraments do not bring to all people indiscriminately, but whom the Lord gives specifically to those who are His — is the one who brings the graces of God with Him, who gives the sacraments their place in us, and who causes them to bear fruit. Although we do not deny that God Himself, by the most immediate power of His Spirit, is present with His own institution — lest the ministry of the sacraments He has ordained be fruitless and vain — yet we affirm that the inward grace of the Spirit, being distinct from the outward ministry, must be weighed and considered separately. God therefore truly performs in reality what He promises and figures in signs — nor are the signs without their effect, so that the Author of them may be shown to be true and faithful. The question here is simply whether God works by His own inward power, as it is called, or delegates His work to outward signs. We affirm that whatever instruments He uses, His original working is in no way diminished or replaced by them. When sacraments are taught in this way, their dignity is set out with proper honor, their use is plainly explained, their benefit is fully described, and the best path through all these things is maintained — so that

nothing is attributed to them that should not be, and nothing is taken away from them that should not be taken away. At the same time, the invented device is removed by which the cause of justification and the power of the Holy Spirit are locked up in physical elements as in vessels or vehicles — and the primary reality that others have omitted is clearly set forth. It should also be noted here that God works inwardly the very thing the minister figures and testifies through outward actions — lest that be transferred to a mortal person which God claims for Himself alone. Augustine wisely touches on this same point: 'How is it that both Moses sanctifies and God sanctifies?' he asks. 'Not Moses instead of God, but Moses through visible sacraments by his ministry — and God through invisible grace by His Holy Spirit. And there also is the entire fruit of visible sacraments. For apart from this sanctification by invisible grace, what do visible sacraments accomplish?'

The word 'sacrament,' as we have treated of its nature thus far, in its broadest sense includes all the signs God has ever given to people to certify and confirm the truth of His promises. Sometimes He willed these to remain in natural things; sometimes He gave them through miracles. Examples of the first kind: when He gave Adam and Eve the tree of life as a pledge of immortality, so they could assure themselves of it as long as they ate of its fruit. And when He set the rainbow in the sky as a memorial for Noah and his descendants that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. These were sacraments to Adam and Noah — not because the tree could give immortality (it could not give it to itself), nor because the rainbow (which is only the reflection of sunlight off clouds) had power to hold back the waters. But because a mark was graven on them by the word of God so that they should serve

as signs and seals of His covenant. The tree was already a tree, and the rainbow already a rainbow. When the word of God was inscribed on them, a new form was given to them so that they began to be what they were not before. That no one should think this said without reason — the rainbow is to this day a witness of the covenant God made with Noah. As often as we see it, we read in it this promise of God written: the earth will never be destroyed by flood again. Therefore if some foolish philosopher, mocking the simplicity of our faith, claims that this variety of colors arises naturally from the reflection of sunlight through clouds — let us grant it. But let us also laugh at his senseless folly, which fails to acknowledge God as Lord and governor of nature, who uses all the elements at His own will in the service of His own glory. Had He imprinted such tokens on the sun, the stars, the earth, stones, and similar things, all of these would be sacraments to us. Why is uncoined silver different in value from coined silver when the metal is identical? Because the one has nothing but its natural property; when struck with a public mark, it becomes currency and receives a new value. Can God not mark His creatures with His word so that they become sacraments — which were previously bare elements? Examples of the second kind: when He showed Abraham a flaming torch in a smoking oven; when He made the fleece wet with dew while the ground remained dry, and then the ground wet while the fleece remained dry, to promise victory to Gideon; and when He moved the shadow on the sundial back ten steps to promise safety to Hezekiah. These things, done to support and establish the weakness of their faith, were sacraments as well.

But our present purpose is to discuss specifically those sacraments that the Lord willed to be ordinary in His church — to gather His worshipers and servants into one faith and the confession of one faith. For, to use Augustine's words, people cannot be bound together under any name of religion — true or false — unless they are joined by some fellowship of visible signs and sacraments. Since the most good Father foresaw this necessity, He ordained from the beginning certain exercises of godliness for His servants — which Satan has since corrupted in many ways by turning them into wicked and superstitious worship. From this arose the solemn initiations of the pagans into their religious orders, and other counterfeit practices — which, though full of error and superstition, were also evidence that people in the profession of religion could not do without such outward signs. But because these were neither grounded in the word of God nor directed toward that truth toward which all signs ought to point, they deserve no mention alongside the holy signs ordained by God that have not departed from their foundation — that is, that they should be aids to true godliness. These sacraments consist not of bare signs, like the rainbow and the tree, but of ceremonies — or rather, the signs given here are ceremonies. As stated above, they are on the Lord's side testimonies of grace and salvation; and on our side, they are marks of profession by which we publicly swear allegiance to the name of God, binding our faith to Him. Chrysostom fittingly calls them in one place covenants by which God binds Himself to us in a league, and we bind ourselves to purity and holiness of life — because a mutual covenant is formed between God and us. For just as the Lord promises there to blot out and cancel whatever guilt and penalty we have accumulated through our offenses, and recon-

ciles us to Himself in His only-begotten Son — so we in turn by this profession bind ourselves to Him in the pursuit of godliness and innocence. Therefore one may rightly say that such sacraments are ceremonies by which God intends to exercise His people — first for the nourishing, stirring up, and strengthening of faith inwardly, and then for the testifying of religion before other people.

These sacraments also varied according to the different periods of time — that is, according to the arrangement by which it pleased the Lord to reveal Himself in different ways to people at different times. To Abraham and his descendants, circumcision was commanded. To this were afterward added the purifications, sacrifices, and other ceremonies out of the law of Moses. These were the sacraments of the Jews until the coming of Christ. At His coming, those were abolished, and two sacraments were established that the Christian church now uses: baptism and the Lord's Supper. I am speaking of those ordained for the use of the whole church. As for the laying on of hands — by which ministers of the church are set apart for their office — I do not object to calling it a sacrament, though I do not count it among the ordinary sacraments. What the other things commonly called sacraments are to be considered, we shall see shortly. In any case, the ancient sacraments also pointed to the same goal as ours — to direct and as it were lead by the hand to Christ, or rather to represent Him as in a picture and bring Him to be known. For since we have already taught that the sacraments are seals by which God's promises are sealed, and since it is absolutely certain that no promise of God was ever offered to people except in Christ — to teach us anything about God's promise, the sacraments must necessarily point to Christ. Belonging to this is

the heavenly pattern of the tabernacle and its worship given to Moses on the mountain. There is only one difference: the ancient sacraments portrayed Christ as still promised, still awaited; ours testify to Christ as already given and delivered.

When each of these sacraments is explained individually, this will become much clearer. Circumcision was a sign to the Jews that whatever comes from human seed — that is, the entire nature of humanity — is corrupt and in need of purification. It was also a teaching and a reminder by which they were to confirm themselves in the promise given to Abraham concerning the blessed seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed — the seed from whom they themselves looked for their blessing. Now that saving seed — as Paul teaches — was Christ, in whom alone they hoped to recover what had been lost in Adam. Therefore circumcision was for them what Paul says it was for Abraham: a seal of the righteousness of faith — that is, a seal by which they would be more certainly assured that their faith in looking for that seed would be reckoned to them by God as righteousness. We will draw the full comparison between circumcision and baptism at a better opportunity elsewhere. The washings and purifications set before their eyes their own uncleanness, filth, and pollution — the defilement of their own nature — while promising another washing that would completely wipe away all that filth. That washing was Christ, with whose blood we are washed and so bring His cleanness before God, so that it may cover all our defilements. The sacrifices accused them of their own wickedness and taught at the same time that some satisfaction must be paid to the judgment of God. There must therefore be some great high priest — a mediator between God and people — who would satisfy God by the shedding

of blood, offering a sacrifice sufficient for the forgiveness of sins. That high priest was Christ. He shed His own blood. He was Himself the sacrifice — for He offered Himself in obedience to His Father unto death, and by that obedience He removed the disobedience of humanity that had provoked God's displeasure.

As for our sacraments, they present Christ to us all the more clearly as He was revealed more fully once He had been truly delivered by the Father as He had been promised. For baptism testifies to us that we are cleansed and washed; the Lord's Supper testifies that we are redeemed. In water, washing is signified; in blood, satisfaction. Both of these are found in Christ — who, as John says, came by water and blood — that is, to cleanse and to redeem. The Spirit of God is also a witness of this. Indeed there are three witnesses in one: water, blood, and Spirit. In water and blood we have the testimony of cleansing and redemption; but the Spirit, as the primary witness, brings us certain confidence in that testimony. This profound mystery has been remarkably shown us in the cross of Christ, when water and blood flowed from His holy side — which side Augustine rightly called the fountain of our sacraments. But we must discuss this further at greater length elsewhere. There is no doubt that a more abundant grace of the Spirit also manifests itself here when we compare the two eras. This belongs to the glory of Christ's kingdom, as we gather from many passages, especially from John 7. In this sense we must understand Paul's statement that under the law were shadows, but in Christ is the substance. His intention is not to strip the testimonies of grace of their effectiveness — by which God in ancient times proved Himself a faithful God to the fathers, even as He does to us today in baptism and the

Lord's Supper. His purpose was only to magnify by comparison what has been given to us, so that no one should wonder that the ceremonies of the law were abolished by the coming of Christ.

That scholastic teaching must also be briefly dismissed here: the view that draws such a sharp distinction between the sacraments of the old and new covenants as to say that the former only shadowed God's grace while the latter actually convey it. For the apostle speaks no less honorably of the former than of the latter when he teaches that the fathers ate the same spiritual food that we eat — and then identifies that food as Christ. Who would dare call an empty sign what delivered to the Jews true communion with Christ? And the very ground of the apostle's argument there plainly supports our position. To prevent anyone from trusting in a superficial knowledge of Christ, an empty Christian title, and outward tokens — and then daring to despise the judgment of God — Paul holds up examples of God's severity toward the Jews, so that we might know the same punishments they suffered await us if we follow the same faults. For the comparison to work, it was necessary for him to show that there is no inequality between us and them in those good things about which he was warning us not to boast falsely. Therefore he first places us on equal footing with them in the sacraments, leaving us not even the slightest advantage that might tempt us to hope for escaping unpunished. Indeed, it is not lawful to claim any more for our baptism than he elsewhere attributes to circumcision, which he calls the seal of the righteousness of faith. Therefore, whatever is given to us in our sacraments today, the Jews received the same in theirs of old — namely, Christ with all His spiritual riches. Whatever power our sacraments have, they also experienced in theirs — that is, they

were seals of God's goodwill toward them and grounds for hope of eternal salvation. Had those who held the contrary position read the letter to the Hebrews carefully, they would not have been so confused. When they read there that sins were not cleansed by the ceremonies of the law, and that the ancient shadows had no inherent power for righteousness — they neglected the comparison the apostle is drawing, and fastening on this one point alone, that the law itself profited nothing for those who followed it, concluded simply that the figures were empty of truth. But the apostle's purpose is to bring the ceremonial law to nothing considered in itself apart from Christ — on whom alone all its effectiveness depends.

But they will object those statements of Paul about 'circumcision of the letter' — that it counts for nothing before God, that it gives nothing, that it is vain. Such statements seem to depress circumcision far below baptism. Not so. The very same could rightly be said of baptism. In fact the same is said — first by Paul himself, when he shows that God does not regard the outward washing by which we enter the profession of religion unless the mind within is cleansed and continues in cleanness. Again by Peter, when he testifies that the truth of baptism does not consist in the outward washing but in a good witness of conscience. But Paul seems also in another place to dismiss outward circumcision entirely, when he contrasts it with the circumcision of Christ. I answer that even in that passage nothing is taken away from its dignity. Paul there argues against those who insisted circumcision was still necessary after it had been abolished. Therefore he warns the faithful to leave the old shadows behind and stand firm in the truth. 'These teachers,' he says, 'are urgently pressing you to have your bodies circumcised. But you are spiritually circumcised according to soul

and body. You therefore have the reality itself, which is far better than the shadow.' One might object in reply that the figure should not be despised just because they now have the reality — since the putting off of the old man of which Paul speaks was also present among the fathers, to whom outward circumcision was nonetheless not superfluous. He prevents this objection when he immediately adds that the Colossians were buried with Christ through baptism — by which he indicates that baptism is today to Christians what circumcision was to the ancient people. Therefore circumcision cannot be imposed on Christians without doing wrong to Christ.

But what follows — and what I just cited — is harder to resolve: that all the Jewish ceremonies were shadows of things to come and that in Christ is the substance. Hardest of all is what is treated over many chapters in the letter to the Hebrews: that the blood of animals could not reach the conscience; that the law had a shadow of good things to come, not the image of the things themselves; that those who followed the Mosaic ceremonies obtained no perfection by them; and similar statements. I return to what I have already touched on: Paul does not call the ceremonies shadows because they had no solid substance in them, but because their fulfillment was, in a certain sense, held in suspension until the delivering of Christ. Again, I say this is to be understood as referring to the manner of signifying, not to the effectiveness. For until Christ was visibly manifested in the flesh, all the signs pointed to Him as absent — yet He did inwardly communicate to the faithful the presence of His power and of Himself. But above all, we must note that in all those passages Paul is not speaking in absolute terms but in a polemical context. Because he was contending against false apos-

bles who wanted godliness to consist in ceremonies alone without any regard for Christ, it was sufficient to address only what ceremonies are worth in themselves — and so refute them. The author of the letter to the Hebrews followed the same approach. We should therefore remember that the debate in those passages is about ceremonies — not as they are understood in their own proper meaning, but as they have been twisted to a false and distorted use; not about their lawful use, but about the abuse of superstition. Is it any wonder, then, that ceremonies separated from Christ are stripped of all power? For all signs whatever, when the thing they signify is removed, are reduced to nothing. So when Christ addressed those who thought manna was nothing but food for the stomach, He accommodated His speech to their crude understanding and said He provides better food — that which nourishes souls to the hope of immortality. If you want a plainer summary, this is the substance of it all: First, the whole apparatus of ceremonies in the law of Moses is a fleeting and worthless thing unless directed to Christ. Second, they did point to Christ in such a way that when He was at last visibly revealed in the flesh, they had their fulfillment. Finally, they had necessarily to be removed at His coming, just as a shadow vanishes in the clear light of the sun. But since I am reserving the fuller discussion of this matter for the place where I have planned to compare baptism with circumcision, I treat it only briefly here.

Perhaps also the excessive praises of the sacraments found in the ancient writers misled those miserable scholastics — such as Augustine's statement that the sacraments of the old law only promised the Savior, but ours give salvation. Without noting the intent of such expressions, they published their extreme doctrines

in a sense completely opposite to what the ancient fathers meant. For Augustine in that passage intended nothing other than what he writes elsewhere: that the sacraments of Moses' law foretold Christ, while ours tell of Christ as already present. And against Faustus: that those were promises of things to be fulfilled, while these are tokens of things already fulfilled — as if to say, the former portrayed Christ as still awaited, while ours present Him as already delivered. Moreover, he is speaking of the manner of signifying, as he also explains in another place: 'The law and the prophets had sacraments foretelling a thing to come; but the sacraments of our time testify that what those announced as coming has already come.' What he thought about the substance and effectiveness he explains in many places: for example, when he says that the sacraments of the Jews were diverse in signs but equal in the thing signified; diverse in visible form but equal in spiritual power. Again: 'In diverse signs is the same faith — just as in diverse words, because words change their sounds across time, and words are after all nothing but signs. The fathers drank the same spiritual drink, though they did not drink the same physical drink. You see, therefore, that faith remaining one, the signs varied. To them the rock was Christ; to us that which is set on the altar is Christ. They drank as a great sacrament the water flowing from the rock; what we drink, the faithful know. If you consider the visible form, they drank different things; if the spiritual meaning, they drank the same spiritual drink.' And in another place: 'In the mystery, their food and drink are the same as ours — the same in signification, not in form — because the very same Christ who was figured to them in the rock was shown to us in the flesh.' However, we also grant that there is some difference here. For both sets of sacra-

ments testify that the fatherly goodwill of God and the graces of the Holy Spirit are offered to us in Christ — but our sacraments testify this more clearly and brightly. In both is a giving of Christ, but in ours more abundantly and fully — consistent with that difference between the old and new covenants which we have already discussed. And this is what the same Augustine means (whom we cite more often as the best and most faithful witness of all the ancient writers) when he teaches that after Christ was revealed, sacraments were ordained that are fewer in number, higher in meaning, and more excellent in power. Readers should also be briefly warned of this: whatever the scholastics have trifled about with their doctrine of 'the work worked' is not only false but contrary to the very nature of the sacraments, which God ordained so that the faithful — empty and poor in all good things — would bring nothing there but their beggary. It follows, then, that in receiving the sacraments people do nothing by which they can earn praise — since in this act, which on their part is entirely passive, no work can be attributed to them.

¶THE .XV. CHAPTER. OF BAPTISME.



Baptism is the sign of our entry by which we are received into the fellowship of the church, so that being grafted into Christ we may be counted among the children of God. It was given to us by God to serve two purposes — which I have taught are common to all the mysteries: first, to serve our faith before Him; second, to serve as our confession before people. We will address each purpose in order. Baptism brings three things to our faith, which must each be treated separately. The first is what the Lord sets out for us: that baptism should be a token and proof of our cleansing — or to put it more precisely, it is like a sealed charter by which He confirms to us that all our sins are so effaced, canceled, and blotted out that they can never come before His sight, be called to mind, or be charged against us. For He wills that all who believe should be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16). Therefore those who think baptism is nothing more than a mark and token by which we profess our religion before other people — as soldiers bear their commander's colors as a sign of their allegiance — have missed what is most important in baptism. That most important thing is this: that we receive it with this promise — whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

In this sense is to be understood what Paul writes: that the church is sanctified by Christ her spouse and cleansed with the washing of water through the word of life (Ephesians 5:26). And in another place: that we are saved according to His mercy through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). And what Peter writes: that baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:22). For Paul did not mean to indicate that our washing and salvation are perfectly accomplished by water, or that water contains in itself the power to cleanse, regenerate, and renew. Neither did Peter point to water as the cause of salvation — only to the knowledge and assurance of such gifts as received in this sacrament, which the words themselves express clearly enough. For Paul joins together the word of life and the washing of water — as if to say, through the Gospel comes the message of washing and sanctifying, and through baptism that message is sealed. And Peter immediately adds that baptism is not the removal of dirt from the flesh but the pledge of a good conscience before God — which is of faith. Indeed, baptism promises us no cleansing except that accomplished by the sprinkling of Christ's blood — which is figured by water because of the similarity of cleansing and washing. Who then can say we are cleansed by this water, when the water itself testifies that Christ's blood is our true and only washing? No stronger argument can be found to refute those who trace all things to the power of the water than the signification of baptism itself — which draws us away from the visible element set before our eyes, and from all other means, in order to bind our minds to Christ alone.

Nor should we think that baptism applies only to past sins — as if for new failures committed after baptism, we must seek fresh remedies for cleansing in some other sacrament, as though baptism's power had expired. This error led in ancient times to the practice of some who refused to be baptized until they were in the most extreme danger of death and gasping their last breath — so that by this means they might obtain pardon for their whole life. The ancient bishops repeatedly denounced this perverse cunning in their writings. But we should understand it this way: at whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and cleansed once for all our life. Therefore whenever we fall, we must return to the remembrance of baptism and arm our minds with it, so that it may always hold with certainty the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. For even though baptism, once administered, appears to be a past event, it is not nullified by later sins. For the cleanness of Christ is offered to us in it — a cleanness that always flourishes, is overcome by no stains, but overwhelms and wipes away all our filth. Yet from this we must not draw license to sin in the future — nor in fact does this equip us for such boldness. This teaching is given only to those who, having sinned, groan wearily under the weight of their guilt, so that they may have something with which to lift themselves up and find comfort, lest they fall into confusion and despair. So Paul says that Christ was made for us a propitiation for the forgiveness of past offenses (Romans 3:25). By this he does not deny that perpetual and continual forgiveness of sins is obtained there, even unto death — but he means it was given by the Father only to poor sinners who, their conscience seared, sigh to the Physician. To these, God's mercy is offered. Those who use the

prospect of escape from punishment as an occasion and license to sin do nothing but provoke the wrath and judgment of God upon themselves.

I know it is commonly thought otherwise — that after baptism we obtain forgiveness through repentance and the ministry of the keys, while at our first regeneration forgiveness was given through baptism alone. But those who hold this view err by failing to remember that the power of the keys they speak of depends so entirely on baptism that it should in no way be separated from it. The sinner receives forgiveness through the ministry of the church — specifically through the preaching of the Gospel. But what kind of preaching is this? That we are cleansed from sins by the blood of Christ. But what sign and testimony is there of that washing except baptism? We see, therefore, that absolution is referred back to baptism. This error has given birth to the invented sacrament of penance, which I have touched on briefly before and will address more fully in its proper place. But it is no wonder that people who, with their limited understanding, were excessively attached to outward things have in this area also shown the same fault — not content with God's pure institution, they pressed in new aids of their own invention. As if baptism itself were not a sacrament of repentance. But if repentance is commended to us for our entire life, the power of baptism must extend to the same span. It is therefore also certain that all godly people, throughout the whole of their lives, whenever they are troubled by the knowledge of their sins in conscience, may call themselves back to the remembrance of baptism — and thereby strengthen themselves in confidence of that one and continual washing that we have in the blood of Christ.

Baptism also brings another benefit: it shows us our death in Christ and our new life in Him. For as the apostle says, we are baptized into His death, being buried with Him in death, so that we may walk in newness of life. By these words he does not merely exhort us to imitate Him — as though he were saying that baptism reminds us to die to our lusts after the pattern of Christ's death, and to be raised to righteousness after the pattern of His resurrection. He reaches much deeper than that: that through baptism Christ has made us partakers of His death so that we are grafted into it. And just as a graft draws its substance and nourishment from the root into which it is grafted, so those who receive baptism with the faith they should have truly feel the effect of Christ's death in the mortifying of their flesh — and with that they feel the effect of His resurrection in the quickening of the Spirit. From this he draws the exhortation: that if we are Christians, we ought to be dead to sin and alive to righteousness. He uses the same argument elsewhere: that we are circumcised and have put off the old self, since we are buried with Christ through baptism. It is in this sense that, in the passage we cited earlier, he called baptism the washing of regeneration and renewing. Therefore the first promise of baptism is free forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness — and then the grace of the Holy Spirit, who reforms us into newness of life.

Finally, our faith receives yet another benefit from baptism: it testifies to us with certainty that we are not merely grafted into the death and life of Christ, but that we are so united to Christ Himself that we are partakers of all His good things. For this reason He has dedicated and consecrated baptism in His own body — so that it might be shared between Him and us as a most powerful bond of

the union and fellowship He chose to enter into with us. So Paul uses baptism to prove that we are children of God — because we have put on Christ in baptism. We see, then, that the fulfillment of baptism is in Christ, whom we therefore rightly call the proper object of baptism. It is therefore no wonder that the apostles are reported to have baptized in His name, even though they were commanded to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. For whatever gifts of God are presented in baptism are found in Christ alone. And yet it cannot be that one who baptizes into Christ does not at the same time invoke the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. For we are cleansed by His blood because the merciful Father, in His incomparable kindness — willing to receive us into His favor — set Him as the mediator between us and Himself to secure that favor for us. But regeneration we obtain only through His death and resurrection if, being sanctified by the Spirit, we are endowed with a new and spiritual nature. Therefore in both our cleansing and our regeneration, we perceive the cause in the Father, the matter in the Son, and the effect in the Holy Spirit. This is how John first baptized, and afterward the apostles — with the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins — meaning by 'repentance' such regeneration, and by 'forgiveness of sins' such washing.

From this it is also most certain that John's ministry was altogether the same as what was afterward committed to the apostles. For it is not different hands that make a baptism different — what makes it the same baptism is the same doctrine. John and the apostles agreed in one doctrine: both baptized for repentance, both for the forgiveness of sins, both in the name of Christ — from whom both repentance and forgiveness of sins come. John said

that He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world — making Him the acceptable sacrifice to the Father, the one who satisfies God's righteousness, the author of salvation. What could the apostles add to this confession? Therefore let no one be troubled by the fact that the ancient writers labor to distinguish the two baptisms — their voice should not weigh so heavily as to shake the certainty of Scripture. For who would rather listen to Chrysostom denying that forgiveness of sins was included in John's baptism, than to Luke affirming plainly that John preached the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? Nor should Augustine's subtle distinction be accepted — that in John's baptism sins were forgiven in hope, but in Christ's baptism in reality. For since the evangelist plainly testifies that John in his baptism promised the forgiveness of sins, why should we diminish this testimony when no necessity compels us to do so? If anyone seeks a distinction based on God's word, he will find no other than this: John baptized in the name of the one who was to come; the apostles baptized in the name of the one who had already appeared.

The fact that more abundant graces of the Spirit were poured out after Christ's resurrection does not establish any difference in baptisms. For the baptism that the apostles administered while Christ was still present on earth was called His — yet it had no greater fullness of the Spirit than John's baptism. Indeed, even after His ascension, the Spirit was not given to the Samaritans above the common measure of believers before the ascension — though they had been baptized in the name of Jesus — until Peter and John were sent to lay hands on them. What misled the ancient writers, I think, was the statement that John's baptism was only a preparation for Christ's baptism, because they read that those who

had received John's baptism were baptized again by Paul. But how wrong they were in this will be plainly shown elsewhere in its proper place. What, then, did John mean when he said that he baptized with water but that Christ would come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire? This can be answered briefly. He did not mean to distinguish between two kinds of baptism. Rather, he was contrasting his own person with the person of Christ — saying that he himself was a minister of water, while Christ was the giver of the Holy Spirit, and would demonstrate this power by the visible miracle of sending the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in tongues of fire. What more could the apostles boast of than this? What more can those who baptize today claim? They are only ministers of the outward sign; Christ is the author of the inward grace — as the ancient writers themselves everywhere teach, and especially Augustine, whose principal argument against the Donatists is this: whoever performs the baptism, Christ alone governs it.

Both of these things we have spoken of — mortification and washing — are prefigured in the people of Israel, whom the apostle for this reason says were baptized in the cloud and in the sea. Mortification was prefigured when the Lord, delivering them from the hand of Pharaoh and from cruel bondage, made a way for them through the Red Sea and drowned Pharaoh and the Egyptians who were chasing hard behind them. In the same way, He promises us in baptism — and confirms by the sign He gives — that through His power we are brought out and delivered from Egyptian slavery, that is, from the bondage of sin; that our Pharaoh — the devil — is drowned, even though he continues to harass and wear us down. But just as that Egyptian was not buried at the bottom of the sea but, overthrown on the shore, still struck terror into the Israelites

with his awful sight yet could not harm them — so our enemy still threatens, displays his weapons, makes himself felt, but cannot overcome us. In the cloud was a sign of cleansing. For just as the Lord covered the Israelites with a cloud spread over them, giving them refreshing shade lest they faint and burn under the scorching sun — so in baptism we acknowledge ourselves covered and protected by the blood of Christ, lest the severity of God, which is truly an unbearable flame, fall upon us. But although this mystery was dark at that time and understood by few, because there is no other way to obtain salvation except through these two graces, God was unwilling to take away the sign of both from the ancient fathers whom He had adopted as heirs.

It is now clear how false the teaching is — which some have recently promoted and others still hold — that through baptism we are freed from original sin and the corruption that Adam spread to all his descendants, and that we are restored to the same righteousness and purity of nature that Adam would have obtained had he remained in his original state. Teachers who hold this view have never understood what original sin is, what original righteousness is, or what the grace of baptism is. We have already shown that original sin is the perverseness and corruption of our nature — which first makes us guilty before God's wrath, and then produces in us what Scripture calls the works of the flesh. These two points must each be kept in mind: we are defiled and corrupted in every part of our nature, and for that corruption alone we stand rightly condemned before God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and cleanness. Even infants bring their own condemnation with them from their mother's womb. Though they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their iniquity, they carry

the seed of it within them. Their whole nature is, in a sense, a seed of sin — and so it cannot help but be hateful and abominable to God. The faithful are assured through baptism that this condemnation is taken away and removed from them — because, as we have said, the Lord promises through this sign that full and complete forgiveness is granted: both for the guilt that would have been charged against us and for the penalty we would have suffered. They also receive righteousness — but the kind of righteousness God's people can obtain in this life, which is righteousness by imputation only. The Lord in His mercy counts them as righteous and innocent.

The other point is this: the corruption of our nature never fully stops, but keeps producing new fruit — namely, those works of the flesh described earlier. It is like a furnace that constantly sends out flame and sparks, or a spring that ceaselessly pours out water. Sinful desire never fully dies and is extinguished in us until, through death, we are delivered out of this body of death and have completely put off the old self. Baptism promises us that our Pharaoh is drowned and that sin is being put to death — but not so completely that sin no longer exists or can no longer trouble us. It promises only that sin will not overcome us. For as long as we live within this prison of the body, the remnants of sin will remain in us. But if we hold fast by faith to the promise God gave us in baptism, those remnants will not rule or reign over us. Let no one deceive himself, and let no one use this truth as an excuse for his sins — since people are already far too inclined to sin. These things are said not to make anyone sleep carelessly in their sins, but only to keep those who are pricked and troubled by their flesh from losing heart. Let them think of themselves as still on the journey, and let

them believe they have made real progress when they see that their sinful desires diminish a little each day — until they reach the goal toward which they are traveling, the final death of the flesh at the end of this mortal life. In the meantime, let them not stop striving vigorously, encouraging one another to press forward, and stirring each other on to complete victory. Indeed, the fact that even after long struggle there is still significant work remaining should sharpen their efforts all the more. This is what we must hold onto: we are baptized into the mortification of our flesh, which begins in us at baptism, which we pursue daily, and which will be completed when we depart this life to be with the Lord.

We are saying nothing different from what Paul sets out most clearly in Romans 7. After he had argued for free righteousness, and because some ungodly people concluded from this that we could live however we pleased — since we would not be accepted by God on the basis of the merit of works — he adds that all who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ are thereby regenerated in the Spirit, and that we have a pledge of this regeneration in baptism. From this he urges the faithful not to let sin have dominion over their members. But because he knew there is always some weakness in the faithful, he adds a comfort so they would not lose heart: they are not under the law. Because this might seem to give Christians license to be careless — since they are not under the yoke of the law — he explains what it means for the law to be set aside, and what the law's proper use is. This was a question he had now deferred a second time. The conclusion is this: we are delivered from the law's strict demands so that we might cling to Christ. The law's purpose, however, is to convict us of our corruption so that we confess our own weakness and misery. Since this corrup-

tion of nature does not show itself as clearly in an unregenerate person who follows his own desires without any fear of God, Paul uses the example of a regenerate person — namely, himself. He says he has a continual struggle with the remnants of his flesh, and that he is held in miserable bondage, unable to consecrate himself entirely to obedience to God's law. He is therefore compelled to cry out with groaning: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?' If the children of God are held captive in this prison as long as they live, they would have to be deeply tormented by the thought of their own danger — unless something addresses that fear. So Paul adds a comfort: there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He teaches that those whom the Lord has once received into favor, grafted into communion with Christ, and admitted through baptism into the fellowship of His church — as long as they continue in faith in Christ — though they are besieged by sin and indeed carry sin within them, are still acquitted from guilt and condemnation. If this is the plain and natural reading of Paul, there is no reason to treat what we teach as something new or unusual.

Baptism also serves our confession before other people. It is a mark by which we openly declare that we wish to be counted among God's people. Through it we testify that we agree with all Christians in worshipping one God and following one religion. And through it we openly affirm our faith — so that not only our hearts breathe out praise to God, but our tongues and all the members of our body express it as fully as they are able. In this way, as we ought, all that we are is devoted to the service of God's glory — nothing held back — and others may be stirred to the same by our example. This was Paul's point when he asked the Corinthians

whether they had not been baptized into the name of Christ. He meant that by being baptized into His name, they had pledged themselves to Him, sworn allegiance to His name, and bound their faith to Him before others — so that they could no longer confess any other than Christ alone, without abandoning the confession they had made in baptism.

Now that we have seen what the Lord had in mind when He instituted baptism, it is clear how we should receive and use it. As far as baptism is given to raise, nourish, and confirm our faith, we must receive it as from the hand of the Author himself. We must hold with certainty and full confidence that it is He who speaks to us through the sign — He who cleanses and washes us and removes the memory of our sins, He who makes us partakers of His death, who takes from Satan his kingdom, who weakens the power of our sinful desires, and who so joins Himself to us that, clothed in Him, we are counted as children of God. All this He truly and certainly performs inwardly for our souls, just as we plainly see our bodies outwardly washed, immersed, and covered. This correspondence — this likeness between the outward and inward — is the surest principle of the sacraments: that in bodily things we should perceive spiritual realities as if they were set before our eyes, since it has pleased the Lord to represent them through such figures. Not because such graces are bound up in the sacrament and must be given by its power — but because the Lord uses this token to testify His will toward us, that He will give us all these things. Nor does He merely show our eyes an empty picture — He brings us into the very presence of the thing and fulfills what the sign represents.

The example of Cornelius the centurion illustrates this well. He was baptized after he had already received forgiveness of sins and visible gifts of the Holy Spirit. He was not seeking a greater forgiveness through baptism — but a more certain exercise of faith, and an increase of confidence through a pledge. Someone might object: why then did Ananias tell Paul to wash away his sins through baptism, if sins are not washed away by the power of baptism itself? The answer is this: we are said to receive, obtain, and gain what the Lord gives us — as far as our faith's experience is concerned — whether He testifies it for the first time in that moment, or whether He more firmly confirms what He has already testified. So this was all Ananias meant: 'Paul, be baptized so that you may be assured your sins are forgiven.' For in baptism the Lord promises forgiveness of sins. Receive that promise and be at peace. I do not mean to lessen the power of baptism — only to say that the thing itself is truly present with the sign, to the extent that God works through outward means. But from this sacrament, as from all others, we receive only what we receive by faith. If we lack faith, baptism becomes a witness to our ingratitude, by which we stand declared guilty before God for not believing the promise given there. But as a sign of our confession, through baptism we testify that our trust is in God's mercy, that our cleansing is in the forgiveness of sins obtained for us by Jesus Christ, and that through it we enter the church of Christ — to live in harmony with all the faithful through one shared faith and love. This last point is what Paul meant when he said we are all baptized in one Spirit, so that we may be one body.

If it is true — as we have argued — that a sacrament should not be judged by the hand that administers it, but as coming from the hand of God himself from whom it undoubtedly proceeds, then we can conclude that nothing is added to or taken from a sacrament by the worthiness of the person who delivers it. It is like a letter sent among people: if the handwriting and seal are recognizable, it does not matter who the carrier is or what kind of person he may be. So it should be enough to recognize the hand and seal of our Lord in His sacraments, no matter by whose hand they are delivered. This thoroughly refutes the error of the Donatists, who measured the value of the sacrament by the worthiness of the minister. Such today are the Anabaptists, who deny that we were rightly baptized because we were baptized by wicked men and idolaters within the papal church — and so they furiously demand that we be baptized again. Against their foolishness we have a sufficient defense in this: in baptism we were dedicated not to the name of any person, but to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is therefore not a human act but God's act — regardless of who administers it. However ignorant or godless those who baptized us may have been, they did not baptize us into the fellowship of their own ignorance or wickedness. They baptized us into faith in Jesus Christ — because they called not upon their own name, but upon God's name, and baptized us into no other name. Since it was God's baptism, it truly contained within it the promise of forgiveness of sins, mortification of the flesh, spiritual renewal, and participation in Christ. It did not harm the Israelites that they were circumcised by unclean or apostate priests. The sign was not thereby made void, requiring it to be done again — it was enough to return to its original meaning. The objection that baptism

should be celebrated in the assembly of the godly does not prove that a partial fault destroys the entire force of the sacrament. When we teach what ought to be done so that baptism is pure and free from all corruption, we do not abolish God's ordinance simply because idolaters have corrupted it. When circumcision in ancient times was corrupted by many superstitions, it did not cease to be a sign of grace. And when Josiah and Hezekiah gathered back the Israelites who had departed from God, they did not call them to a second circumcision (Matthew 28:19).

When our opponents ask what faith of ours followed our baptism in the years since — in order to prove that baptism is void when it is not sanctified to us through the word of promise received by faith — our answer is this: we were indeed blind and unbelieving for a long time, and we did not hold fast to the promise given us in baptism. But the promise itself, being God's promise, remained steady, firm, and true throughout. Though all people are liars and faithbreakers, God does not cease to be true. Though all people are lost, Christ remains salvation. We admit, therefore, that baptism profited us nothing during that time — because the promise it offered, without which baptism is nothing, was ignored and set aside. But now that by God's grace we have begun to see more clearly, we blame our own blindness and hardness of heart for having been so long ungrateful for His great goodness. Yet we believe that the promise itself has not vanished. Rather, we understand it this way: God promised forgiveness of sins in baptism, and since He promised it, He will without doubt fulfill it to all who believe it. That promise was offered to us in baptism. Therefore let us now embrace it by faith. It has indeed been buried from us for a long time through unbelief — but now let us receive it by faith. So when

the Lord calls the Jewish people to repentance, He gives them no command for a second circumcision — even though they had been circumcised by wicked and ungodly hands and had for a time lived entangled in that same wickedness. He simply and urgently calls for a turning of the heart. Even though the covenant had been broken by them, the sign of the covenant, by the Lord's own ordinance, remained steadfast and inviolable. On the single condition of repentance, they were restored to the covenant the Lord had once made with them in circumcision — a covenant they had, in receiving it from the hand of a covenant-breaking priest, defiled as much as was in their power to do, and whose effect they had extinguished (Romans 3:3).

Our opponents think they have struck a decisive blow when they point out that Paul rebaptized those who had previously received John's baptism. Their argument runs like this: if by our own admission John's baptism was entirely the same as ours, then just as those disciples — who had first been wrongly instructed — were baptized again when they received true doctrine, so baptism without true doctrine counts for nothing, and we ought to be baptized again now that we have for the first time received true teaching. Some think there was a man with some ill intent toward John who had led those disciples astray with their first baptism into a vain superstition. They seem to draw this inference from the fact that the disciples confessed complete ignorance of the Holy Spirit — since John would surely never have sent away disciples so untaught. But it is not likely that Jews who had been baptized at all would have been completely ignorant of the Holy Spirit, who is spoken of so prominently in so many passages of Scripture. When they answered that they did not know whether the Holy Spirit had

been given, they should be understood as saying they had not yet heard whether the gifts of the Spirit — about which Paul was asking them — had been given to the disciples of Christ. I grant that it was the true baptism of John, identical with the baptism of Christ. But I deny that they were rebaptized. Then what is meant by the words, 'they were baptized in the name of Jesus'? Some interpret this as Paul simply instructing them in true doctrine. But I prefer a simpler reading: that this refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit — that is, the visible gifts of the Spirit were given to them through the laying on of hands. Calling this 'baptism' is nothing new. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles remembered the Lord's words about the baptism of fire and of the Spirit. And Peter recalled those same words when he saw those gifts poured out on Cornelius and his household and relatives. Nor does the next statement contradict this — 'when he had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down upon them.' Luke is not describing two different events. He is following the common Hebrew pattern of first stating the summary and then explaining it more fully. This is evident from the way the words are put together. He says, 'When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of Jesus.' Then: 'When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down upon them.' The second sentence explains what kind of baptism the first referred to. If ignorance so completely invalidates a previous baptism that a second is required, then the apostles themselves should have been rebaptized first — since for nearly three years after their baptism they had barely begun to taste any portion of purer doctrine. And among us today — what rivers would be enough to provide as many new washings as there are errors that the Lord mercifully corrects in us day by day? (Acts 19:3; Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16)

By now, if I am not mistaken, the power, dignity, value, and purpose of this sacrament should be sufficiently clear. As for the outward sign, I wish that Christ's own simple institution had prevailed as it ought and restrained human boldness. Instead — as if being baptized with water according to Christ's command were too plain — people invented a blessing, or rather an enchantment, to corrupt the true consecration of the water. Then came the addition of a candle and chrism, while blowing on the candidate was treated as opening the gateway to baptism. I am well aware how ancient these additions are. But it is fully legitimate for me and for all godly people to reject whatever human presumption has added to Christ's ordinance. When Satan saw how easily his deceptions were received at the very beginning of the Gospel through the world's foolish credulity, he pressed forward into coarser abuses. From this came the introduction of saliva and other trivial practices — openly and with unchecked license — to the disgrace of baptism. From these experiences let us learn that nothing is holier, better, or safer than to be content with the authority of Christ alone. How much better it would have been — setting aside theatrical ceremonies that dazzle simple eyes and stupefy simple minds — that whenever someone was to be baptized, he should be presented to the assembly of the faithful and offered to God with the whole church looking on as witness, praying over him. The confession of faith in which the candidate is to be instructed should be recited. The promises contained in baptism should be declared. The one instructed should be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And finally, he should be sent away with prayers and thanksgiving. This way nothing is left out that matters, and the single ceremony that came from God — its

Author — shines through clearly, unobscured by any foreign corruption. As for whether the one being baptized is fully immersed once or three times, or only sprinkled with water poured over him — this matters very little. Churches should be free to follow the custom of their own region. That said, the very word 'baptize' means to dip, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church.

It is also relevant to know that it is wrong for private individuals to take it upon themselves to administer baptism. The distribution of baptism, like the Lord's Supper, is a part of the ministry of the church. Christ did not command women, or just anyone, to baptize — He gave this command to those He had appointed as His apostles. And when He commanded His disciples at the Lord's Supper to do what they had seen Him do when He served as the rightful administrator, He plainly meant them to follow His example in this as well. As for the practice — accepted for many centuries, and in a sense from the very beginning of the church — that lay people may baptize in an emergency when no minister is present in time, I do not see how it can be strongly defended. The ancient fathers themselves who either held this view or allowed this practice were uncertain whether it was rightly done. Augustine seems to have had this doubt when he wrote: 'Although a layman compelled by necessity administers baptism, I cannot say whether it is right to repeat it — for if done without necessity, it is usurping another's office; if necessity compels it, it is either no sin or a forgivable one.' Moreover, concerning women, the Council of Carthage decreed without exception that they should not presume to baptize at all. But someone might object that there is danger of a sick person dying without baptism and so being deprived of the

grace of regeneration. Not so. God declares that He adopts our infants as His own before they are born, when He promises to be a God to us and to our children after us. Their salvation is contained in that word of promise. No one should dare be so contemptuous toward God as to claim His promise is not sufficient in itself to accomplish its effect. Few people recognize how much damage the poorly interpreted teaching — that baptism is necessary for salvation — has caused, and so they are less careful about it. For where this view has taken hold — that all who have not been washed with water are lost — our situation is worse than that of the people in the Old Testament, as though God's grace were now more narrowly restricted than it was under the law. Under such reasoning, Christ would seem to have come not to fulfill the promises but to abolish them — since the promise that was once sufficient in itself to bring salvation before the eighth day would now be powerless without the help of the sign.

What the custom was before Augustine's time is made clear first from Tertullian, who stated that a woman is not permitted to speak in the church, to teach, to baptize, to offer, or to claim for herself any function belonging to men — let alone to priests. Epiphanius also bears strong witness to this same practice when he rebukes Marcion for giving women the liberty to baptize. I am aware of the objection raised by those who think differently — that common practice differs considerably from an emergency measure when extreme necessity demands it. But when Epiphanius pronounces it a mockery to grant women liberty to baptize and makes no exceptions, it is plain that he condemns this practice as inex-

cusable under any pretext. In his third book as well, where he teaches that this was not permitted even to the holy mother of Christ, he adds no qualification.

The example of Zipporah is poorly applied here. The angel of God was appeased after she took a stone and circumcised her son — but it is wrongly concluded from this that God approved of what she did. By that same reasoning, one would have to say that the worship set up by the nations brought from Assyria pleased God. There are stronger reasons to show that what a rash woman did should not be made a pattern for others to imitate. It would be enough to point out that it was an exceptional case that should not be made into a general example — and especially that since there is no record anywhere of priests in ancient times receiving a specific command to circumcise, circumcision and baptism are not comparable in this respect. For Christ's words are plain: 'Go, teach all nations, and baptize.' He appointed the same men to be both preachers of the Gospel and ministers of baptism. And as the apostle testifies, no one takes honor upon himself in the church except the one called as Aaron was — so whoever baptizes without a lawful calling is intruding into someone else's office. Even in the smallest matters — such as food and drink — Paul plainly declares that whatever we do with a doubtful conscience is sin. Women baptizing is a far more serious sin, since it clearly breaks the rule Christ established. We know it is unlawful to separate what God has joined together. But I will set all this aside. I simply want readers to notice that Zipporah's intent was anything but to serve God. Seeing her son in danger, she seethed and complained — and not without anger she threw the foreskin on the ground, taunting her husband, even directing her anger at God. It is plain that the whole

episode arose from a furious state of mind: she was raging against both God and her husband because she was compelled to shed her son's blood. Furthermore, even if everything else about her conduct had been acceptable, her act of circumcising her son in the presence of her husband is an inexcusable presumption. Her husband was not just any private person — he was Moses, the chief prophet of God, the greatest who ever arose in Israel. What she did was no more lawful for her than it would be today for a woman to perform such an act in the presence of a bishop. In any case, this whole controversy is easily resolved by this principle: infants who die before receiving baptism are not shut out of the kingdom of heaven. It has already been shown that we do serious wrong to God's covenant if we treat it as though it were weak in itself — since its effect depends neither on baptism nor on any other addition. The sacrament is added afterward like a seal — not to supply effectiveness to God's promise as though it were otherwise defective, but only to confirm it to us. From this it follows that the children of the faithful are not baptized in order to become children of God for the first time — as if they were previously strangers to the church. Rather, they are received through a solemn sign into the church because they already belong to the body of Christ by virtue of the promise. Therefore, if the sign is omitted without laziness, contempt, or negligence, we are free from all danger. It is far better — and far holier — to honor God's ordinance by seeking sacraments only where the Lord has placed them. When we cannot receive them from the church, God's grace is not so bound to the sacraments that we cannot obtain it through faith in the word of the Lord.

¶THE .XVI. CHAPTER. THAT THE
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But since in this age certain fanatical spirits have stirred up severe trouble in the church over the baptism of infants and still do not stop causing turmoil, I must add a section here to restrain their recklessness. If this seems too long to some, I ask them to consider that we should value the purity of doctrine in such an important matter, together with the peace of the church, so highly that nothing offered to secure both should be impatiently dismissed. Beyond that, I have worked to shape this discussion so that it will also significantly help to explain the mystery of baptism more clearly. They attack infant baptism with an argument that admittedly looks appealing on the surface, claiming it is not grounded in any institution of Christ but was introduced only through human boldness and misguided curiosity, and was then rashly adopted through careless ease. For a sacrament, unless it rests on a sure foundation of God's word, hangs by a thread. But what if, when the matter is carefully examined, it turns out that the

Lord's holy ordinance is being falsely and unjustly charged with such a slander? Let us therefore search out its true origin. And if it turns out that it was invented by mere human rashness, then let us abandon it and measure the true practice of baptism by God's will alone. But if it proves to have His certain authority behind it, we must be careful that in attacking God's holy ordinances we do not also slander the Author Himself.

First, it is a well-known principle, accepted among all the godly, that the proper understanding of the sacraments depends not only on the outward ceremonies but rests primarily on the promise and the spiritual realities that the Lord appointed the ceremonies themselves to represent. Therefore, anyone who wants to fully understand what baptism is, what its purpose is, and what it means should not fix his thoughts on the physical element and visible act. Instead, he should lift his mind to the promises of God offered in it and to the inward realities it represents. Whoever grasps these things has reached the sound truth and whole substance of baptism. From there he will also learn the reason and use of the outward washing. On the other hand, whoever dismisses these things and keeps his mind fixed entirely on the visible ceremony will understand neither the power nor the nature of baptism -- not even what the water means or what purpose it serves. This principle is confirmed by so many clear testimonies of Scripture that we do not need to spend much time on it here. Therefore it remains for us to discover from the promises given in baptism what its true power and nature are. Scripture shows that baptism first represents the cleansing of sins that we receive through the blood of Christ, and then the putting to death of the flesh, which depends on sharing in His death. Through this the faithful are reborn into

newness of life and into fellowship with Christ. Everything taught in Scripture about baptism can be summed up under these points, except that baptism also serves as a sign to declare our faith before others.

But since before the institution of baptism, God's people had circumcision in its place, let us consider how these two signs differ from each other and how they are alike. From this comparison, the relationship between the one and the other will become clear. When the Lord gave Abraham circumcision to observe, He first told him that He would be God to him and to his descendants, adding that with Him is the overflowing abundance and sufficiency of all things and that Abraham should consider God's hand as the source of every good thing. These words contain the promise of eternal life, as Christ Himself explains, using this passage to prove the immortality of the faithful and the resurrection. For God, He says, is not the God of the dead but of the living. Therefore Paul, showing the Ephesians from what destruction the Lord had rescued them, argues from the fact that they had not been admitted to the covenant of circumcision that they were without Christ, without God, without hope, and strangers from the covenants of promise (Matthew 22:32; Luke 20:38; Ephesians 2:12). All of these things the covenant itself contained. But the first step toward God, the first entrance into immortal life, is the forgiveness of sins. From this it follows that forgiveness corresponds to the promise of baptism concerning our cleansing. Afterward the Lord made a covenant with Abraham that he should walk before Him in purity and integrity of heart. This relates to mortification, or regeneration. And so that no one would doubt that circumcision is a sign of mortification, Moses declares this more plainly elsewhere when he

urges the people of Israel to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts, because they were specially chosen to be God's people out of all the nations of the earth (Genesis 17:10; Deuteronomy 10:16). Just as God, in adopting Abraham's descendants as His people, commands them to be circumcised, so Moses declares that the heart must be circumcised, explaining what the true meaning of this circumcision really is. Then, so that no one would try to accomplish this by his own strength, he teaches that the grace of God is needed. All of this is repeated so often by the prophets that I do not need to pile up many testimonies here, since they present themselves everywhere. We have therefore proved that a spiritual promise was declared to the fathers in circumcision, the same kind of promise that is given in baptism: it represented to them the forgiveness of sins and the putting to death of the flesh (Deuteronomy 30:6). Moreover, just as we have taught that Christ is the foundation of baptism, in whom both of these realities are found, so it is clear that He is also the foundation of circumcision. For He is promised to Abraham, and in Him the blessing of all nations. The sign of circumcision was added to seal this grace.

We can now easily see what is the same and what is different between these two signs. The promises on which the power of the signs rests are identical in both — God's fatherly favor, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. The thing signified is also the same in both: regeneration. The foundation on which the fulfillment of these things rests is the same in both. There is therefore no difference in the inward mystery — and it is on the inward mystery that the whole force and meaning of the sacraments depends. The difference that remains lies only in the outward ceremony, which is the least important part. The chief part hangs on the promise and

the thing signified. We may therefore conclude that whatever applies to circumcision also applies to baptism — apart from the difference in the visible ceremony. The apostle's rule leads us to this comparison directly, commanding us to examine all interpretation of Scripture according to the analogy of faith. Indeed, the truth here almost presents itself without argument. Just as circumcision was the sign by which the Jews were certified that they were chosen to be God's people and household — and by which they in turn professed their dedication to God — and was therefore their first entry into the church: so now through baptism we enter into our profession of God, are counted among His people, and pledge ourselves to His name. From this it is clear and certain that baptism has taken the place of circumcision and now fulfills the same function among us.

Now, if we want to determine whether baptism may rightly be given to infants, is it not foolish — even senseless — to fix one's attention only on the element of water and the outward act while refusing to think about the spiritual mystery? If any thought is given to the spiritual mystery, it will without question become clear that baptism is rightly given to infants — that it is in fact owed to them. For in ancient times the Lord did not admit infants to circumcision without making them partakers of everything that circumcision then signified. Otherwise He would have been deceiving His people with empty signs — a thought too horrible to entertain. He expressly declared that the circumcision of an infant was to serve as a seal of the covenant promise. If that covenant remains unbroken and firm, it belongs no less today to the children of Christians than it once belonged to the infants of the Jews under the old covenant. But if infants share in the thing signified, why should they be

barred from the sign? If they have the reality, why should they be denied the figure? Though the outward sign and the word belong together in a sacrament and cannot be torn apart, if we consider them separately — which do we value more? Since the sign serves the word, it must be ranked under it and given the lesser place. Since the word of baptism extends to infants, why should the sign — which is the addition attached to the word — be withheld from them? This single argument, even if there were no others, is more than enough to silence all who argue the contrary. The objection that circumcision had a specific day assigned to it is nothing more than an evasion. We grant that we are not bound to specific days as the Jews were. But when the Lord — while setting no specific day — clearly shows that He is pleased for infants to be received into His covenant with a solemn rite, what more do we need?

Scripture gives us an even clearer basis for certainty on this point. It is perfectly evident that the covenant the Lord once made with Abraham is in force today among Christians no less than it was among the Jewish people in ancient times — and that this word applies to Christians no less than it applied to the Jews. Unless perhaps we think that Christ's coming has diminished or cut back the grace of His Father — a thought that amounts to abominable blasphemy. Therefore, just as the children of the Jews were called a holy seed — because being made heirs of the same covenant they were set apart from the children of the ungodly — so today the children of Christians are counted holy. This applies even if only one parent is a believer, as the apostle testifies, and such children are distinguished from the unclean offspring of idolaters. Now, after making the covenant with Abraham, the Lord immediately commanded it to be sealed in infants through an out-

ward sacrament. What reason can Christians give for not testifying and sealing the same covenant in their children today? Let no one object that the Lord commanded His covenant to be confirmed through no other sign than circumcision, which was long ago abolished. The answer is ready: for the age of the old covenant, God ordained circumcision to confirm His covenant. But though circumcision has been abolished, the same manner of confirming — which we share with the Jews — remains in place. We must always carefully distinguish what is common to both and what belongs to each separately. The covenant is common to both. The reason for confirming it is common to both. Only the manner of confirming differs — circumcision served that purpose for them, while baptism has taken its place among us. If the testimony by which the Jews were assured of their children's place in salvation were simply removed from us, it would mean that Christ's coming resulted in God's grace being darker and less confirmed by signs than it was before under the law. That cannot be said without extreme slander against Christ, through whom the infinite goodness of the Father has been poured out on the earth more fully and freely than ever before. We must therefore acknowledge that God's grace is at least not more sparingly granted or less clearly testified to us than it was under the shadows of the law.

The Lord Jesus, wishing to show by a sign that He had come to enlarge rather than to restrict God's mercy, gently received the children brought to Him and rebuked the disciples who tried to keep them away — for the disciples were pushing away from Him the very ones to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs, and through whom alone the way into heaven is opened. But someone will ask: what does this have to do with baptism? He is not re-

ported to have baptized them — only to have received them, embraced them, and blessed them. So if we want to follow His example, we should pray for infants, but not baptize them. Let us look more carefully at what Christ did, however. It is not a small thing that Christ commands that infants be brought to Him, and gives the reason: the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. He then confirms His intention through action — embracing them and commending them to the Father with prayer and blessing. If it is right for infants to be brought to Christ, why is it not also right that they be received into baptism — the sign of our communion and fellowship with Christ? If the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, why should the sign be denied to them — through which an entry into the church is opened, so that being admitted they may be numbered among the heirs of the heavenly kingdom? How unjust we would be to drive away those whom Christ calls to Himself. How unjust to strip those whom He adorns with His gifts. How unjust to shut out those whom He willingly receives. Moreover, if we compare what Christ did there with baptism itself — through baptism we testify that infants are included in God's covenant. How much more significant is that than receiving, embracing, laying on of hands, and prayer — through which Christ, being present in person, declared that they belong to Him and are sanctified by Him? The other objections they use to evade this passage reveal only their own ignorance. They argue from Christ's words 'Let the little ones come to me' that these were older children who could already walk on their own. But the evangelists call them *brephe* and *paidia* — Greek words that specifically mean nursing infants. Therefore the word 'come' simply means 'be brought to' or 'have access to.' See what contortions those who have hardened themselves against

the truth are forced to make. Their claim that the kingdom of heaven is not given to infants but only to those who are like them — because it says 'of such' and not 'of them' — is no stronger than the rest. If that were granted, what kind of reasoning would Christ be using when He means to show that infants are not strangers to Him? When He commands that infants be permitted to come to Him, it is plain that actual infants are being spoken of. And lest this seem strange, He immediately adds: 'for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' If infants must necessarily be included in this, then it is clear that 'such' refers to infants themselves and those who are like them.

By now it should be clear to everyone that infant baptism was not invented by human beings — it is supported by such strong testimony from Scripture. Those who object that no infant is explicitly recorded as being baptized by the hands of the apostles make a weak and disingenuous argument. Even if the evangelists do not record it by name, they do not exclude it either. Whenever the baptism of a household is mentioned, who but a madman would argue that no infants were included? If such arguments had any force, women should be forbidden from participating in the Lord's Supper — since we do not read that they were explicitly admitted to it in the time of the apostles. But in such matters we are guided by the rule of faith. When we consider what the institution of the Supper requires, we can judge who ought to have access to it. The same applies to baptism. When we consider the purpose for which baptism was ordained, we can plainly see that it belongs no less to infants than to adults. Therefore infants cannot be deprived of it without openly contradicting the will of its Author. As for the claim spread among simple people that many years passed after

Christ's resurrection before infant baptism was known — this is a blatant lie. There is no ancient writer who does not trace infant baptism back to the time of the apostles.

It remains to briefly show the fruit that comes from this practice — both for believing parents who bring their children to the church to be baptized, and for the infants themselves who receive baptism — so that no one dismisses it as useless or empty. If anyone is tempted to mock infant baptism on this basis, he is in the same breath scorning the commandment of circumcision given by the Lord. Whatever argument they bring against infant baptism can equally be turned against circumcision. This is how the Lord repays the arrogance of those who quickly condemn what they cannot grasp with their own natural reasoning. But God has provided other weapons by which their foolishness can be thoroughly defeated. This holy institution — by which we find our faith strengthened with singular comfort — does not deserve to be called useless. God's sign given to a child is like a seal stamped on the promise given to the godly parent, declaring that it is confirmed: the Lord will be God not only to the parent but also to his descendants (Genesis 17:14), and will show His goodwill and grace not only to the individual but to his offspring for a thousand generations. When God's great kindness shows itself in this way, it gives ample reason to glorify Him and fills believing hearts with singular joy — for they are moved all the more earnestly to love back so gracious a Father, who they see takes care of their descendants for their sake. I will not be moved if someone objects that the promise alone should be enough to confirm the salvation of our children. God chose to do it differently — knowing our weakness, He was graciously pleased to accommodate it. Therefore, those who embrace

God's promise of mercy extended to their children should regard it as their duty to bring them to the church to be marked with the sign of mercy — and through this to strengthen their own confidence, as they see with their own eyes the Lord's covenant inscribed on the bodies of their children. Children also receive benefit from their baptism: being grafted into the body of the church, they are commended to the care of the other members. As they grow to maturity, they are significantly motivated to worship God earnestly — having been received as His children through a solemn sign of adoption before they were old enough to know Him as their Father. Finally, we should be deeply sobered by the judgment God pronounces on those who refuse to mark their child with the sign of the covenant — for such contempt is a rejection and renunciation of the grace offered.

Let us now examine the arguments by which certain violent opponents relentlessly attack this holy institution of God. Finding themselves pressed hard by the parallel between baptism and circumcision, they work to drive a sharp wedge between the two signs — so that one will seem to have nothing in common with the other. They claim that the two signs signify different things, that the covenants are entirely different, and that the naming of the children is not equivalent. In trying to prove the first point, they argue that circumcision was a figure of mortification, not of baptism. This we gladly grant them — it helps our case completely. Our entire argument rests on precisely this: that baptism and circumcision are both signs of mortification. We therefore conclude that baptism has taken the place of circumcision and represents to us the very same thing that circumcision signified to the Jews in ancient times. As for their claim of a different covenant — with what

barbarous boldness they twist and corrupt Scripture, and not just in one place but everywhere, leaving nothing intact. They portray the Jews as so carnal that they are barely more than animals — people whose covenant extends no further than this present life, whose promises are exhausted in material and earthly blessings. If this teaching were accepted, what would remain but that the Jewish nation was fattened with God's benefits for a time — no differently than a herd of swine fattened in a sty — only to perish at last in eternal damnation? For whenever we point to circumcision and the promises attached to it, they answer that circumcision was a literal sign and its promises were carnal.

If circumcision was a literal sign, then the same must be said of baptism — for the apostle in Colossians 2 makes the one no more spiritual than the other. He says that we are circumcised in Christ with a circumcision not made with hands — the putting off of the body of sin that dwelled in our flesh — which he calls the circumcision of Christ. He then immediately adds by way of explanation that we are buried with Christ through baptism. What does he mean by this except that the fulfillment and truth of baptism is the same as the fulfillment and truth of circumcision, because both signify the same thing? He is laboring to show that baptism is to Christians what circumcision had been to the Jews. Since we have already clearly demonstrated that the promises of both signs and the mysteries they represent agree with each other, we need not linger on this point. I will simply remind the faithful that — without any further argument from me — they should consider for themselves whether baptism should be regarded as an earthly and literal sign with no spiritual or heavenly content. But to prevent these opponents from peddling their deceptions to the simple, I

will address one objection by which they try to dress up this shameless falsehood. It is perfectly certain that the principal promises in which God established His covenant with Israel in the old covenant were spiritual in nature and pointed toward eternal life — and that the fathers received them spiritually, as was fitting, so that they could draw from them assurance of the life to come, which they longed for with their whole heart. At the same time, we do not deny that God also testified His goodwill toward them through earthly and material blessings — and we agree that through these, the same promise of spiritual things was confirmed. When God promised everlasting blessedness to His servant Abraham, He added a further promise concerning the possession of the land of Canaan, in order to set before his eyes a clear token of His favor. All earthly promises given to the Jewish nation should be understood in this way: the spiritual promise — as the head to which they are directed — always holds the chief place. Since I have treated these matters more fully in the comparison of the old and new covenants, I pass over them more briefly here.

In the matter of naming the children, our opponents find this difference: in the old covenant, those who descended from Abraham's physical line were called his children, but now those who follow his faith bear that name. Therefore, they argue, the physical infants who through circumcision were grafted into the fellowship of the covenant merely foreshadowed the spiritual infants of the new covenant who are regenerated through God's word to immortal life. There is a small glimmer of truth in this — but these shallow thinkers make a serious error. When they latch onto the first thing that comes to hand, instead of pressing further and weighing many things together, they rest their entire case on a sin-

gle point. Those who stop at surface knowledge like this will inevitably be misled. We do grant that the physical descendants of Abraham for a time held the place of the spiritual offspring who are grafted into him through faith. For we are called his children even though there is no natural kinship between him and us. But if they mean — as they plainly do — that no spiritual blessing was ever promised to the physical descendants of Abraham, they are greatly mistaken. We must therefore aim at a better target, directed by the surest guidance of Scripture. The Lord promised Abraham that he would have a seed through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed, and assured him that He would be God to him and to his descendants. All who receive Christ — the author of blessing — through faith are heirs of this promise, and are therefore called the children of Abraham.

It is true that since Christ's resurrection, the boundaries of God's kingdom have expanded broadly into all nations without distinction — so that, as Christ said, the faithful would be gathered from every quarter to sit down in heavenly glory with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But many ages before this, God had already extended that same great mercy to the Jews. Passing over all other nations, He chose that one nation alone, in which He would confine His grace for a time, calling them His special possession and His purchased people. Circumcision was given as the sign to testify this great generosity — through which the Jews were taught that God is the author of their salvation, and by this knowledge their minds were lifted up to hope for eternal life. For what can the person lack whom God has once taken into His care? When the apostle wants to prove that the Gentiles were children of Abraham equally with the Jews, he argues this way: Abraham was justified

by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Afterward he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith — so that he would be the father of all the faithful, both uncircumcised and circumcised: not of those who merely boast of circumcision, but of those who follow the faith that our father Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised. Do we not see that both groups are given equal standing? For the time determined by God's decree, Abraham was the father of the circumcised. But when the dividing wall was torn down — as the apostle writes elsewhere — by which the Jews had been separated from the Gentiles, the way into God's kingdom was opened to the Gentiles as well. Abraham was made their father too, and without the sign of circumcision, since they have baptism in its place. When the apostle explicitly denies that Abraham is the father of those who are merely of circumcision, this was said to deflate the pride of those who, neglecting godliness, boasted only in ceremonies. In the same way today, the vanity of those who seek nothing in baptism but water can be equally refuted.

But our opponents will cite another passage — from Romans 9 — where the apostle teaches that those who are of the flesh are not Abraham's children, but only those who are counted as his descendants through the promise. He seems to suggest that physical descent from Abraham counts for nothing — which appears to contradict what we have been saying. But we must look more carefully at what the apostle is actually arguing there. His purpose is to show the Jews how God's goodness is not bound to Abraham's physical descendants — that physical descent counts for nothing on its own. To prove this, he brings forward Ishmael and Esau: though they were natural offspring of Abraham according to the

flesh, they were rejected as if they were strangers, while the blessing rested in Isaac and Jacob. From this he draws the conclusion he later states: that salvation depends on God's mercy, which He extends to whom He pleases. The Jews therefore have no reason to rely on their own standing or boast in the covenant — unless they keep the terms of the covenant by obeying God's word. But after bringing the Jews down from false confidence in their lineage, Paul also sees the other side: the covenant God once made with Abraham's descendants cannot be made void. So in Romans 11, he argues that physical descent is not to be stripped of its proper dignity. Through this gracious consideration, he teaches that the Jews are the first and natural heirs of the Gospel — but because through their ingratitude they were set aside as unworthy, the heavenly blessing has not been entirely removed from their nation. For this reason, however stubborn and covenant-breaking they were, he still calls them holy — such honor he gives to the holy lineage with whom God chose to make His holy covenant. He describes us Gentiles, by comparison, as latecomers — even untimely born children of Abraham, adopted rather than natural: like a branch cut off from its native tree and grafted into a foreign stock. So that they would not be deprived of their birthright, the Gospel had to be preached to them first — for they are like the firstborn children in God's household. That honor was to be given them until they refused it when offered and through their own ingratitude caused it to be carried away to the Gentiles. Yet however stubbornly they continue to war against the Gospel, we should not despise them — for the blessing of God still remains among them on account of the promises. The apostle himself testifies that it will never completely depart from there, because God's gifts and calling are irrevocable.

Behold the force of the promise given to Abraham's descendants, and how carefully it must be weighed. So when we distinguish the heirs of the kingdom from illegitimate children and strangers, we have no doubt that God's free election alone governs — and yet we also see that it pleased God in a special way to embrace the seed of Abraham with His mercy, and to seal that mercy with circumcision so it might be more surely testified. The situation in the Christian church is entirely parallel. Just as Paul argues there that the Jews are sanctified through their parents, so he teaches elsewhere that the children of Christians receive the same sanctification through their parents. From this it follows that such children are rightly set apart from the rest, who are otherwise condemned as unclean. Who then can doubt that the conclusion our opponents draw — that the infants circumcised in ancient times only prefigured spiritual infancy that arises from regeneration through God's word — is entirely false? For Paul is not playing a subtle philosophical game when he writes that Christ is a servant of circumcision in order to confirm the promises made to the fathers. He means: since the covenant made with Abraham has reference to his descendants, Christ — in order to fulfill and discharge the promise His Father once made — came with salvation to the Jewish nation. Do you not see how even after Christ's resurrection, Paul judges that the covenant promise is to be fulfilled, not merely as allegory, but literally to the physical descendants of Abraham? To the same end Peter declares to the Jews in Acts 2 that the blessing of the Gospel belongs to them and their descendants by right of the covenant. In the next chapter he calls them children of the covenant — that is, heirs. This also agrees with what the apostle says elsewhere, where he counts circumcision impressed on in-

fants as a testimony of their communion with Christ. But if we accept our opponents' arguments, what becomes of the promise by which the Lord in the second commandment pledges to His servants that He will be favorable to their descendants for a thousand generations? Shall we retreat to allegory? That would be too evasive. Or shall we say that promise is abolished? If so, the law would be destroyed — yet Christ came rather to establish it, insofar as it leads us to life. Let it then be settled beyond dispute: God is so good and generous to His own that for their sake He includes the children they beget among His people.

The distinctions our opponents try to draw between baptism and circumcision are not only laughable and groundless, but also self-contradictory. First they claim that baptism corresponds to the first day of the spiritual battle, while circumcision corresponds to the eighth day when mortification is already complete. But then, forgetting this, they change their argument and call circumcision a figure of the flesh still to be mortified, while calling baptism a burial — into which no one should be placed until they are already dead. What kind of frenzied confusion can leap about between such contradictory positions so easily? In the first argument, baptism comes before circumcision. In the second, it is pushed to a later place. It is nothing new for human minds to be tossed around like this when, instead of holding to God's certain word, they worship whatever they have invented. We say that first distinction is pure fantasy. If they wanted to interpret the eighth day allegorically, their approach does not even work on its own terms. It would be far more fitting — as the ancient writers suggest — to relate the number eight to the resurrection, which happened on the eighth day and on which our newness of life depends. Or it could

refer to the whole span of this present life, throughout which mortification should always be advancing until, when life ends, mortification itself is complete. God may also have had regard for the tenderness of newborns in delaying circumcision to the eighth day, since the wound would have been more dangerous to infants fresh from the womb. As for their stronger claim — that we must be dead first before being buried in baptism — Scripture clearly says the opposite: we are buried into death precisely so that we may die and then press forward in mortification. Equally baseless is their argument that women should not be baptized if baptism is modeled after circumcision. If it is certain that the sanctification of the seed of Israel was testified through circumcision, then it is equally certain that this sign was given to sanctify both males and females. Only male bodies could receive the physical mark by their nature — yet women were in a certain way companions and partners in circumcision through the males. Setting aside all these foolish arguments, let us hold firmly to the parallel between baptism and circumcision, which we have seen agree fully in inward mystery, in promises, in purpose, and in power.

They also think they have a strong argument for barring children from baptism when they claim that infants are not yet old enough to understand the mystery the sacrament signifies. That mystery is spiritual regeneration — which, they say, cannot occur in early infancy. They therefore conclude that infants should be regarded simply as children of Adam until they are old enough for a second birth. But God's word speaks against all of this. If infants are to be left among the children of Adam, they are left in death — for in Adam we can only die. But Christ commands that children be brought to Him. Why? Because He is life. He makes them par-

takers of Himself so that He may give life to them — while these opponents drive them away and consign them to death. If they try to escape by saying that infants do not necessarily perish just because they are counted among Adam's children, Scripture refutes this abundantly. Since Scripture declares that all die in Adam, it follows that there is no hope of life except in Christ. Therefore, to become heirs of life, we must share in Him. Again, Scripture says we are by nature all subject to God's wrath and conceived in sin — to which condemnation permanently clings. We must therefore depart from our own nature before the way into God's kingdom is opened to us. And what could be more plainly stated than that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God? Everything that belongs to us by nature must be done away with — which cannot happen without regeneration — before we can inherit that kingdom. If Christ truly says He is life, we must be grafted into Him to be delivered from the bondage of death. But they ask: how are infants regenerated when they have no knowledge of good or evil? We answer: God's work is not therefore no work at all simply because it exceeds our capacity to comprehend. It is not at all doubtful that infants who are to be saved — and some of that age are certainly saved — are regenerated by the Lord first. For if they bring with them from the womb the corruption naturally planted in them, they must be cleansed of it before being admitted into the kingdom of God, into which nothing defiled or stained may enter. If they are born sinners — as both David and Paul affirm — they either remain under God's wrath, or they must be justified. What more do we need when the Judge himself plainly declares that the entry into heavenly life is open to none except those who are born again? And to silence objectors, He gave the example of John the

Baptist, whom He sanctified in his mother's womb — showing what He is able to do with others as well. Our opponents gain nothing by dismissing this as a one-time event, from which it does not necessarily follow that the Lord commonly does the same with all infants. We are not arguing that He always does this. Our point is only to show that His power is unjustly and enviously confined within the narrow limits they would impose on it — limits He refuses to accept. Their other objection carries no more weight. They claim that the phrase 'from the womb' in Scripture's typical usage simply means 'from childhood.' But it is clear that the angel, when he announced this to Zechariah, meant something different — namely, that the one not yet born would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us not therefore presume to make laws for God. Let Him sanctify whom He pleases, just as He sanctified that child, for His power has not diminished.

Christ was sanctified from His very infancy so that He might sanctify in Himself all His elect, of every age without distinction. For just as He took on our flesh in order to undo the guilt of the disobedience committed in it — performing in it, for us and in our place, perfect obedience — so He was conceived of the Holy Spirit so that, having holiness fully poured into the flesh He had taken on, He might pour that same holiness into us. If we have in Christ the perfect pattern of all the graces God continually shows to His children, then He is also our proof in this matter: the age of infancy is not so unsuited for sanctification as our opponents claim. But whatever one thinks about that, this much is beyond dispute: none of God's elect departs this life without first being made holy and regenerated by God's Spirit. When they object that Scripture recognizes no regeneration except through incorruptible seed —

that is, through the word of God — they wrongly interpret Peter's statement, which refers only to those who had been taught through the preaching of the Gospel. We grant that for such people, the word of the Lord is the only seed of spiritual regeneration. But we deny that this means God cannot regenerate infants through His power — which is for Him as easy and natural as it is incomprehensible and wonderful to us. And we should not be so bold as to deny the Lord the freedom to make Himself known to infants in whatever way He chooses.

But faith, they say, comes by hearing — of which infants have no use yet — and they cannot know God, from whom Moses says they lack all knowledge of good and evil. They fail to notice, however, that when the apostle says hearing is the beginning of faith, he is describing only the ordinary way the Lord chooses to use in calling those who are His. He is not appointing a permanent rule that binds God to one method alone. In fact, God has called many people through an inward means — through the illumination of the Spirit, without any preaching as a mediation — and has given them true knowledge of Himself in that way. As for their claim that it would be absurd to grant any knowledge of God to infants, from whom Moses takes away all understanding of good and evil — I ask them simply: what harm is there in saying that infants receive some portion of that grace whose full richness they will enjoy shortly after? For if the fullness of life consists in the perfect knowledge of God, then when many infants die in their earliest days and pass into eternal life, they are received to behold the most immediate face of God. If the Lord intends to enlighten them with the full brightness of His light, why may He not also — if it so pleases Him — send out some small ray of that light in advance,

especially since He need not strip them of ignorance before taking them out of the prison of the flesh? I do not mean to boldly assert that infants possess the same kind of faith we experience in ourselves, or that they have knowledge of faith exactly as we do — these questions I prefer to leave unsettled. My purpose is only to restrain the foolish arrogance of those who, puffed up with their own words, boldly deny or affirm whatever they please without care.

To press their point further, they add that baptism is a sacrament of repentance and faith — and since neither of these can occur in infancy, we should not admit infants to baptism, lest its meaning be emptied of content. But these objections are thrown against God more than against us. It is abundantly clear from many passages of Scripture that circumcision was also a sign of repentance. Paul also calls it the seal of the righteousness of faith. Let them therefore take their objection to God himself and demand why He commanded it to be marked on the bodies of infants. Since baptism and circumcision stand in the same position, whatever is granted to one must be granted to the other. If they retreat to their usual escape — that physical infants in that age merely figured spiritual infants — that way is already blocked. We say, therefore, that since God granted circumcision — a sacrament of repentance and faith — to infants, it is no absurdity for infants to receive baptism as well. The only alternative is to rage openly against God's own ordinance. But God's wisdom and righteousness shine clearly in all His acts — including this one — and are more than sufficient to rebut the slanders of the wicked. Even though infants at the moment of circumcision did not comprehend in understanding what the sign meant, they were truly circumcised into the

mortification of their corrupt nature — a mortification they would afterward practice as they grew older. Finally, the objection is easily answered by saying that infants are baptized into repentance and faith that is yet to come. Though that repentance and faith are not yet formed in them, the seed of both lies hidden in them by the secret working of the Spirit. This answer at once overthrows all the objections they draw from the meaning of baptism. Among these is the title Paul gives it — calling it the washing of regeneration and renewal. From this they conclude that it should be given only to those capable of grasping what these things mean. But we can answer the same way: circumcision, which betokened regeneration, should on their logic have been given only to those already regenerate. And so they would end up condemning God's own ordinance. Therefore, as we have already noted in several places, whatever arguments are aimed at undermining circumcision have no force when used against baptism. Nor do they escape by saying we should simply accept what rests on God's authority even when the reason is not apparent — while denying that same respect to infant baptism on the grounds that it is not expressly commanded in so many words. They are caught by this double argument: the commandment of God concerning the circumcision of infants was either lawful and beyond question, or it was open to legitimate objection. If there was no incongruity or absurdity in the commandment of circumcision, then there is no absurdity to be found in the practice of infant baptism.

The particular absurdity they try to attach to infant baptism is answered this way: those whom the Lord has chosen, if they receive the sign of regeneration and then depart this life before reaching maturity, He renews through the power of His Spirit — in

a manner incomprehensible to us, and in the way He alone foresees to be fitting. If they live to an age where they can be taught the truth of baptism, they will be all the more spurred on by that teaching to pursue the renewal whose token they learn was given to them from their earliest infancy — so that they might practice it throughout their whole lives. To the same end applies what Paul teaches in two places: that through baptism we are buried together with Christ. He does not mean that the person being baptized must already have been buried with Christ before baptism takes place. He is simply declaring what doctrine is contained in baptism — and he declares it to those who have already been baptized. Only a madman would take that passage to mean that burial with Christ must precede baptism. This is exactly how Moses and the prophets called the people to remember what circumcision meant — even though they had received that mark as infants. Paul's statement in Galatians has the same force: when they were baptized, they put on Christ — meaning they should from that point forward live to Christ, because they had not lived that way before. While it is true that in the case of older converts the reception of the sign should follow the understanding of the mystery, infants must be evaluated differently — as will be shown shortly. Nor should we judge differently Peter's statement, which they think is a stronghold for their position: that baptism is not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience before God, through the resurrection of Christ. They conclude from this that infant baptism is a mere empty show — since this inner reality cannot be present in infants. But they repeatedly make the same error: insisting that the inner reality must always precede the sign in time. The truth of circumcision also consisted in this pledge of a good conscience. If

that were required to come first, God would never have commanded infants to be circumcised. But since He declared that the pledge of a good conscience is contained within the truth of circumcision, and yet simultaneously commanded infants to be circumcised, He thereby made clear that circumcision is applied in reference to future fulfillment. Therefore no more immediate fulfillment needs to be required in infant baptism than this: that it confirm and establish the covenant the Lord has made with them. The rest of what the sacrament signifies will follow in due time, as God himself foresees.

By now I think no one can fail to see that all these arguments of theirs are simply misreadings of Scripture. As for the remaining objections of a similar kind, we will pass through them briefly. They object that baptism is given for the forgiveness of sins — but this actually supports our position. Since we are born sinners, we need forgiveness and pardon from our very birth. Since the Lord does not exclude infants from the hope of mercy, but rather assures it to them, why should we withhold from them the sign that is far less than the thing itself? So we turn their argument back on them: infants receive forgiveness of sins — therefore the sign should not be taken from them. They also cite Ephesians, where Paul says the Lord cleanses the church through the washing of water in the word of life. Nothing could be cited more suitable for overturning their error, since it naturally leads to a straightforward proof of our position. If the Lord wills that the cleansing by which He purifies His church be testified through baptism, it does not seem right that this testimony should be withheld from infants — who are rightly counted as part of the church, since they are called heirs of the heavenly kingdom. Paul is speaking of the whole

church when he says it was cleansed through the washing of water. Likewise, from what he says elsewhere — that through baptism we are grafted into the body of Christ — we conclude that infants, whom he counts among Christ's members, ought to be baptized, so they are not cut off from His body. Behold with what forceful arguments they assault our position — and how easily those arguments turn against them.

They then appeal to apostolic practice: in the time of the apostles, no one is found to have been admitted to baptism who had not first professed faith and repentance. When those who intended to repent asked Peter what they should do, he told them first to repent and then to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Similarly, when the Ethiopian official asked Philip to baptize him, Philip answered that he could be baptized if he believed with his whole heart. From this they conclude that baptism should not be given to anyone unless faith and repentance come first. But if we grant this reasoning, the first passage — where faith is not mentioned — would prove that repentance alone suffices. And the second — where repentance is not required — would prove that faith alone is enough. I suspect they will answer that the two passages must be read together to supplement each other. I say exactly the same: other passages must be brought alongside these — passages that help resolve the question — since many statements in Scripture can only be properly understood in light of their context. The present case is a perfect example. Peter and Philip were speaking to people of an age sufficient for repentance and faith. We fully agree that such people should not be baptized until a conversion and faith have been recognized — as far as this can be judged by human assessment. But infants belong in an entirely different cat-

egory — and this is more than clear. In ancient times, if someone joined the fellowship of Israel's religion, he first had to be taught the Lord's covenant and instructed in the law before receiving circumcision — because he was born outside the people of Israel, with whom the covenant that circumcision sealed had been made.

Likewise, when the Lord adopted Abraham as His own, He did not begin with circumcision while concealing what the sign meant. He first declared what covenant He intended to make with him, and only after Abraham had believed the promise did He make him a partaker of the sacrament. Why does the sacrament follow faith in Abraham's case, but come before understanding in Isaac his son? Because it is fitting that someone received into the fellowship of the covenant in adulthood — having been a stranger to it until then — should first learn its terms. But an infant born to him needed no such instruction, since by right of inheritance, according to the promise, the child is included in the covenant from his mother's womb. Or, to put it more plainly: if the children of believers are partakers of the covenant without the aid of understanding, there is no reason to bar them from the sign merely because they cannot formally swear to the covenant's terms. This is the very reason why God in certain places declares that the children born of the Israelites are born to Him. He counts as His children the children of those to whose descendants He has promised to be a Father. But one born of ungodly, unbelieving parents is considered a stranger to the fellowship of the covenant — until united to God through faith. It is no surprise, therefore, that such a person is not a partaker of the sign, for in him its meaning would be hollow and false. Paul writes to the same effect: that the Gentiles, as long as they were sunk in idolatry, were outside the covenant. With this

brief summary, the whole matter is, I think, made clear: those who embrace faith in Christ as adults, having until then been strangers to the covenant, should not be marked with baptism until faith and repentance open the way for them into the fellowship of the covenant. But infants born to Christians, since they are received by God into the inheritance of the covenant as soon as they are born, should likewise be received into baptism. To this end applies what the evangelist says — that those who confessed their sins were baptized by John. This we also consider the right practice today. If a Muslim were to present himself for baptism, he should not be rashly baptized — not until after a confession by which he can satisfy the church.

They also cite Christ's words from John 3, thinking that this passage requires present regeneration as a prerequisite for baptism: 'Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' Look, they say — the Lord himself calls baptism regeneration. How then can we admit to baptism those who are clearly unable to receive regeneration, which baptism requires? Their first mistake is assuming that baptism is even being referenced in this passage simply because water is mentioned. After Christ had declared to Nicodemus the corruption of human nature and told him that men must be born anew, Nicodemus imagined a physical second birth. Christ then explained how God regenerates us — by water and the Spirit — as if to say: by the Spirit, who cleanses and refreshes believing souls the way water does the body. I therefore take 'water and the Spirit' as simply referring to the Spirit — the Spirit as water. This is not an unusual form of expression. It fully agrees with the statement in Matthew 3: 'He who comes after me is the one who baptizes with

the Holy Spirit and fire.' Just as baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire means giving the Holy Spirit, who functions and acts as fire — so being born again of water and the Spirit means nothing other than receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, who does in the soul what water does in the body. I know others interpret this differently, but I am convinced this is the natural meaning — because Christ's only purpose there is to teach that all who aspire to the heavenly kingdom must put off their own nature. If we wished to argue as cleverly as they do, we could easily turn the passage against them: granting their interpretation, we could infer that baptism comes before faith and repentance — since in Christ's words 'water' comes before 'Spirit.' It is certain that the Spirit here refers to spiritual gifts. If those come after baptism, I have what I need. But setting aside clever arguments, we must hold to the plain meaning I have given: no one can enter the kingdom of God until renewed by the living water — that is, by the Spirit.

From all this it is also clear that their invented doctrine — which condemns all the unbaptized to eternal death — deserves to be rejected outright. Let us take their position and imagine that baptism is administered only to those of age. What will they say becomes of a child who has been properly and well instructed in godliness, but who happens to die suddenly before the appointed day of baptism, when no one expected it? The Lord's promise is clear: whoever believes in the Son will not see death, will not come into judgment, but has already passed from death into life. And nowhere does Scripture record that God ever condemned someone simply because they had not yet been baptized. I would not have this taken to mean that baptism may simply be dismissed — for such contempt, I affirm, defiles the Lord's covenant, and I cannot

excuse it. My point only is that baptism is not so absolutely necessary that someone must immediately be counted as lost simply because they were unable to receive it. But if we adopt their invented position, we would be forced to condemn without exception all those kept from baptism by any circumstance — however great the faith by which they possess Christ himself. Furthermore, they condemn all infants to eternal death by denying them baptism, which they themselves claim is necessary for salvation. Let them then explain how this agrees with Christ's own words, by which the kingdom of heaven is declared to belong to that age. But even granting them everything their interpretation of that passage claims, they will gain nothing from it — not unless they first overthrow the doctrine we have already established regarding the regeneration of infants.

But they boast that their strongest argument comes from the very institution of baptism in the final chapter of Matthew — where Christ, sending His apostles to all nations, commands them first to teach and then to baptize. They add to this the statement from the end of Mark: 'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.' 'What more do we need?' they ask. 'The Lord's own words plainly state that teaching must come before baptism, and that faith is assigned the first place and baptism the second.' They also note that the Lord himself set this example by waiting until His thirtieth year to be baptized. But here, good Lord — how many ways do they entangle themselves and expose their own ignorance? They make a childish mistake in treating these passages as the original institution of baptism, when Christ had commissioned His apostles to administer baptism from the very beginning of His preaching ministry. There is therefore no reason to claim that the

law and rule of baptism must be derived from these passages as if they contained its first establishment. But even setting that aside and granting their assumption, how strong is their argument? To be honest, if I wanted to play word games, there is not a small loophole but a wide-open field in which to escape their argument. They press so hard on the order of words — arguing that because it says 'go, preach and baptize,' and 'whoever believes and is baptized,' therefore teaching must precede baptism and faith must precede baptism — that we could reply by the same logic: baptism must precede teaching the commandments, since the text says 'baptize, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.' We noted the same problem in the passage just cited about regeneration through water and the Spirit. If that passage is read the way they demand, then in that text baptism must come before spiritual regeneration — since it is named first. For Christ says we must be born again 'of water and the Spirit,' not 'of the Spirit and water.'

Now their seemingly invincible argument has been somewhat shaken. But since truth defends itself best through simplicity, I will not slip away with such lightweight counterarguments — let me give them a full reply. Christ in this passage gives the primary command concerning the preaching of the Gospel, to which He adds the ministry of baptism as an attached consequence. He speaks of baptism only as it falls under the scope of the teaching office. Christ sends the apostles to proclaim the Gospel to all nations — gathering from every place, by the message of salvation, those who were previously lost and drawing them into His kingdom. But who specifically? What kind of people? It is certain that only those capable of receiving instruction are in view. He then

adds that such people, once taught, should be baptized — attaching the promise that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Is there even one syllable about infants in all of that? What kind of reasoning is it, then, to say: adults must first be taught and believe before being baptized — therefore it is unlawful to baptize infants? However hard they press this passage, they can prove nothing from it except that the Gospel must be preached to those capable of hearing it before they are baptized — since that is who the passage is about. Let them try, if they can, to derive from that a prohibition of infant baptism.

But so that even those who are spiritually blind can feel their way to seeing this deception, I will illustrate it with a clear comparison. If someone argued that food should be withheld from infants on the grounds that the apostle allows none to eat who do not work (2 Thessalonians 3:10), would he not deserve everyone's contempt? Why? Because he takes without distinction what was said about one kind and one certain age of people and applies it to all people. Their handling of this present case is no better. What everyone can see applies only to one age group, they drag into application to infants — so that a rule made only for those of more mature years would govern infants as well. As for Christ's own example — it does nothing to support them. He was not baptized until He was thirty years old — that is true. But the reason is ready to be given: He intended by His preaching to lay a solid foundation for baptism, or rather to establish the foundation already laid by John. When He purposed through His teaching to institute baptism, He sanctified it with His own body to give His institution greater authority — and He did so at precisely the right moment, when He began His public ministry. The only conclusion to be drawn is that

baptism took its origin and beginning from the preaching of the Gospel. If they want to make the thirtieth year the rule, why don't they keep it — instead of receiving everyone into baptism as soon as they judge the person sufficiently advanced? Indeed, Servetus — one of their own teachers — who stubbornly insisted on this age requirement, began boasting that he was a prophet when he was barely twenty-one years old. As if someone who claims the role of teacher in the church before being a member of it could be tolerated.

Finally they object that there is no more reason to give baptism to infants than to give them the Lord's Supper — which is not given to them. As if Scripture did not everywhere express a clear difference between the two. Admitting children to the Supper was indeed done in the ancient church, as both Cyprian and Augustine show — but that practice rightly fell out of use. For if we consider the nature and purpose of baptism, it is truly the entry into the church — a form of enrollment by which we are received into God's people — and a sign of our spiritual regeneration by which we are born again as children of God. The Supper, by contrast, is given to those who are more mature, who have passed beyond tender infancy and are now able to take solid food. This difference is clearly shown in Scripture. Regarding baptism, the Lord makes no distinction of ages. Regarding the Supper, however, He does not give it to all indiscriminately — only to those who are able to discern the body and blood of the Lord, to examine their own conscience, to proclaim the Lord's death, and to weigh its significance. Could we want anything plainer than what the apostle teaches when he urges that each person examine and test himself, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Corinthians 11:28)? Self-exam-

ination must come first — something that cannot be expected of infants. Furthermore, whoever eats unworthily eats and drinks judgment upon himself, not discerning the Lord's body. If only those who can rightly discern the holiness of the Lord's body may partake worthily, why would we give our tender children poison instead of nourishing food? What is the Lord's command — 'do this in remembrance of Me'? What is the apostle's corresponding statement — 'as often as you eat this bread, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes'? What remembrance of this can we require from infants who have no understanding of it? What proclaiming of Christ's cross — the power and benefit of which they cannot yet grasp? None of these requirements apply to baptism. Therefore there is a great difference between these two signs — and we see the same distinction in the parallel signs of the old covenant. Circumcision, which corresponds to our baptism, was given to infants. But the Passover — which the Supper has now replaced — did not receive all comers without distinction. It was rightly celebrated only by those old enough to inquire into its meaning. If these men retained even a grain of sound judgment, how could they be blind to something so plain?

I regret burdening readers with so many trivial objections. Yet it is worth the effort to briefly dispose of the arguments that Servetus — no minor Anabaptist, but the great glory of their company — thought were decisive when he prepared himself for debate. He claims that Christ's signs, being perfect, require those who are perfect or capable of grasping perfection. The answer is easy: the perfection of baptism extends throughout life unto death, and it is wrong to confine it to a single moment in time. I add further that it is foolish to demand perfection in a person at the outset

— since baptism leads us toward perfection throughout our whole lives by gradual steps. He objects that Christ's signs were ordained for remembrance, so that each person would remember being buried with Christ. I answer that what he invented here needs no refutation. What he applies to baptism, Paul's own words show belongs specifically to the Lord's Supper — where each person is to examine himself. No such requirement appears anywhere in connection with baptism. From this we conclude that those who are too young to be capable of self-examination are rightly baptized. His third objection is that all who do not believe in the Son of God remain in death and under God's wrath — and therefore that infants who cannot believe lie in their condemnation. I answer that Christ there is not speaking of the general guilt in which all of Adam's descendants are wrapped, but is threatening those who proudly and stubbornly despise and reject the Gospel's offered grace. This has nothing to do with infants. I also set a counter-argument against him: whoever Christ blesses is freed from Adam's curse and God's wrath. Since it is known that He blesses infants, it follows that they are freed from death. He then falsely cites a statement found nowhere in Scripture — that whoever is born of the Spirit hears the voice of the Spirit. Even if we granted this were written, it would prove nothing more than that the faithful are formed for obedience as the Spirit works in them. But what is said of a certain group cannot be applied indiscriminately to all. His fourth objection is that since the natural comes first, we must wait for the right time before administering the spiritual baptism. I grant that all of Adam's descendants, born of the flesh, carry their own condemnation from the womb — but I deny that this prevents God from immediately bringing a remedy. Servetus cannot prove

that God has appointed a span of years that must pass before spiritual newness of life can begin. As Paul testifies, those born of believers are by nature condemned — yet by supernatural grace they are saved. He then introduces an allegory: David, when he entered the tower of Zion, took strong soldiers with him, not blind or lame men. But what if I set against it the parable in which God calls the blind and lame to the heavenly banquet? How will Servetus get out of that? I also ask whether the lame and maimed were not once soldiers with David in the first place. But it is pointless to linger on an argument that readers will find — upon examining the scriptural history — to be built entirely on falsehood. He follows with another allegory: the apostles were fishers of men, not of little children. But I ask what Christ's own statement means — that the Gospel net gathers all kinds of fish. Since I dislike playing with allegories, I will simply answer: when the teaching office was entrusted to the apostles, they were not forbidden from baptizing infants. And I would like to know why, when the evangelist uses the word *anthropous* — which means all human beings without exception — our opponents deny that infants are human beings. His seventh argument is that since spiritual things must match spiritual realities, infants who are not spiritual are not fit for baptism. But it is plain how wrongly he handles Paul's text. Paul there is dealing with doctrine: when the Corinthians were too proud of their own cleverness, Paul rebuked their sluggishness — showing they still needed instruction in the first principles of heavenly wisdom. Who can conclude from this that baptism should be denied to infants whom God, from their very birth, makes holy to Himself through free adoption? When Servetus says they must be fed with spiritual food if they are new people, the answer is simple: through baptism

they are admitted into Christ's flock, and the sign of adoption is sufficient for them until they grow old enough to take solid food. The time of examination that God expressly requires for the Lord's Supper must then be waited for. He then objects that Christ calls all His people to the holy Supper. But it is clear enough that He admits only those already prepared to commemorate His death. It follows that infants, whom He chose to embrace, occupy a distinct place of their own until they grow older — yet they are not strangers. The thief converted on the cross did not cease to be a brother to the godly even though he never came to the Supper. Servetus then adds that no one becomes our brother except through the Spirit of adoption, given only through the hearing of faith. I answer that he falls again into the same fallacious argument — wrongly applying to infants what was said only of adults. Paul there is describing God's ordinary manner of calling: He stirs up faithful teachers whose ministry He uses to reach His elect. Who dares from this to impose a law on God, forbidding Him from grafting infants into Christ by some other hidden way? His objection that Cornelius was baptized after he received the Holy Spirit shows how wrongly a general rule is drawn from one example — since in the case of the Ethiopian official and the Samaritans, the Lord kept the opposite order, with baptism preceding the gifts of the Spirit. His fifteenth argument is more than foolish. He says we are made gods through regeneration, and that those are gods to whom the word of God is spoken — which does not apply to infant children. His invention of a kind of deity in the faithful is one of his delusions, which does not belong to the present discussion. But to twist the psalm to such a contrary meaning is shamelessly desperate. Christ's point is that kings and magistrates are called gods by

the prophet because they hold an office appointed by God. But Servetus takes what was directed to certain men concerning the specific duty of governance and applies it to the preaching of the Gospel — all in order to banish infants from the church. He then objects that infants cannot be counted as new people because they are not begotten by the word. I repeat once more what I have said many times: doctrine is the incorruptible seed of regeneration for those capable of receiving it. But when a person's age does not yet allow learning, God proceeds in His own degrees of regenerating. He then returns to allegories: under the law, a sheep or goat was not offered in sacrifice the moment it left the womb. If I were inclined to match allegory for allegory, I could just as easily point out that all firstborn things were consecrated to God as soon as they had opened the womb, and that a lamb could be killed at a year's age. From this it would follow that one need not wait for mature strength — that God actually chooses young and tender offspring for sacrifice. He then claims that no one can come to Christ except those prepared by John's ministry. As if John's office was not temporary and for a specific time. But setting that aside: the children whom Christ embraced and blessed had received no such preparation from John. So let Servetus abandon that false premise. Finally, he calls upon Hermes Trismegistus and the Sibyls as authorities to prove that sacred washings belong only to those of mature age. What an honorable view of Christ's baptism — reducing it to the level of Gentile ceremonies so that it can only be administered in ways that Hermes Trismegistus would approve. We hold the authority of God to be far higher — the God who was pleased to make infants holy to Himself and to receive them with the sacred sign, the full meaning of which they did not yet understand by rea-

son of age. We do not consider it lawful to borrow anything from Gentile purification rites that might alter in our baptism the eternal and inviolable law of God established through circumcision. His final argument is this: if it is lawful to baptize infants without understanding, then baptism could be administered playfully by children during their games. Let him take that quarrel to God — by whose command circumcision was given to infants before they attained understanding. Was that therefore a plaything, or subject to children's games, so that God's holy ordinance could be overturned? It is no wonder that such reprobate spirits, as if seized by a frenzy, pile up the grossest absurdities in defense of their errors — for God justly punishes their pride and stubbornness with such dizziness. I trust I have now made clear how feeble the arguments are with which Servetus has tried to help his unfortunate Anabaptist companions.

By now it should be clear to any sober mind how rashly those who stir up conflict over infant baptism disturb the church of Christ. But it is worth considering what Satan is aiming at through this clever strategy: to rob us of the singular fruit of confidence and spiritual joy that baptism is meant to produce, and to diminish as much as possible the glory of God's goodness. How sweet it is for godly hearts to be assured — not only by word, but by something seen with their own eyes — that they enjoy such favor with their heavenly Father that He even cares for their descendants. Here we see God taking upon Himself the role of the most caring Father of a household — who, even after our death, does not set aside His concern for us, but provides and watches over our children. Should we not, following David's example, leap up with our whole hearts in thanksgiving — so that by this display of His good-

ness, His name may be hallowed? This is precisely what Satan is after in attacking infant baptism with such force: to strip away this testimony of God's grace, so that the promise so clearly set before our eyes may gradually fade away. From this would follow not only wicked ingratitude toward God's mercy, but also a kind of carelessness in raising our children in godliness. We are not slightly spurred on to bring them up in earnest fear of God and in keeping His law when we consider that even from their very birth, He receives and acknowledges them as His own children. Therefore, unless we choose to enviously obscure God's generosity, let us offer our children to Him — to the One who gives them a place among the members of His household, that is, the members of the church.

¶THE .XVII. CHAPITER. ¶OF THE HOLY SUPPER OF CHRIST: AND WHAT IF AUAYLETH VS.



After God has once received us into His family — not merely as servants, but as children — He takes upon Himself the role of a most good and caring Father, nourishing us throughout the whole course of our lives. And not content with this alone, it pleased Him to confirm this continual generosity through a pledge. For this purpose He has given His church another sacrament through the hand of His only-begotten Son: a spiritual banquet, in which Christ testifies that He is the living bread by which our souls are fed unto true and blessed immortality. Since the knowledge of so great a mystery is vitally necessary — and since Satan, to rob the church of this inestimable treasure, has long spread confusion and darkness to obscure its light, and has stirred up conflicts to drive simple minds away from tasting this holy food, and has done the same in our own time — I will briefly summarize the matter for those who are newer to it, and then untangle the knots with which Satan has worked to ensnare the world. Bread and wine are signs that represent to us the invisible nourishment we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ. As in baptism

God regenerates us and grafts us into the fellowship of His church, adopting us as His own — so in the Lord's Supper He fulfills the role of the careful head of a household, continually providing us food, sustaining and preserving us in the life into which He has begotten us through His word. The only food of our soul is Christ, and therefore the heavenly Father calls us to Him — so that, being refreshed through sharing together in Him, we may continually draw living strength until we attain to heavenly immortality. Since this mystery of Christ's hidden union with the godly is by nature beyond human comprehension, God gives us its figure and image in visible signs suited to our limited capacity. He makes it as certain to us as something seen with our own eyes — confirming it through pledges and tokens — because this familiar analogy penetrates even the slowest minds: souls are fed by Christ just as bread and wine sustain bodily life. So we understand the purpose of this mystical blessing: to assure us that the body of the Lord was once offered for us, so that now we eat it, and in eating it, we feel in ourselves the effective power of that one sacrifice. His blood was once shed for us, and it remains our continual drink. This is what the words of promise attached to the sacrament declare: 'Take, this is my body, which is given for you.' We are commanded to take and eat the body that was once offered for our salvation — so that when we see ourselves as partakers of it, we may confidently know that the life-giving power of His death is at work in us. He also calls the cup 'the covenant in His blood' — for in a certain sense it renews, or rather continues, the covenant He once established with His blood, as often as He holds out to us that holy blood to be received, confirming our faith by it.

Godly souls may gather great fruit of assurance and sweetness from this sacrament — for it testifies that we are knit together into one body with Christ, so that whatever is His we may call our own. From this it follows that we may boldly claim that eternal life is ours, of which He is the heir — and that the kingdom of heaven, which He has now entered, can no more be taken from us than from Him. It follows as well that we can no longer be condemned for our sins, from the guilt of which He has acquitted us by willing them to be charged to Himself as if they were His own. This is the wonderful exchange that in His immeasurable generosity He has made with us: becoming with us the Son of Man, He has made us with Him the sons of God. By coming down to earth, He has opened for us the way to heaven. By taking on our mortality, He has given us His immortality. By taking on our weakness, He has strengthened us with His power. By taking our poverty to Himself, He has conveyed His riches to us. By taking the weight of our unrighteousness — under which we were crushed — He has clothed us with His righteousness.

We have such complete testimony of all these things in this sacrament that we must hold with certainty that Christ is truly given to us — as surely as if He were placed before our eyes and held in our hands. For His word cannot lie to us or deceive us: 'Take, eat, drink. This is my body which is given for you. This is my blood, which is shed for the forgiveness of sins.' When He commands us to take, He signifies that it is ours. When He commands us to eat, He signifies that it is made one substance with us. When He says of the body that it was given for us, and of the blood that it was shed for us, He teaches that both belong not so much to Him as to us — for He took and laid down both not for His own benefit,

but for our salvation. It is especially important to note that the chief substance of the sacrament — and in a sense the whole of it — rests on these words: 'which is given for you,' 'which is shed for you.' For it would not greatly benefit us that the body and blood of the Lord are now distributed if they had not once been given up for our redemption and salvation. They are therefore represented under bread and wine so that we may understand they are not only ours, but also appointed for the nourishment of our spiritual life. This is what we said earlier: from the bodily things shown in the sacrament, we are guided by a kind of correspondence to spiritual realities. So when bread is given to us as a sign of Christ's body, we should immediately grasp the parallel: just as bread nourishes, sustains, and maintains the life of our body, so Christ's body is the only food that revives and gives life to our soul. When we see wine set forth as a sign of His blood, we should call to mind what wine does for the body — that these same benefits come to us spiritually through Christ's blood: to cherish, refresh, strengthen, and gladden. For if we properly consider what the giving of His holy body and the shedding of His holy blood have accomplished for us, we will plainly see that what is said about bread and wine, through this correspondence, fits very well with what Christ is to us when He is communicated to us.

Therefore, the chief purpose of the sacrament is not simply to hand Christ's body to us as a physical delivery, but rather this: to seal and confirm the promise by which He declares that His flesh is truly food and His blood is truly drink — by which we are fed unto eternal life — and by which He affirms that He is the bread of life, of which whoever eats will live forever. And in confirming this promise, to direct us to the cross of Christ, where that promise was

truly fulfilled in every respect. For we do not eat Christ rightly and with profit except as the crucified Christ — when with a living sense we grasp the effectiveness of His death. When He called Himself the bread of life, He did not borrow that name from the sacrament, as some wrongly interpret it. He was the bread of life because the Father gave Him to us as such, and He fulfilled this in reality: by sharing our human mortality, He made us partakers of His divine immortality; by offering Himself as a sacrifice, He took our curse upon Himself so that He might fill us with blessing; by His death, He destroyed and swallowed up death; by His resurrection, He raised up to glory and incorruption the corruptible flesh He had taken on.

What remains is that all of this be applied to us personally. This happens through the Gospel — and more clearly through the holy Supper — where Christ offers Himself to us with all His blessings, and we receive Him by faith. The sacrament does not cause Christ to begin being the bread of life for the first time. Rather, by calling to remembrance that He was made the bread of life — which we continually eat — and by giving us a taste and experience of that bread, it causes us to feel the power of it. For it promises us that whatever Christ did and suffered was done to give life to us. And that this gift of life is eternal — so that we may be nourished, sustained, and preserved in life without end. For just as Christ would not have been the bread of life had He not been born and died and risen again for us — so He would not remain the bread of life now if the effectiveness and fruit of His birth, death, and resurrection were not an everlasting and immortal thing. Christ has expressed all this very clearly: 'The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' By these words He signi-

fies without question that His body should be for us as bread for the spiritual life of the soul — because it was given over to death for our salvation. And it is given to us to eat when He makes us partakers of it through faith. Once He gave it to become bread, when He gave Himself to be crucified for the redemption of the world. He gives it daily when through the word of the Gospel He offers it to us to receive — as the crucified one — and where He seals that offering with the holy mystery of the Supper. And He inwardly fulfills what He outwardly signifies. In all of this we must beware of two errors: on one hand, so undervaluing the signs that we seem to tear them away from the mysteries to which they are in a sense joined; on the other hand, so exalting the signs that we end up obscuring the mysteries themselves. That Christ is the bread of life by which the faithful are nourished unto eternal salvation — no one who has any religion will deny this. But what is not agreed upon by everyone is the manner of partaking in Him. There are those who define eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood as simply believing in Christ. But I think Christ intended something more definite and deeper in that remarkable discourse where He commends to us the eating of His flesh — namely, that we are truly made alive through genuine participation in Him. He expressed this through the language of eating and drinking so that no one would think the life we receive from Him comes through bare intellectual knowledge alone. For just as it is not the sight but the eating of bread that nourishes the body — so it is necessary for the soul to be truly and fully made a partaker of Christ, so that by His power it may be given life into a spiritual life. At the same time, we confess that there is no other eating but eating by faith, nor can any other be imagined. But here is the difference between my posi-

tion and theirs: for them, to eat is simply to believe. I say that Christ's flesh is eaten in the act of believing — because by faith He is made ours — and I say that eating is the fruit and effect of faith. Or, to put it more plainly: for them, eating is faith itself. I think eating rather follows from faith. In words the difference may seem small, but in substance it is not small. For though the apostle teaches that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, no one interprets this dwelling as being faith itself. Everyone understands that something is being expressed here — a remarkable effect of faith, by which the faithful come to have Christ dwelling in them. In the same way, when the Lord called Himself the bread of life, He meant not only to teach that salvation is stored up for us in faith in His death and resurrection — but also that through genuine participation in Him, His life passes into us and becomes ours, just as bread, when taken as food, imparts vitality to the body.

Nor did Augustine — whom they cite as their ally — mean anything different when he wrote that we eat by believing, than to show that this eating is by faith, not by the mouth. This I do not deny — but I add that by faith we embrace Christ not as someone standing at a distance, but as one who makes Himself one with us, so that He may be our head and we His members. I do not entirely reject that way of speaking. I only say it is not a complete account, if the intention is to define what it means to eat Christ's flesh. Augustine himself frequently used this kind of language — as when he says in book three of *On Christian Doctrine*: 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man' — this is a figure teaching that we must participate in the Lord's passion and must sweetly and profitably keep in remembrance that His flesh was crucified and wounded for us. Again, when he says that the three thousand converted at

Peter's sermon drank Christ's blood by believing — blood that they had shed by their own cruel actions. But in many other places Augustine honorably sets out this benefit of faith: that through it our souls are refreshed by communion with Christ's flesh no less than our bodies are nourished by the bread we eat. Chrysostom likewise writes in one place that Christ makes us His body not only through faith but also in reality. He does not mean that we obtain this benefit from any source other than faith — only that when faith is named, no one should conceive a bare abstraction. As for those who hold that the Supper is nothing more than a token of outward profession — I pass over them here, since I believe I refuted their error sufficiently when treating the sacraments generally. Let readers simply note this: when the cup is called 'the covenant in His blood,' a promise is expressed that has power to confirm faith. From this it follows that unless we look to God and embrace what He offers, we are not rightly using the holy Supper.

I am also not satisfied with those who — while acknowledging that we have some communion with Christ — when they try to describe it, make us partakers only of the Spirit, with no mention of flesh and blood. As if all those statements meant nothing: that His flesh is truly food, that His blood is truly drink, that no one has life except the one who eats that flesh and drinks that blood — and all the other statements that point in the same direction. Since it is certain that the full communion with Christ extends beyond what they describe — their account being too narrowly confined — I will now try to summarize its full scope before addressing the opposite error of excess. I will have a more extended discussion with those who go to excess — who, according to their own crude understanding, fashion an absurd and carnal manner of eating and drinking,

and in doing so strip Christ of His flesh and transform Him into a phantom. Yet I see that I cannot sufficiently grasp so great a mystery even with my own mind — and I freely confess this, so that no one will measure its greatness by the small capacity of my limited understanding. Rather, I urge readers not to confine their minds within these narrow limits, but to strive to rise far higher than I am able to lead them. Even I, whenever I speak of this, feel after saying everything I can that I have said very little compared to the dignity of the subject. And though the mind can grasp more than the tongue can express, even the mind is overcome and overwhelmed by the greatness of the thing. In the end, nothing remains but to break forth in wonder at a mystery that neither the mind can adequately think nor the tongue declare. Nevertheless, in whatever way I am able, I will set forth the substance of my meaning — which I have no doubt is true, and which I trust godly hearts will not reject.

Scripture teaches us first that Christ was from the beginning the life-giving Word of the Father — the fountain and origin of life, from whom all things ever received their existence and life. John therefore calls Him at times the Word of life, and at other times writes that life was in Him — meaning that even then, flowing into all creation, He poured into it the power of breath and life. Yet the same John adds that this life was not openly revealed until the Son of God took on our flesh, giving Himself to be seen with eyes and touched with hands. For though He spread His power through creation even before, man had been estranged from God through sin and had lost the communion of life. Death loomed on every side. For man to recover hope of immortality, it was necessary that he be received into communion with that Word. For what confidence

can you draw from hearing that the Word of God — from whom you are completely separated — holds within itself the fullness of life, when in yourself and all around you nothing presents itself but death? But since that fountain of life began to dwell in our flesh, it is no longer hidden far from us — it now delivers itself to us to be partaken of. Indeed, it makes the very flesh in which it dwells capable of bringing life to us, so that through partaking of it we are nourished unto immortality. 'I am the bread of life, who came down from heaven. And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' In these words He teaches not only that He is life as the eternal Word of God who came down to us from heaven — but also that in coming down, He poured that same power of life into the flesh He put on, so that from there the communication of life might flow out to us. From this follows what comes next: that His flesh is truly food and His blood is truly drink, on which the faithful are sustained unto eternal life. In this lies a singular comfort for the godly: they now find life within their own flesh. They need not travel far to reach it — it lays itself open before them and offers itself to them. They need only open the embrace of their heart to receive it as it draws near, and they will have it.

Now, though Christ's flesh does not in itself have such great power — for in its original state it was subject to mortality, and even now, endowed with immortality, it does not live by its own power — it is rightly called life-giving, because it is filled with the fullness of life and pours that life into us. This is the sense in which I interpret, with Cyril, Christ's statement: 'As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself.' There Christ is speaking not of what He possessed with the Father

from the beginning, but of the gifts with which He was endowed in the very flesh in which He appeared. He is therefore declaring that the fullness of life dwells also in His humanity — so that whoever partakes of His flesh and blood thereby also partakes of life. We can illustrate this with a familiar comparison. Just as water from a spring is sometimes drunk directly, sometimes drawn, sometimes channeled through ditches to water fields — yet the water does not overflow by its own natural abundance into all these uses, but is continually supplied by the spring itself, which yields a never-ending store — so Christ's flesh is like a rich and inexhaustible fountain, pouring into us the life that springs from the Godhead itself into that flesh. Who then does not see that communion with the flesh and blood of Christ is necessary for all who aspire to heavenly life? This is the point of the apostle's statement that the church is the body of Christ and His fullness, and that He is the head from whom the whole body, joined and held together by its joints, grows — and that our bodies are members of Christ. All of this, we understand, cannot come to pass unless He wholly cleaves to us in Spirit and body. But He has described that closest fellowship in which we are joined to His flesh with an even more glorious description, when He said that we are members of His body and of His bone and of His flesh. And to make clear that this surpasses all words, He concludes with an exclamation: 'This is a great mystery.' It would therefore be the height of madness to deny any communion of the faithful with the flesh and blood of the Lord — a communion which the apostle declares to be so great that he preferred to wonder at it than to attempt to express it.

To summarize: our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ just as bread and wine sustain and maintain bodily life. Otherwise the correspondence of the sign would mean nothing — unless souls truly find their nourishment in Christ. And this cannot happen unless Christ truly grows into one with us, refreshing us through the eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood. Even if it seems incredible that Christ's flesh, at such a great distance of place, should reach us to be our food — let us remember how far the secret power of the Spirit surpasses all our senses, and how foolish it is to try to measure His immeasurability by our own measure. Therefore, what our minds cannot comprehend, let faith grasp: that the Spirit truly unites what is spatially separated. Now this same holy communion of His body and blood — by which Christ pours His life into us as if driving it into our very bones and marrow — He also testifies and seals in the Supper. Not by setting before us an empty or useless sign, but by bringing there the effective working of His Spirit, through which He fulfills what He promises. Indeed, He offers and delivers the thing signified to all who sit at that spiritual banquet — though it is received with fruit only by those who welcome such great generosity with true faith and gratitude. In this sense the apostle said that the bread we break is the communion of the body of Christ, and that the cup we consecrate through the word and prayers is the communion of His blood. No one should object that this is a figure of speech in which the name of the thing signified is transferred to the sign. I grant that the breaking of bread is a sign, not the thing itself. But with that admitted, we rightly conclude from the delivery of the sign that the thing itself is delivered. For unless a person is willing to call God a deceiver, he cannot possibly say that God sets before us

an empty sign. Therefore, if through the breaking of bread the Lord truly represents partaking of His body, it must be beyond doubt that He truly performs and delivers it. This is a rule the godly should always hold: as often as they see the signs ordained by the Lord, they should fully believe that the reality of the thing signified is present. For why else would the Lord place the sign of His body in your hand, except to assure you of true participation in it? If it is true that a visible sign is given to seal the gift of an invisible reality — then when we receive the sign of the body, let us believe with no less certainty that the body itself is also given to us.

I therefore affirm — and this has always been the teaching of the church, and is what all who think rightly teach today — that the holy mystery of the Supper consists of two things: the bodily signs, which are set before our eyes to represent invisible realities according to the capacity of our weakness; and the spiritual truth, which is both figured and delivered through those signs. When I want to explain this clearly, I typically distinguish three things: the signification, the substance that is attached to the signification, and the power or effect that follows from both. The signification consists in the promises, which are in a sense wrapped together with the sign. The substance or matter I call Christ with His death and resurrection. By effect I mean redemption, righteousness, sanctification, and eternal life — and whatever other benefits Christ brings us. Now, though all of these have to do with faith, I leave no room for the objection that when I say Christ is received by faith, I mean He is merely conceived in the understanding or imagination. The promises offer Him not so that we might remain in mere sight and bare knowledge, but so that we might enjoy true communion with Him. Indeed, I do not see how anyone can have

confidence that he has redemption and righteousness in Christ's cross, and life in His death, unless it rests primarily on true communion with Christ Himself. For these good things would not come to us unless Christ first made Himself ours. I therefore affirm that in the mystery of the Supper, through the signs of bread and wine, Christ is truly delivered to us — indeed His body and blood, in which He accomplished all obedience to obtain righteousness for us — so that first we may grow into one body with Him, and then, being made partakers of His substance, we may also feel His power in the sharing of all His blessings.

Now I turn to the excessive distortions that superstition has introduced. Here Satan has played with remarkable cleverness — drawing men's minds away from heaven to fill them with a perverse error, as though Christ were fastened to the element of bread. First, we must not imagine the kind of presence of Christ in the sacrament that the craftsmen of Rome's papal court have invented — as though the body of Christ were made locally present to be handled with hands, crushed with teeth, and swallowed with the mouth. This is the very form of recantation that Pope Nicolas composed for Berengarius as a public demonstration of his repentance — written in terms so monstrous that even the author of the gloss cried out that readers are in danger of sucking a heresy worse than Berengarius's own if they do not read carefully. This appears in the second distinction, in the chapter beginning 'Ego Berengarius.' Peter Lombard, though he labors to excuse the absurdity, ultimately leans toward the same position. We have no doubt that Christ's body, in accordance with the permanent nature of a human body, has its limits — it is held in heaven, into which it was once received, until He returns in judgment. Therefore to drag

it back under these corruptible elements, or to imagine it present everywhere, we count as entirely unlawful. Nor is any such thing necessary for us to enjoy communion with Him. The Lord grants us this benefit through His Spirit — that we are made one with Him in body, Spirit, and soul. The bond of this union is the Spirit of Christ. Through that bond we are joined together, and through it — as through a kind of channel — whatever Christ is and has is conveyed to us. For if we see the sun shining on the earth and, by its rays, in a certain sense extending its substance to engender, nourish, and quicken the fruits of the earth — why should the extending of the beams of Christ's Spirit be insufficient to convey to us the communion of His flesh and blood? Scripture therefore, when it speaks of our participation with Christ, refers the whole power of it to the Spirit. One passage will suffice in place of many: Paul in Romans 8 says that Christ dwells in us through His Spirit. Yet by this he does not take away the communion of Christ's flesh and blood that we are now speaking of — but teaches that the Spirit alone works so that we possess the whole Christ and have Him dwelling in us.

The scholastic theologians thought more modestly — restrained by horror at such crude impiety. Yet even they did nothing but deceive with more refined tricks. They grant that Christ is not contained in the sacrament by local confinement or in a bodily manner — but then they invent a mode of presence that they themselves do not understand and cannot explain to others. It amounts to this: Christ must be sought in what they call the form of bread. For consider what this actually means. When they say the substance of bread is turned into Christ, do they not bind Him to the whiteness they leave behind? They say He is so contained in the

sacrament that He remains in heaven — and that they designate no presence other than one of relationship. But whatever words they use to disguise this with a semblance of reason, the conclusion is always the same: through consecration, what was bread becomes Christ, and from that point forward, Christ lies hidden under the appearance of bread. They are not ashamed to say this in plain words. Lombard's own words are: the body of Christ, which is itself visible, when the consecration is complete lies hidden and is covered under the form of bread. So the form of bread is nothing more than a mask that hides Christ's flesh from the eyes. We need not look far to understand what trap they intended to set with these words — the thing itself makes it plain. For we can see what vast superstition has held captive — not only common people but even the greatest leaders — in the papal churches for certain past ages and still today. Having little concern for true faith — through which alone we both enter fellowship with Christ and cling to Him — as long as they have the carnal presence they have devised apart from the word, they think they have Christ present enough. In sum, we see that through this clever subtlety the result has been that bread is taken for God.

From this source came the invented doctrine of transubstantiation — which today they defend more fiercely than any other article of their faith. The original advocates of local presence could not resolve how the body of Christ might be united with the substance of bread without running into numerous absurdities. They were therefore driven by necessity to invent the idea that bread is converted into the body — not that the body is literally made from bread, but that Christ, in order to conceal Himself under the outward form, reduces the substance of bread to nothing. It is as-

tounding that they fell into such ignorance — indeed, such senseless dullness — that they put forward this monstrosity despite both Scripture and the unanimous witness of the ancient church working against them. I grant that some of the ancient writers occasionally used the word 'conversion' — but not to mean that the substance of the outward signs is destroyed. They used it to indicate that bread dedicated to the mystery differs greatly from ordinary bread and has become something different in purpose and significance. But everywhere and without exception they plainly declare that the holy Supper consists of two parts — an earthly part and a heavenly part — and the earthly part they consistently explain to be bread and wine. Whatever these defenders claim, it is plain that they have no support from the ancient writers for this doctrine — support they are so accustomed to invoke against the clear word of God. The doctrine of transubstantiation is not ancient. It was unknown not only in those better ages when purer religious doctrine flourished, but even in times when that purity had already been considerably corrupted. None of the ancient writers fails to confess in plain terms that the holy signs in the Supper are bread and wine — though, as we said, they sometimes use elevated language to honor the dignity of the mystery. When they say a secret conversion takes place in the consecration — so that what is present is now other than ordinary bread and wine — I have already explained that they do not mean the things themselves are reduced to nothing, but only that they are now to be regarded differently from common food appointed merely to fill the stomach, since through them the spiritual food and drink of the soul is given to us. This we do not deny. But if there is a conversion, our opponents say, then one thing must be made into another. If they mean that

something is made which was not there before, I agree. But if they want to apply this to their own invented scheme, let them answer me: what change do they think takes place in baptism? The fathers there also speak of a remarkable conversion — saying that from a corruptible element is made a spiritual washing of the soul — yet none of them denies that water remains. 'But,' they say, 'there is nothing in baptism like the words in the Supper: this is my body.' As if the question were about those words — which have a clear enough meaning — and not rather about the word 'conversion,' which should carry no more meaning in the Supper than in baptism. So farewell to these hair-splitting word games, which do nothing except expose the emptiness of those who use them. The correspondence between sign and reality would not hold unless the truth represented there had a living image in the outward sign. Christ's will was to testify through the outward sign that His flesh is food. If He set before us only an imaginary phantom of bread — not real bread — where would the parallel be that leads us from the visible to the invisible? For if everything must fit together, the signification can extend no further than feeding us on the appearance of Christ's flesh. Just as in baptism — if the form of water were deceiving our eyes rather than being real water — it would not be a reliable pledge of our washing. Instead, we would be given an occasion for doubt by that deceptive illusion. The nature of the sacrament is therefore overthrown unless, in the manner of signifying, the earthly sign corresponds to the heavenly reality. And so we lose the truth of this mystery unless real bread represents to us the real body of Christ. To say it once more: since the Supper is nothing other than a visible testimony of the promise in John 6 — that Christ is the bread of life who came down from heaven — visible

bread must be used as the means by which that spiritual bread is represented. Otherwise we lose all the benefit that God in His tenderness grants through this to sustain our weakness. And by what reasoning would Paul conclude that all of us who partake together of one bread are one body and one bread — if there remained only an imaginary form and not the natural reality of bread? (1 Corinthians 10:17)

They could never have been so thoroughly deceived by Satan's tricks had they not already been captured by this error — that the body of Christ, enclosed under the bread, is sent down into the stomach through the physical mouth. The cause of such a crude imagination was that consecration meant to them something like a magical incantation. They were ignorant of this principle: that bread is a sacrament only for those to whom the word is directed. Just as the water of baptism is not changed in itself — but as soon as the promise is attached to it, it begins to be for us what it was not before — so it is with bread. A parallel sacrament makes this clearer. The water that sprang from the rock in the desert was for the fathers a token and sign of the same thing that wine represents to us in the Supper — for Paul teaches they drank the same spiritual drink. But it was also ordinary drinking water for the people's animals and livestock. From this it is easily concluded that in earthly elements when applied to a spiritual use, no other change takes place than in relation to people — insofar as the elements become seals of the promises for them. Moreover, since God's purpose is — as I often say — to lift us up to Himself by means suited to our nature, those who call us to Christ lurking invisibly under bread wickedly frustrate that purpose. For it is impossible for a mind, unable to escape the limitations of place, to reach Christ

who is above the heavens. What nature denied them, they tried to compensate for with a remedy more harmful still: remaining on earth, we would have no need of Christ's heavenly nearness. That is the necessity that drove them to transform Christ's body in their theology. In Bernard's time, though a harsher way of speaking had come into use, transubstantiation was not yet known. And in all earlier ages this comparison was universally on every man's lips: that in this mystery a spiritual reality is joined together with the bread and wine. As for their answer about the words — they think it clever, but it is entirely beside the point. Moses's rod turned into a serpent, they say — yet though it received the name of a serpent, it still retained the old name and is called a rod. So in their view it is equally reasonable that though the bread passes into a new substance, it may still — loosely but not unfittingly — be called what it appears to the eyes. But what resemblance do they find between a clear miracle and their invented illusion, of which no eye on earth is witness? The magicians had deceived the Egyptians with their tricks, persuading them they had divine power to alter the order of nature. Moses came forward, drove away all their deceptions, and showed that the invincible power of God was on his side — for his own rod swallowed all the rest. But since that transformation was visible to the eyes, as we have said, it has nothing to do with the present question. And shortly afterward, the rod visibly returned to its original form. Furthermore, it is not even clear whether that sudden transformation was one of substance or not. Also, the connection to the magicians' rods must be considered: the prophet would not call them serpents, precisely to avoid suggesting a real transformation had occurred — since those deceivers had done nothing but cast an illusion before the eyes of the observers. What

resemblance does any of this have to these statements: 'The bread which we break,' 'As often as you eat this bread,' 'They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread,' and similar expressions? It is certain that in the case of the magicians, only their eyes were deceived by enchantment. As for Moses, the matter is less clear — for it was no harder for God through Moses to make a serpent from a rod and a rod from a serpent than to clothe angels with bodily forms and unclothe them again shortly after. If the nature of this sacramental mystery were the same or similar, their solution might have some color of credibility. Let it remain certain: the promise that Christ's flesh is truly our food in the Supper cannot be truly or properly fulfilled unless the real substance of the outward sign corresponds to it. And as one error breeds another, the passage from Jeremiah is so foolishly twisted to prove transubstantiation that I am reluctant even to rehearse it. The prophet complained that wood was put in his bread — meaning that through his enemies' cruelty, his food was made bitter. David uses a similar figure when he mourns that his food was corrupted with gall and his drink with vinegar. These men would have it that Christ's body was allegorically fastened to the cross. Some of the ancient fathers thought so. As though we ought not rather to overlook their ignorance and spare their embarrassment, than to add shamelessness by forcing them still to fight as though they were opponents of the natural meaning of the prophet.

Others, seeing that the correspondence between the sign and the thing signified cannot be overthrown without the truth of the mystery collapsing, concede that the bread of the Supper is truly a substance of an earthly and corruptible element, unchanged in itself — but claim that it has the body of Christ enclosed beneath it.

If they meant by this that when bread is delivered in the mystery the delivery of the body is joined to it — because the reality is inseparable from the sign — I would not have much quarrel with them. But since they place the body in the bread and invent for it a kind of everywhere-presence contrary to its nature — and in saying 'under the bread' they mean it lies there hidden — it is necessary to briefly draw these subtleties out of their hiding places. My full intention is not yet to address this whole point, but only to lay the foundations for the discussion that will follow shortly in its proper place. They insist the body of Christ must be invisible and immeasurable so that it can lie hidden under the bread — for they think they cannot share in Him unless He descends into the bread. But they fail to grasp the manner of His descending — which is how He lifts us upward to Himself. They dress the idea up in every available argument, but when all is said, it is plain that they rest on a local presence of Christ. Where does this come from? Simply from the fact that they cannot conceive of any sharing in His flesh and blood except one that consists of physical proximity, local contact, or some form of gross enclosure.

And to stubbornly defend an error rashly adopted, some of them do not hesitate to say that Christ's flesh never had any measurements other than the full breadth of heaven and earth. When He was born as a child from the womb, when He grew, when He was stretched out on the cross, when He was enclosed in the tomb — all this was done by a kind of special arrangement so that He could be born, die, and fulfill the other duties of human existence. When after His resurrection He was seen in His familiar bodily form, when He was taken up to heaven, when after His ascension He appeared to Stephen and Paul — this too was done by the same

arrangement, so that it might be visible to human eyes that He was established as king in heaven. What is this but to resurrect Marcion from hell? For no one can doubt that Christ's body was a phantom or a phantasm if He was in such a condition. Some slip away more subtly by saying that the body given in the sacrament is glorified and immortal, and therefore it is no absurdity if it is contained in many places, or in no place, or in no fixed form, under the sacrament. But I ask: what kind of body did Christ give to the disciples on the night before He suffered? Do not the words indicate that He gave the same mortal body, which was about to be handed over to death shortly after? 'But He had already shown His glory to three disciples before this,' they say. True — but His intention was to give them a brief taste of His immortal glory for that moment. Even then they saw not two different bodies but the one body Christ bore, adorned with new glory. But when He distributed His body at the first Supper, the moment was already approaching when He, stricken by God and humbled, would lie in disgrace like a leper — far from displaying the glory of His resurrection. And what a wide door this opens to Marcion — if Christ's body was mortal and lowly in one place, yet immortal and glorious in another? Moreover, if their view holds, this same thing happens every day — for they are forced to admit that the body of Christ, which is visible in itself, lies hidden invisibly under the sign of bread. And yet those who vomit out such absurdities are so unashamed that they ferociously attack us without provocation, merely because we refuse to agree with them.

If they insist on fastening the body and blood of the Lord to bread and wine, one must necessarily be separated from the other. For since the bread is delivered separately from the cup, the body

united to the bread must of necessity be divided from the blood enclosed in the cup. When they affirm that the body is in the bread and the blood is in the cup, and the bread and wine are spatially separated from each other, they cannot escape the conclusion that the body is separated from the blood. Their usual dodge — claiming that by what they call 'accompaniment,' the blood is present with the body and the body with the blood — is far too weak, since the signs in which they are enclosed are clearly separated. But if with our eyes and minds we are lifted up to heaven — seeking Christ there in the glory of His kingdom, as the signs draw us to Him whole — then under the sign of bread we shall be fed with His body, and under the sign of wine we shall separately drink His blood, so that at last we may enjoy Him whole. For although He has taken His flesh away from us and in His body has ascended into heaven, He nonetheless sits at the right hand of the Father — that is, He reigns in the power, majesty, and glory of the Father. This kingdom is bounded by no limits of place, enclosed by no measurements — so that Christ may display His power wherever He pleases, in heaven and on earth; so that He may show Himself present in power and strength; so that He may always be at hand with those who are His, breathing His life into them, living in them, strengthening them, giving them life, keeping them safe — as surely as if He were present in body. And finally, so that He may feed them with His own body, whose communion He pours into them by the power of His Spirit. In this manner the body and blood of Christ is delivered to us in the sacrament.

We must affirm a presence of Christ in the Supper that does not fasten Him to the element of bread, does not enclose Him in the bread, does not in any way confine or circumscribe Him — for

all these things plainly diminish His heavenly glory. It must be a presence that does not take away His proper dimensions, does not simultaneously stretch Him into many places at once, and does not ascribe to Him an unlimited immensity spread throughout heaven and earth — for these things plainly contradict the truth of His human nature. Let us never allow these two principles to be taken from us. The first: nothing must be taken away from Christ's glory — which happens whenever He is brought under the corruptible elements of this world or bound to any earthly creature. The second: nothing must be falsely attributed to His body that does not fit the nature of a true man — which happens whenever it is said to be infinite, or is placed in many locations at once. With these absurdities set aside, I gladly receive whatever may help to express the true and substantial communication of the body and blood of the Lord — the communication that is delivered to the faithful under the holy signs of the Supper — provided it is understood that the faithful do not receive it merely in imagination or by mental conception, but truly enjoy it as the food of eternal life. There is no reason whatever that this teaching should be so hated by the world and so unfairly stripped of its defense by unjust verdicts — none except that the devil has maddened people's minds with his horrible bewitchment. What we teach agrees in every point with Scripture. It contains no absurdity, no obscurity, no ambiguity. It is consistent with true godliness and sound edification. It has nothing offensive in it — except that in certain past ages, when the ignorance and barbarism of the scholastics dominated the church, this clear light and open truth was unjustly suppressed. Yet because Satan today is also working through contentious spirits to

smear it with every slander and reproach he can — bending himself to no other task with greater effort — it is worth defending and rescuing it more carefully.

Before going further, we must examine the actual institution of Christ — since the chief objection our opponents raise is that we depart from Christ's words. To clear ourselves of the false charge of malice they lay on us, we should begin with an exposition of those words. Three evangelists and Paul recount that Christ took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to His disciples, and said: 'Take, eat: this is my body, which is given' — or broken — 'for you.' Of the cup, Matthew and Mark say: 'This cup is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.' Paul and Luke say: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.' The defenders of transubstantiation claim the pronoun 'this' refers to the form of bread — because the consecration is performed over the whole sentence and there is no visible substance that can be pointed to. But if they are so scrupulously attached to Christ's exact words — since He testified that what He placed in the disciples' hands was His body — their own invention, that what was bread is now the body, is in fact the furthest thing from the natural meaning of those words. What Christ took in His hands and gave to the apostles He calls His body. But He took bread. Who cannot see that bread is still being pointed to? There is therefore no greater absurdity than to redirect to the 'form' what is said about the bread. Others who interpret 'is' as 'to be transubstantiated' resort to a more forced and violently twisted gloss. There is therefore no reason for them to pretend they are moved by reverence for the words. It was unheard of in any language that the word 'is' should be taken to mean 'to be transformed into another thing.' As for

those who leave the bread in the Supper while affirming that the body of Christ is there — they differ greatly among themselves. The more moderate among them, though they insist strictly on the letter 'This is my body,' still swerve from their own strictness and say it amounts to the same as saying that the body of Christ is 'with bread,' 'in bread,' and 'under bread.' We have already touched on the substance of what they assert, and will shortly have occasion to say more. For now I dispute only about the words — by which they claim to be constrained so they cannot admit bread to be called the body, since it is merely a sign of the body. But if they shun all figures, why do they leap from Christ's plain statement to their own expressions that differ from it entirely? For there is a great difference between 'bread is the body' and 'the body is with bread.' Since they saw it was impossible to maintain the simple proposition that bread is the body, they have tried to escape through these round-about expressions. Some bolder advocates do not hesitate to affirm that even in the literal sense, bread is the body — and by this they truly prove themselves to be wooden literalists. If it is objected that bread is therefore Christ, and is God — they will deny this, because it is not stated in Christ's words. But their denial gains nothing — since all agree that whole Christ is offered to us in the Supper. And it is an intolerable blasphemy to say without figure that a frail and corruptible element is Christ. Now I ask them: are these two propositions equivalent? 'Christ is the Son of God' and 'bread is the body of Christ.' If they grant they are different — which we will compel them to grant, willing or not — let them explain where the difference lies. I think they will give no other answer than that the bread is called the body in a sacramental sense. From which it follows that Christ's words do not follow the common rule and should

not be judged by ordinary grammar. I also ask all the rigid, inflexible defenders of the letter: when Luke and Paul call the cup 'the covenant in the blood,' do they not express the same thing as in the first part, where they call bread the body? The same reverence applies to both parts of the mystery. And because brevity is obscure, more words give a clearer meaning. So whenever they affirm in one statement that the bread is the body, I will supply from the fuller statement the fitting interpretation: that it is the covenant in the body. For why should we need any more faithful or reliable interpreter than Paul and Luke? Nor is my intent to diminish anything from the communion of Christ's body that I have already affirmed — only to refute the foolish stubbornness with which they so hatefully quarrel about words. I understand, on the authority of Paul and Luke, that the bread is the body of Christ because it is the covenant in the body. If they fight against this, they fight not with me but with the Spirit of God. However much they protest that reverence for Christ's words keeps them from treating plain statements figuratively, this is not a sufficient excuse for rejecting all the arguments we bring to the contrary. Meanwhile, as I have already noted, it is important to grasp what this is: the covenant in the body and blood of Christ. For the covenant established by the sacrifice of death would not benefit us unless it were accompanied by that secret communion whereby we grow into one with Christ.

We must therefore conclude: because of the close relationship between the things signified and their signs, the name of the thing was given to the sign — figuratively, but not without a most fitting correspondence. I will set aside allegories and parables so that no one can accuse me of grasping for loopholes and wandering from the point. What I am describing is a figure of speech called

metonymy — the transfer of a name — which is commonly used in Scripture whenever mysteries are discussed. There is no other way to understand these statements: that circumcision is the covenant, that the lamb is the Passover, that the sacrifices of the law are expiations, that the rock from which water flowed in the desert was Christ — unless you take them as involving a transfer of names. Nor are names transferred only from the higher to the lower. The reverse also occurs — the name of the visible sign is given to the thing signified: as when God is said to have appeared to Moses in the bush, when the ark of the covenant is called God and the face of God, and when the dove is called the Holy Spirit. For even though the sign differs in substance from the thing signified — since the thing signified is spiritual and heavenly, while the sign is bodily and visible — why should the name of the thing not rightly belong to the sign? For the sign does not merely figure the reality it is solemnly appointed to represent, as though it were a bare and empty token — it truly delivers that reality. If signs devised by human beings — which are more like images of absent things than marks of things present, and which often deceptively shadow what is absent — are nonetheless sometimes adorned with the names of those things: then signs ordained by God, which always carry a sure and truthful signification and have the truth joined to them, have far greater reason to borrow the names of what they signify. The likeness and nearness of sign to thing is therefore so close that their names are easily interchangeable. Let our opponents therefore stop piling up their tasteless mockeries and calling us 'tropists,' as if we expound the sacramental manner of speaking in some unheard-of way. We explain it according to the common usage of Scripture. Because the sacraments share many things in

common, they all share in this transfer of names. Therefore, as the apostle teaches that the rock from which spiritual drink flowed for the Israelites was Christ — because it was a visible sign under which that spiritual drink was truly present, though not discernible to the eye — so bread today is called the body of Christ, because it is a sign through which the Lord offers us the true eating of His body. Augustine thought and said the same, lest anyone dismiss this as a new invention. He writes: 'If sacraments did not have a certain likeness to the things of which they are sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all. And from this likeness they often take the names of those things. So the sacrament of the body of Christ is, in a certain manner, the body of Christ; the sacrament of the blood of Christ is the blood of Christ; the sacrament of faith is faith.' There are many similar passages in him, but this one is enough — except that readers should be informed that Augustine teaches the same in his letter to Enodius. The attempt to dismiss this by saying that when Augustine speaks of metonymy in mysteries, he makes no mention of the Supper is a feeble evasion. If that kind of evasion were valid, we could never reason from the general to the particular — it would be like arguing that because every sentient creature has the power of movement, therefore an ox and a horse have the power of movement, and treating that as invalid. In any case, the matter is settled by Augustine's own words elsewhere, where he says that Christ did not hesitate to call the sign of His body His body. This appears *Against the Manichaeon Adimantus*, chapter 12. And in another place, commenting on Psalm 3, he writes: 'Marvelous is the patience of Christ, who received Judas to the banquet in which He committed and delivered to His disciples the figure of His body and blood.'

But if someone, ignoring all the rest, takes his stand on only these words — 'This is' — as though this mystery were governed by different rules than everything else, the solution is easy. They argue that the force of the verb 'is' is so strong that it admits no figure. But if we grant this: even in Paul's words the same verb appears — where he calls bread 'the communion of the body of Christ.' But communion is something different from the body itself. Indeed, whenever sacraments are discussed, we find the same construction used. 'This shall be to you a covenant with me.' 'This lamb shall be to you a Passover.' To mention just one more: when Paul says the rock was Christ, why do they treat the verb 'is' in that passage as less forceful than in Christ's own words? Let them also explain what force the verb carries in John's statement 'the Holy Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.' For if they hold to their rule, the eternal essence of the Holy Spirit would be destroyed — as if He had no existence until the ascension of Christ. Finally, let them explain what Paul means when he says that baptism is 'the washing of regeneration and renewal' — which is clearly not profitable for everyone who receives it. But nothing confutes them more effectively than Paul's statement that 'the church is Christ' — for in drawing an analogy from the human body, he adds 'so is Christ,' meaning by this the only-begotten Son of God, not in Himself but in His members. I believe I have now shown, for those of sound and unbiased judgment, how repugnant our enemies' slanders are — when they spread the claim that we withhold trust from Christ's words, which we embrace no less obediently than they do, and weigh with greater reverence. Their careless negligence shows that they care little what Christ meant, so long as they have a shield to defend their stubbornness. Our

earnest inquiry, by contrast, testifies to how greatly we esteem Christ's authority. They maliciously spread abroad that natural human reason keeps us from believing what Christ spoke with His own holy mouth. But I have already made clear in large part how false that slander is, and it will become even clearer going forward. Nothing keeps us from believing Christ when He speaks, nor from obeying the moment He indicates His will. The only question is whether it is unlawful to inquire into the natural meaning of His words.

These self-styled scholars, to appear well educated, forbid any departure from the literal text, however slight. But when Scripture calls God a man of war, I have no hesitation — seeing that the expression, taken literally, would be far too crude — in understanding it as a comparison drawn from human experience. It was on precisely this basis that the Anthropomorphites in ancient times troubled the orthodox fathers, seizing on statements like 'the eyes of God see,' 'it reached His ears,' 'His hand stretched out,' 'the earth is His footstool' — and crying out that the fathers were stripping God of the body Scripture assigns to Him. If that principle is accepted, outrageous barbarousness will overwhelm every light of faith. For what monstrous absurdities might fanatical minds not extract, if they are permitted to cite any small phrase to establish their opinions? Their objection — that it is unlikely Christ would have spoken in riddles when He was preparing singular comfort for His apostles in the face of adversity — actually supports our position. For if it had not occurred to the apostles that bread was figuratively called the body because it was the sign of the body, they would without doubt have been shocked and bewildered by something so monstrous. The Gospel of John records that at almost that

very same time they were confused and troubled by each small difficulty. Men who were arguing among themselves about how Christ would go to the Father, raising questions about how He would leave the world, who understood nothing of what was said about the heavenly Father until they would see Him — how would they have so easily believed what all reason refuses: that Christ was sitting before them at the table and at the same time was invisibly enclosed under the bread? The fact that they ate the bread without hesitation and without confusion shows that they understood Christ's words in the same sense we do — because they remembered what ought not to seem strange in mysteries: that the name of the thing signified is transferred to the sign. So to the disciples, as to us, it was a clear and certain comfort, entangled in no riddle. The only reason some depart from our interpretation is that the devil's enchantment has blinded them — making them fabricate darkness for themselves where the plain use of a fitting figure presents itself. Moreover, if we press the words precisely, Christ would have wrongly said something separately about the bread that differs from what He says about the cup. He calls the bread His body. He calls the wine His blood. Either this is a confused and meaningless repetition, or it is a division that separates the body from the blood. By the same logic it would be just as true to say of the cup 'This is my body' as of the bread itself — and equally valid to say the bread is the blood. If they answer that we must consider the purpose for which the signs were ordained — I grant it. But they will not be able to escape the absurdity that their error entails: that the bread is the blood and the wine is the body. I do not know what to make of their claiming that bread and body are different things, yet affirming that the one is properly and literally

said of the other without any figure — as if someone were to say that a garment is indeed different from a person, yet is properly called a person. Meanwhile, as if their victory depended on stubbornness and insults, they cry that Christ is accused of lying if any interpretation of the words is sought. It will be easy to show readers how unjust a wrong these word-catchers do us when they fill simple minds with the notion that we withhold trust from Christ's words — when we have shown that they violently pervert and confuse those words, while we expound them faithfully and rightly.

But this slander cannot be fully cleared away until another charge is also answered. They spread the claim that we are so bound to natural reason that we grant no more to the power of God than the order of nature permits and common sense teaches. Against such malicious slanders I appeal to the very doctrine I have set forth — which shows plainly enough that I do not measure this mystery by the proportion of human reason, nor make it subject to the laws of nature. Tell me: have we learned from natural philosophy that Christ feeds our souls from heaven with His flesh, as our bodies are nourished with bread and wine? From where does this power come to flesh, that it can give life? Everyone will say that this does not happen naturally. It will please human reason no more to be told that Christ's flesh reaches to us to become our food. In short, whoever has truly tasted our doctrine will be filled with wonder at the secret power of God. But these zealous men invent for themselves a miracle that, when taken away, leaves God himself to vanish along with His power. I urge readers once again to weigh carefully what our doctrine actually teaches — whether it rests on common sense, or whether it climbs with the wings of faith above the world and into the heavens. We say that

Christ, through both the outward sign and His Spirit, descends to us so that He may truly give life to our souls with the substance of His flesh and blood. Whoever does not see that these few words contain many miracles is more than senseless — for nothing is more contrary to nature than that souls should draw spiritual and heavenly life from flesh that had its origin in the earth and was subject to death. Nothing is more incredible than that things separated by the whole expanse of heaven and earth should not only be joined together across that distance, but so united that souls receive nourishment from Christ's flesh. Let these contentious men stop cultivating hatred toward us with this filthy slander — as if we enviously limit the immeasurable power of God. They either err too foolishly or lie too maliciously. The question here is not what God could do, but what He willed to do. We affirm that what pleased Him is done. And what pleased Him was that Christ should be made like His brothers in all things, except sin. What kind of thing is our flesh? Is it not something that has a certain measure, that is contained in space, that can be touched, that can be seen? And why, they ask, might God not make the same flesh occupy many different places, be contained in no place, be without measure or form? You madman — why do you demand that the power of God make flesh simultaneously to be and not to be flesh? That is like demanding that He make light at the same moment to be both light and darkness. But He wills that light be light, darkness be darkness, and flesh be flesh. He will indeed, when it pleases Him, turn darkness into light and light into darkness. But when you require that light and darkness not differ — what are you doing but overturning the order of God's wisdom? Therefore flesh must be flesh, and spirit must be spirit — each thing in the law and

condition God created it for. And such is the condition of flesh: it must exist in one — a specific — place, and consist of its proper measure and form. Christ took flesh on these terms — and, as Augustine testifies, He has given it incorruption and glory, but He has not taken from it its nature and reality.

They answer that they have the word, by which God's will is made plain — provided, that is, that the gift of interpretation that sheds light on the word is banished from the church. I grant that they have the word — but the same kind of word the Anthropomorphites had when they gave God a body, the same kind Marcion and the Manicheans had when they invented a heavenly or phantasmal body for Christ. They cited as proof: 'The first Adam was from the earth, earthy; the second Adam is from heaven, heavenly.' And again: 'Christ humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant, and was found in likeness as a man.' But the crude carnalists think there is no power of God unless all the order of nature is overturned by the monster they have fashioned in their imaginations — which is actually a more severe limitation of God, since we try to define what He can do by our own invented ideas. For from which word have they derived that the body of Christ is visible in heaven but lurks invisibly on earth under countless small pieces of bread? They will say that necessity requires this — that the body of Christ must be given in the Supper. Indeed — because they were pleased to draw a fleshly, physical eating from the words of Christ, their own preconceived judgment swept them away and drove them by necessity to coin this subtlety, which all of Scripture cries out against. As for the claim that we diminish God's power — this is false. Our doctrine in fact honors that power most admirably. But since they constantly accuse us of robbing God of His

honor when we refuse what is hard to believe according to common sense — even though they claim it has been promised by Christ's own mouth — I give again the same answer as before: in the mysteries of faith we do not consult common sense. We receive doctrine from heaven with quiet willingness to learn and with the meekness James commends. But they err perniciously in this very point. I do not deny that we follow a useful moderation. They hear the words 'This is my body' and immediately imagine a miracle utterly foreign to His meaning. Then, when foul absurdities arise from their invented scheme — because they have already rushed headlong into their own snares — they plunge themselves into the bottomless depths of God's omnipotence to quench the light of truth. From this comes that proud dogmatism: 'We will not inquire how Christ lies hidden under the bread — we are content with His words, This is my body.' We, however — as we do throughout all of Scripture — study with no less obedience than care to arrive at a sound understanding of this passage. We do not rashly and indiscriminately seize the first thing that comes to mind. Instead, through diligent reflection, we embrace the meaning the Spirit of God provides — and standing on it, we look down from above on whatever earthly wisdom is set against it. Indeed, we take our own minds captive so that they dare not so much as quibble with a single word against it. We humble them so they do not dare rise up against it. From this came our interpretation of Christ's words — an interpretation shown to be common to all sacraments throughout Scripture, as everyone who has been even moderately trained in Scripture knows. Nor do we think it lawful for us — following the example of the holy virgin — to inquire how a difficult thing can be done.

Since nothing will more confirm the faith of the godly than knowing that the doctrine we have taught is drawn from God's word and stands on its authority, I will demonstrate this as briefly as I can. Since His resurrection, it is not Aristotle but the Holy Spirit who teaches that Christ's body is limited in location and is held in heaven until the last day. I am well aware that they boldly mock the passages cited for this purpose. Whenever Christ says He will depart and leave the world, they answer that this departure means nothing more than a change from His mortal condition. But if that were so, Christ would not have needed to send the Holy Spirit to supply — as they call it — what would otherwise be lacking from His absence. For the Spirit does not take Christ's place in the sense of descending to earth, nor does Christ Himself come down again from heavenly glory to resume a mortal life. The coming of the Holy Spirit and the ascension of Christ are set against each other as opposites — and so it cannot be that Christ dwells with us bodily in the same manner as He sends His Spirit. Moreover, He plainly says that He will not always be present with His disciples in the world. This too they think they cleverly explain away, as if Christ meant only that He would not always be poor and miserable or subject to the necessities of this frail life. But the context of the passage cries out plainly against this — for the subject there is not poverty or misery or the hardships of earthly life, but worship and honor. The anointing displeased the disciples because they thought it a wasteful and unnecessary expense, bordering on excess, and they wished the money — which they thought poorly spent — had been given to the poor. Christ answers that He will not always be present to be honored with such an act. Augustine interpreted it the same way, and his words are perfectly

clear: 'When Christ said, You will not always have Me, He spoke of the presence of His body. For according to His majesty, according to His providence, according to His unspeakable and invisible grace, what He said was fulfilled: Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. But according to the flesh that the Word took to Himself — according to His birth from the virgin, His seizure by the Jews, His nailing to the cross, His taking down, His wrapping in linen, His laying in the tomb, His visible appearance in the resurrection — this was fulfilled: You will not always have Me with you.' Why not? 'Because according to the presence of His body He spent forty days with His disciples, and while they looked on — not following, but watching — He ascended. He is not here: for He sits at the right hand of the Father. And yet He is here: because He has not departed in the presence of His majesty. Therefore, according to the presence of His majesty, we always have Christ; but according to the presence of His flesh, it is rightly said: You will not always have Me. For in the presence of His flesh, the church had Him for a few days; now she holds Him by faith, but does not see Him with her eyes.' I will note briefly here: Augustine identifies three ways Christ is present with us — by majesty, by providence, and by unspeakable grace — and under this last I include this marvelous communion of His body and blood. But it must be understood as accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by the invented enclosure of His body under the element. For our Lord testified that He has flesh and bones that can be felt and seen. And 'to go away' and 'to ascend' do not signify making a show of ascending while not actually doing so — but doing in fact what the words plainly say. Someone may ask: shall we then assign to Christ

some fixed corner of heaven? I answer with Augustine: that is an overly curious and unnecessary question — as long as we believe that He is in heaven.

But what does the word 'ascending,' so often repeated, mean — does it not signify movement from one place to another? They deny it — claiming that 'height' signifies only the majesty of His dominion. But what of the very manner of His ascending? Was He not, in the sight of His watching disciples, lifted up on high? Do not the evangelists plainly declare that He was taken up into the heavens? These clever sophists answer that He was carried out of their sight by an intervening cloud, so that the faithful might learn He would no longer be visibly present in the world. As if, to establish His invisible presence, it would not have been more fitting for Him simply to vanish in an instant — or for the cloud to have surrounded Him before He lifted a foot. But when He was carried upward into the air and a cloud was placed beneath Him — teaching thereby that He is no longer to be sought on earth — we rightly conclude that He now dwells in the heavens, as Paul also affirms, and from there He bids us to look for Him. In the same way, the angels told the disciples it was useless to keep gazing up into heaven — for 'this Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.' Here too the opponents of sound doctrine slip away with what they think is a clever move — saying that He will come visibly then, but that He never left the earth and has remained invisibly present with His own all along. As if the angels were there pointing to a double presence, rather than simply making the disciples eyewitnesses of His departure — so that no doubt would remain. It is as if the angels said: 'He has been taken up into heaven before your

very eyes. He has claimed the heavenly kingdom for Himself. What remains is for you to wait patiently for His return as judge of the world — for He has now entered heaven, not to possess it alone, but to gather you and all the godly together with Him.'

Since the defenders of this counterfeit doctrine are not ashamed to decorate it with the endorsement of the ancient writers — especially Augustine — I will show in brief how perversely they go about this. Because learned and godly men have already gathered together the relevant testimonies, I will not repeat work already done. Whoever wishes may find them in their writings. I will not even compile everything from Augustine that could serve the purpose — I will only show by a few examples that he is, without any real dispute, entirely on our side. As for what our opponents cite — that it is commonly read in his books that the flesh and blood of Christ is distributed in the Supper, namely the sacrifice once offered on the cross — this amounts to nothing, since he also calls it thanksgiving or the sacrament of the body. And in what sense he uses the words 'flesh and blood,' we need not search far — for he explains himself by saying that sacraments take their names from the likeness of the things they signify, and that therefore in a certain sense the sacrament of the body is the body. With this agrees his well-known statement: 'The Lord did not hesitate to say, This is my body, when He gave the sign of it.' They also object that Augustine explicitly writes that the body of Christ falls to the ground and enters the mouth — in the same sense that he affirms it to be consumed, because he links both statements together. But the counter-statement he makes is not a difficulty: that when the mystery is ended the bread is consumed — because just before he had said, 'since these things are known to people, because they are

performed by people, they may have honor as familiar things, but not as marvelous things.' And to no other end points what our opponents so rashly apply to themselves — that Christ 'in a certain manner' carried Himself in His own hands when He offered the mystical bread to the disciples. By inserting this qualifying phrase 'in a certain manner,' Augustine makes sufficiently clear that Christ was not truly and literally enclosed under the bread. This is no surprise, since in another place he plainly affirms that bodies, if spaces and locations are taken from them, will be nowhere — and because they will be nowhere, they will not exist at all. It is a desperate dodge to say that passage does not concern the Supper, in which God exercises special power — because the question being addressed was precisely about Christ's flesh, and the holy man deliberately answers: 'Christ gave immortality to His flesh, but took not nature from it.' 'After this manner it must not be thought that He is everywhere spread abroad — for we must be careful not to so affirm the deity of the man that we take away the truth of the body. And it does not follow that what is in God must be everywhere as God is.' He adds the reason immediately: 'For one person is God and man, and Christ is both — everywhere by reason of His deity, in heaven by reason of His humanity.' What negligence it would have been not to except the mystery of the Supper — so serious and weighty a matter — if anything in it had conflicted with the doctrine he was treating. And if a person reads attentively what follows shortly after, he will find that the Supper is included under that general teaching — that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God and Son of man, is everywhere present as God; that He is in the temple of God, that is in the church, as God dwelling there; and in some definite place in heaven by reason of the measure of His true

body. We see how, in order to unite Christ with the church, Augustine does not drag His body down from heaven — which he surely would have done if Christ's body could not be our true food unless it were enclosed under the bread. Elsewhere, defining how the faithful now possess Christ, he says: 'You have Him by the sign of the cross, by the sacrament of baptism, by the food and drink of the altar.' I will not now dispute how rightly he counts a somewhat superstitious practice among the signs of Christ's presence — but the one who compares the presence of the flesh with the sign of the cross shows plainly enough that he does not imagine a two-bodied Christ — one who lurks hidden under the bread while the other sits visibly in heaven. If this needs to be stated more plainly, it is added in the same passage shortly after: 'According to the presence of majesty, we always have Christ; but according to the presence of the flesh, it is rightly said, Me you shall not always have.' They answer that this is also added there — that 'according to an unspeakable and invisible grace, it is fulfilled which is said of Him, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' But that does nothing for their position — because this statement is ultimately restricted to His majesty, which is consistently set in contrast to His body, while His flesh is explicitly distinguished from His grace and power. The same contrast appears elsewhere in Augustine — that Christ departed from the disciples by bodily presence so that He might remain with them by spiritual presence — where it is plain that the substance of the flesh is distinguished from the power of the Spirit, which unites us with Christ even while we are otherwise far separated by distance of place. He uses the same manner of speaking repeatedly — as when he says: 'He is to come again to the living and the dead with bodily presence, according to the rule of

faith and sound doctrine. For with spiritual presence He was also to come to them, and to abide with the whole church in the world to the end of the age.' He therefore directs this statement to the believers whom He had already begun to save through bodily presence, and whom He was to leave through bodily absence — so that by His spiritual presence with the Father He might save them. To interpret 'bodily' as merely 'visible' is a weak evasion — since Augustine also sets the body in contrast against divine power, and by adding 'to save with the Father' he clearly expresses that Christ pours out His grace from heaven to us through His Spirit.

Since they place such confidence in their hiding place of invisible presence, let us see how well they actually conceal themselves in it. First, they cannot produce a single word from Scripture to prove that Christ is invisible. They simply assume what no person of sound judgment will grant them — that the body of Christ cannot be given in the Supper unless it is covered with the mask of bread. Yet that is precisely the point under dispute, and it is far from being an established principle. Furthermore, their position forces them to make Christ's body twofold — for on their view, it is visible in heaven in its own right, but becomes invisible in the Supper through a special arrangement. How well this fits with Scripture generally, and with Peter's testimony in particular, is easy to judge. Peter says that Christ must be held or contained in heaven until He returns (Acts 3:21). But these men teach that He is everywhere, though without form. They object that it is unfair to subject the nature of a glorified body to the laws of ordinary nature. But this answer drags in Servetus's delirious error — rightly abhorred by all godly people — that the body was absorbed into the Godhead. I am not saying they intend this. But if filling all

things invisibly is reckoned among the qualities of a glorified body, it is clear that the bodily substance is destroyed and that no difference remains between the Godhead and human nature. Again, if Christ's body is so multi-faceted that it is visible in one place and invisible in another — where is the actual nature of a body, which consists of definite proportions? And where is its unity? Tertullian is far more correct when he affirms that the body of Christ was a true and natural body — because it is the figure of that body that is set before us in the Supper as a pledge and assurance of spiritual life. And truly, of His glorified body, Christ Himself said: 'See and feel — for a spirit does not have flesh and bones' (Luke 24:39). There, by Christ's own mouth, the reality of His flesh is proven — because it can be felt and seen. Take these away, and it ceases to be flesh. They still flee to their invented den of special dispensation. But it is our duty to embrace what Christ absolutely affirms — so that what He intends to assert carries full force with us, without qualification. He proves He is no ghost by showing Himself visible in His flesh (Philippians 3:21). Take away what He claims as proper to the nature of His body — and must they not then be forced to coin a new definition of what a body is? No matter where they turn, their invented dispensation has no place in Paul's statement that we look for a Savior from heaven who will transform the body of our humble state to be like His glorious body. For we cannot hope for such a transformation into qualities like those they ascribe to Christ — where everyone would have an invisible and limitless body. No one of any intelligence can be made to believe such a gross absurdity. Let them therefore not ascribe to Christ's glorified body the quality of being in many places at once and contained in no space. Finally, let them either openly deny the resur-

rection of the flesh — or grant that Christ, clothed in heavenly glory, did not put off His flesh. He will make us in our flesh fellow partakers of that same glory when we share in the resurrection with Him. For what does Scripture teach more plainly than this: just as Christ put on our true flesh when He was born of the virgin, and suffered in our true flesh when He made satisfaction for us — so He received again that same true flesh in the resurrection and carried it up to heaven (John 20:27)? This is our hope of resurrection and ascension — that Christ has risen and ascended. And as Tertullian says, He carried the pledge of our resurrection into the heavens with Him. How weak and frail would that hope be unless our own flesh had been raised up with Christ and entered into the kingdom of heaven? But the defining property of a body is to be contained in space, to consist of its proper proportions, and to have its form. Therefore away with this foolish invention that fastens both human minds and Christ to the bread. For what purpose does His secret presence under bread serve, except that those who long to be joined with Christ may rest in the sign? But the Lord Himself willed us to lift not only our eyes but all our senses away from the earth — forbidding the women to touch Him until He had ascended to His Father (Acts 7:56). When He saw Mary hastening in godly reverence to kiss His feet, the only reason He forbade this touching until His ascension was that He wills to be sought nowhere else. As for the objection that He was afterward seen by Stephen — the answer is simple: it was not necessary for Christ to change location in order to give His servant's eyes such sharpness of sight as could pierce through the heavens (Acts 9:4). The same applies to Paul. The objection that He came out of the sealed tomb and entered through closed doors does nothing to support their er-

ror. Just as the water bore Christ walking on the lake as on solid ground, it is no wonder if the hardness of the stone yielded at His approach (Matthew 28:6; John 20:19; Matthew 14:25). Though it is more likely that the stone was moved by His command and then returned to its place after He had passed. And entering through closed doors does not mean passing through solid matter, but rather that by divine power He opened a way for Himself so that He suddenly stood among the disciples in a marvelous manner, though the doors were firmly shut. What they cite from Luke — that Christ vanished from the sight of the disciples He walked with on the road to Emmaus — neither helps them nor hurts us (Luke 24:31). He was not made invisible to remove their sight of Him — He simply went out of sight. In the same way, when He walked alongside them on the road — as Luke himself testifies — He did not put on a different face to go unrecognized; He held their eyes back (Luke 24:16). But these men do not only transform Christ so He might move about on earth — they make Him different and unlike Himself in different places. Finally, in all this foolishness, they effectively — not in one word, but by the sum of their teaching — turn the flesh of Christ into a spirit. And not content with this, they load it with completely contrary qualities. The necessary result is that it becomes twofold.

Even if we grant them what they claim about invisible presence, ubiquity is still not proved — and without ubiquity, their attempt to enclose Christ under bread fails entirely. Unless Christ's body can be everywhere at once, without any spatial limitation, it cannot plausibly be hidden under bread in the Supper. That necessity is what drove them to invent their monstrous doctrine of ubiquity. But Scripture bears clear and strong testimony that His body

was bounded by the measure of a human body — and that His ascension proved He is not everywhere, for when He moves into one place, He leaves the place He was in before. The promise they cite cannot be stretched to cover His body: 'I am with you always, to the end of the age.' First, if it referred to bodily presence, continuous fellowship with Him would have to hold even apart from the Supper. There would then be no reason for their fierce quarreling about Christ's words in the Supper specifically, in order to enclose Him under the bread. Furthermore, the text itself shows that Christ is not speaking about His flesh at all — He is promising His disciples invisible help by which He will defend and sustain them against all the attacks of Satan and the world. For when He laid a heavy charge on them, He strengthened them against fear and doubt with the assurance of His presence — as if saying His support would never fail them, that it would be impossible to overcome. If they were not determined to confuse everything, they would have made a distinction in the manner of His presence. Indeed, some would rather display their ignorance with great shame than yield even the smallest point of their error. I am not speaking of the papists — whose doctrine is, at least on this point, more tolerable, or at least more modest. But contentiousness carries some so far that they say: by reason of the union of natures in Christ, wherever His Godhead is, His flesh is also, since the two cannot be separated. As if that union composed of the two natures some intermediate thing that was neither God nor man. That is precisely what Eutyches did — and after him, Servetus. But Scripture makes plain that the one person of Christ consists of two natures in such a way that each retains its own properties intact. That Eutyches was rightly condemned they will be ashamed to

deny — yet remarkably, they fail to notice the reason for his condemnation: by removing the distinction between the natures while insisting on the unity of person, he made God into man and man into God. What madness it is, then, to prefer mixing heaven and earth together rather than simply not dragging Christ's body out of the heavenly sanctuary. As for the testimonies they cite — 'No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven,' and 'The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him' — it shows the same senseless dullness to ignore the *communicatio idiomatum*, which the holy fathers devised long ago with good reason. When the Lord of glory is said to have been crucified, Paul does not mean that His Godhead suffered anything — but because the same Christ who suffered in His lowly and despised flesh was also God and Lord of glory. In the same way, the Son of Man was in heaven — because the same Christ who as Son of Man dwelt on earth in the flesh was God in heaven. In the same sense He is said to have descended from heaven according to His Godhead — not that the Godhead abandoned heaven to hide itself in the prison of the body, but because, though it fills all things, it dwelt bodily in Christ's very humanity — that is, naturally, and in a certain inexplicable manner. There is a common distinction made in the schools that I am not ashamed to repeat: that although the whole Christ is everywhere, yet not the whole of what is in Him is everywhere. I wish the scholastics themselves had properly weighed the substance of this statement — for it would have headed off the unpleasant invention of the bodily presence of Christ in the bread. Therefore our Mediator, being whole and everywhere, is always at hand with His own — and in the Supper He makes Himself present in a special

manner. Yet the whole of Him is present, not everything He is — because, as it has been said, in His flesh He is contained in heaven until He appears for judgment.

But they are badly mistaken who can conceive of no presence of Christ's flesh in the Supper unless it is made present in bread. For this view leaves nothing to the secret working of the Spirit, which unites Christ Himself to us. They think Christ is not present unless He comes down to us. As if we could not equally enjoy His presence if He lifted us up to Him. The question, therefore, is only about the manner: they place Christ in the bread, while we do not think it lawful to drag Him down from heaven. Let readers judge which is the more correct view. Only let this objection be driven away: that Christ is absent from His Supper unless He is hidden under the covering of bread. Since this mystery is heavenly, there is no need to draw Christ down to earth in order for Him to be joined with us.

Now if anyone asks me about the manner of this, I will not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too high to be either comprehended by my mind or expressed in my words — and, to speak more plainly, I feel it more than I understand it. Therefore I hold without hesitation to the truth of God, in which I may safely rest. He declares that His flesh is the food of my soul and His blood is the drink. With such food I present my soul to Him to be nourished. In His holy Supper He commands me, under the signs of bread and wine, to take and eat and drink His body and blood. I have no doubt that He truly delivers them, and that I truly receive them. I only reject the absurdities that seem either unworthy of Christ's heavenly majesty or inconsistent with the truth of His human nature — since they must also conflict with the word of God,

which teaches that Christ was so taken up into the glory of the heavenly kingdom that He is lifted above all the conditions of this world, and which with no less care sets forth in His human nature the things that properly belong to true humanity. Nor should this seem incredible or contrary to reason — because just as the whole kingdom of Christ is spiritual, whatever He does with His church should not be reduced to the reasoning of this world. Or, to use the words of Augustine: this mystery, like others, is performed by human beings but originates with God; on earth but from heaven. Such, I say, is the presence of the body as the nature of the sacrament requires — a presence we say is of such great force and effectiveness that it not only brings to our minds an undoubted confidence of eternal life, but also assures us of the immortality of our flesh. For our flesh is now made alive by His immortal flesh and in a certain manner participates in His immortality. Those who go beyond this with their excessive claims do nothing but use such tangles to obscure a simple and plain truth. If anyone is not yet satisfied, I would ask him here to pause and consider with me that we are speaking of a sacrament, all the parts of which must be related to faith. We feed faith no less richly and fully with this partaking of the body as we have described it, than they do who would drag Christ Himself down from heaven. At the same time, I plainly confess that I reject the mixing of Christ's flesh with our soul, or the pouring of it into us as they teach — because it is enough for us that Christ, from the substance of His flesh, breathes life into our souls and pours His own life into us, even though the literal flesh of Christ does not enter into us. Furthermore, it is plain that the analogy of faith — by which Paul instructs us to test all interpretation of Scripture — is entirely consistent with my position. As for

those who speak against so evident a truth, let them consider what rule of faith they are following. 'Whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.' These men, whether they conceal it or fail to recognize it, are stripping Him of His flesh.

The same must be said of communion — which they recognize only when they can devour the flesh of Christ under bread. But great wrong is done to the Holy Spirit if we do not believe that it is through His incomprehensible power that we commune with the flesh and blood of Christ. Indeed, if the force of this mystery — as we teach it, and as it was known to the ancient church for four hundred years — had been properly weighed, there would have been more than enough to satisfy. The gate would have been closed against the many foul errors from which horrible controversies have been kindled, by which the church has been miserably tormented both in ancient times and in our own age — controversies stirred up by those who force an excessive mode of presence that Scripture never teaches. They make a commotion over something foolishly and rashly conceived, as if the enclosure of Christ under bread were — as the proverb says — the beginning and end of godliness. What was most important to know was this: how the body of Christ, once given for us, is made ours, and how we become partakers of His blood that was shed — for this is to possess the whole crucified Christ and so enjoy all His blessings. But these things, of such great importance, are overlooked, neglected, and practically buried — while the only question that interests them is how the body of Christ lies hidden under the bread or under the form of bread. They falsely claim that whatever we teach about spiritual eating is opposed to true eating, as they call it. The differ-

ence is only about the manner: theirs is carnal, since they enclose Christ in bread; ours is spiritual, since the secret power of the Spirit is the bond of our union with Christ. Equally false is the other objection — that we take into account only the fruit or effect that the faithful receive from eating the flesh of Christ. We have already said that Christ Himself is the substance of the Supper — and that from this the effect follows: that through the sacrifice of His death we are cleansed from sins, through His blood we are washed, and through His resurrection we are raised up to the hope of heavenly life. But the foolish notion originated by Lombard has perverted their thinking — the notion that the eating of Christ's flesh is the sacrament itself. His words are: 'The sacrament and not the thing are the forms of bread and wine; the sacrament and the thing are the flesh and blood of Christ; the thing and not the sacrament is His mystical body.' And a little later: 'The thing signified and contained is the proper flesh of Christ; the thing signified and not contained is His mystical body.' I agree that he distinguishes between the flesh of Christ and the effective nourishing power with which it is endowed — but I cannot accept the error of treating it as a sacrament contained under bread. From this error has grown the false idea of sacramental eating — the notion that wicked people and evildoers also eat Christ's flesh, even though they are total strangers to Him. But the flesh of Christ in the mystery of the Supper is no less a spiritual thing than eternal salvation itself. From this we conclude that whoever is empty of Christ's Spirit can no more eat Christ's flesh than they can drink wine that has no taste. To give out that dead body — with no living strength — to unbelievers is too heinous a division of Christ. And His own express words are directly against it: 'Whoever eats my flesh and

drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him' (John 6:56). They answer that this passage is not about sacramental eating — which I grant, provided they do not stumble on the same stone by claiming that the flesh itself can be eaten without any fruit. But I would like to know how long they think that eating lasts. Here, in my judgment, they will have no escape. They object that nothing can be taken away from God's promises by human ingratitude. I grant that — and I say that the force of the mystery remains whole, however much wicked people try to empty it of effect. Yet it is one thing to be offered, and another to be received. Christ reaches out this spiritual food and offers this spiritual drink to all people. Some receive it eagerly, some refuse it with contempt. Will these people's refusal cause the food and drink to lose their nature? They will say this supports their position — that Christ's flesh, even if unpalatable to the ungodly, is nonetheless His flesh. But I deny that it can be eaten without the taste of faith — or, to speak as Augustine does, men carry away from this sacrament only as much as they gather with the vessel of faith. So nothing is taken away from the sacrament — its truth and effectiveness remain completely intact — even though the wicked depart empty from the outward partaking of it. If they object again that the words 'This is my body' are diminished if the wicked receive nothing but corruptible bread — the answer is ready: God is not to be acknowledged as true in the act of receiving, but in the steadfastness of His own goodness — in that He is ready to give, and indeed generously offers to the unworthy what they refuse. And this is the fullness of the sacrament, which the whole world cannot break: that the flesh and blood of Christ is given no less to the unworthy than to God's faithful elect. Yet it is also true that, as water landing on hard stone

runs off because there is no opening to enter, the wicked by their hardness drive back God's grace so it cannot penetrate them. Moreover, that Christ could be received without faith is no more reasonable than that seed should sprout in fire. As for their question of how Christ comes to damnation for some, unless they receive Him unworthily — this is a very weak argument. We nowhere read that people bring death upon themselves by receiving Christ unworthily — rather by rejecting Him. Nor does Christ's parable help them, where seed grows up among thorns and is later choked (Matthew 13:7) — for there He is addressing the value of a faith that lasts only for a time, which they do not even consider necessary for eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood, since in this matter they make Judas the equal of Peter. Rather the same parable refutes their error — where some seed falls on the road and some on rocky ground, and neither takes root. This shows that the unbeliever's own hardness prevents Christ from reaching them. Whoever wants this mystery to truly help their salvation will find nothing more fitting than for the faithful to be led to the very fountain and draw life from the Son of God. The dignity of the mystery is honored sufficiently when we remember that it is a help by which we are grafted into the body of Christ, or — already being grafted — we grow more and more into one with Him, until He fully unites Himself with us in the heavenly life. They object that Paul would not have declared them guilty of the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:29) unless they had been partakers of them. I answer that they are condemned not because they have eaten them, but because they have profaned the mystery — trampling underfoot the pledge of the holy union with God, which they ought to have received with reverence.

Now, since Augustine among the ancient writers most strongly affirmed the principle that nothing is taken away from the sacraments and the grace they represent is not voided by the unbelief or unworthiness of the recipients, it will be useful to show clearly from his own words how unfairly and falsely they apply his teaching to the present case -- those who would throw the body of Christ to dogs to eat. Sacramental eating, according to their view, is the way in which the wicked receive the body and blood of Christ without any working of the Spirit or any effect of grace. Augustine, on the contrary, carefully weighing those words -- "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood shall not die forever" -- says: "This means the power of the sacrament, not merely the visible sacrament; and truly inwardly, not outwardly. It is he who eats with the heart, not he who crushes it with the teeth." Therefore he ultimately concludes that the sacrament of this reality -- that is, of the unity of the body and blood of Christ -- is set before people in the Lord's Supper, for some leading to life and for some to destruction. But the reality itself of which it is a sacrament brings life to all who partake of it and destruction to none. And let no one quibble here that the "reality" refers not to the body but to the grace of the Spirit, which could be separated from the body. The contrasting comparison between the two terms "visible" and "invisible" sweeps away all such confusion, for the body of Christ cannot be classified under the first of those terms. Therefore it follows that unbelievers share only in the visible sign. And to remove all doubt, after saying that this bread requires the hunger of the inner person, he adds: "Moses and Aaron and Phinehas and many others who ate the manna pleased God. Why? Because they spiritually understood the spiritual food, spiritually hungered for it, spiritually tasted it, so

that they might be spiritually filled. For we also today have received spiritual food. But the sacrament is one thing, and the power of the sacrament is another." A little later: "And so the one who does not remain in Christ, and in whom Christ does not remain, without doubt neither eats His flesh spiritually nor drinks His blood, even though he physically and visibly crushes with his teeth the sign of the body and blood." We hear again that the visible sign is set in contrast to spiritual eating. This refutes the error that the invisible body of Christ is indeed eaten sacramentally, though not spiritually. We also hear that nothing is granted to the ungodly and unclean beyond receiving the visible sign. From this comes his famous statement: the other disciples ate the bread that was the Lord, but Judas ate the bread of the Lord. In saying this, he plainly excludes unbelievers from partaking of the body and blood. Nor does what he says elsewhere point in any other direction: "Why are you amazed that the bread of Christ was given to Judas, through which he was handed over to the devil, when you see that, on the other side, Paul was given a messenger of the devil through whom he might be perfected in Christ?" He certainly says elsewhere that the bread of the Supper was the body of Christ for those to whom Paul said, "He who eats unworthily eats and drinks judgment on himself," and that they therefore did not receive nothing just because they ate unworthily. But what he means, he explains more fully in another place. For, taking it upon himself to define specifically how the wicked and evildoers who profess the Christian faith with their mouths but deny it by their deeds eat the body of Christ -- and going against the opinion of some who thought they did not eat it even in the sacrament -- he says: Neither should it be said that they eat the body of Christ, because

they are not to be counted among the members of Christ. For, to say nothing of the rest, they cannot be both members of Christ and members of a prostitute at the same time. Finally, where Christ Himself says, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him," He shows what it means to eat the body of Christ not merely in the sacrament but in reality. For this means remaining in Christ so that Christ remains in him. He said it as though He were saying: "Let the one who does not remain in Me and in whom I do not remain, not say or think that he eats My body or drinks My blood." Let the readers carefully weigh the contrast set up in this comparison -- eating "sacramentally" versus eating "in reality" -- and no doubt will remain. He confirms the same point no less plainly in these words: "Prepare not your jaws but your heart. This is what the Supper commends. See, we believe in Christ when we receive Him by faith. In receiving we know what to think. We receive a small amount and are satisfied in heart. Therefore it is not what is seen but what is believed that feeds us." Here again he limits what the wicked receive to the visible sign and teaches that Christ is received in no other way than by faith. Likewise in another place, expressly stating that the good and the wicked share together in the signs, he excludes the wicked from the true eating of Christ's flesh. For if they received the reality itself, he would certainly not have left that unmentioned, since it would have been more relevant to his argument. Also, in another place, discussing this eating and its fruit, he concludes: "Then shall the body and blood of Christ be life to each person if what is visibly received in the sacrament is in the truth itself spiritually eaten, spiritually drunk." Therefore, whoever would make unbelievers partakers of the flesh and blood of Christ and still claim to agree

with Augustine must show us a visible body of Christ, since according to his judgment the whole truth is spiritual. And it is certainly clear from his words that sacramental eating, when unbelief bars the entrance to the truth, amounts to nothing more than visible or outward eating. If the body of Christ could truly be eaten yet not spiritually, what would he mean in that other passage? "You shall not eat this body which you see, nor drink the blood which those who crucify Me shall shed. I have committed a certain sacrament to you; being spiritually understood, it will give you life." He certainly would not deny that the same body Christ offered as a sacrifice is delivered in the Supper. But he explained the manner of eating: namely, that having been received into heavenly glory, it breathes life into us by the secret power of the Spirit. I grant that he often uses this way of speaking, that the body of Christ is eaten by unbelievers. But he explains himself by adding: "in the sacrament." And elsewhere he describes spiritual eating in which outward performance does not exhaust grace. And lest my opponents say I am burying them under a heap of quotations, I would simply ask how they can escape this one statement of his: that the sacraments accomplish in the elect alone what they represent. They certainly would not dare deny that the bread in the Supper represents the body of Christ. Therefore it follows that the reprobate are excluded from partaking of it. That Cyril also held the same view is shown by these words: "As if someone pours molten wax on other wax and thoroughly blends one with the other, so it is necessary that if anyone receives the flesh and blood of the Lord, that person be joined with Him, so that Christ is found in him and he in Christ." From these words I think it is clear that those who merely eat the body of Christ sacramentally are deprived of the true and

real eating, which cannot be separated from Christ's power. And so the faithfulness of God's promises does not fail, which continues to rain from heaven even though stones and rocks do not absorb the moisture of the rain.

This understanding will also easily draw us away from the carnal worship that some have rashly erected around the sacrament. They reasoned this way: if the body is there, then the soul and the Godhead are with it — for they cannot now be separated. Therefore Christ is there to be worshipped. But first, if their claim of 'accompaniment' is denied, what will they do? For however much they protest at the absurdity of separating the body from the soul and the Godhead — yet what person of sound and sober judgment can persuade himself that the body of Christ is Christ? They think they prove their point neatly with logical arguments. But since Christ speaks separately of His body and blood without describing the manner of presence — how can they derive from something uncertain the certainty they claim? What then? If their consciences are ever tried with a more serious challenge, will not their logical arguments dissolve and melt away? When they find themselves without the certain word of God — which alone holds our souls firm when we are called to account, and without which they fail at the first test — when they recall that the teaching and example of the apostles are against them, and that they alone are the authors of this practice. To such unsettling thoughts will be added others that are not small. Is it a matter of no importance to worship God in a form He never prescribed? When true worship of God was at stake, should they have so lightly attempted something for which not a single word can be found anywhere? But if they had held all their thoughts under the word of God with proper humility, they would

have heard what He said — 'Take, eat, drink' — and they would have obeyed this command, which instructs them to receive the sacrament, not to worship it. Those who receive it as God commands, without worshipping it, are assured they have not departed from God's command — and there is nothing better when undertaking any work than this assurance. They have the example of the apostles, who are not recorded as prostrating themselves to worship the bread, but as receiving and eating it while sitting. They have the practice of the apostolic church, in which Luke reports that the faithful participated not by worshipping but by breaking bread. They have the teaching of the apostles, by which Paul instructed the church at Corinth, professing that what he delivered he had received from the Lord.

All of this tends to one end: to help godly readers see how dangerous it is in such high matters to wander from the simple word of God into the dreams of our own minds. But the things already said above should deliver us from all doubt on this point. For, if godly souls are rightly to lay hold of Christ, they must be lifted up to heaven. If the purpose of a sacrament is to help the weak human mind rise up to grasp spiritual mysteries — then those who remain fastened to the outward sign have wandered from the right path of seeking Christ. What then? Shall we deny that it is superstitious worship when people prostrate themselves before bread in order to worship Christ within it? Without doubt the Council of Nicaea intended to address this danger when it forbade reverent attention directed toward the physical signs set before us. It was for no other reason that in ancient times the people were loudly called, before the consecration, to lift their hearts upward. Scripture itself — beyond its diligent declaration of Christ's ascension, by which He re-

moved the presence of His body from our sight and company — commands us, whenever it mentions Him, to lift our minds upward and seek Him in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. This is meant to strip away all carnal thinking about Him. In keeping with this, He should be worshipped spiritually in heavenly glory — not by inventing this dangerous kind of worship, which is full of carnal and crude ideas about God. Those who invented the worship of the sacrament have not only dreamed it up from their own minds apart from Scripture — in which no mention of it can be found (and it surely would not have been left out if it were acceptable to God) — but with all of Scripture crying out against it, they have fashioned for themselves a god according to their own desires, abandoning the living God. For what is idolatry, if this is not — to worship the gifts instead of the Giver himself? They have offended doubly in this: the honor due to God alone was transferred to a creature, and God himself was dishonored through the defilement and profaning of His blessing, when out of His holy sacrament an accursed idol was made. But for our part, that we may not fall into the same pit, let us firmly fix our ears, eyes, hearts, minds, and tongues on the holy teaching of God. For that is the school of the Holy Spirit — the best of all teachers — in which such profit is gained that nothing more need be sought from anywhere else, and we ought to be content to remain ignorant of whatever is not taught there.

But now — since superstition, once it has passed its proper limits, knows no end to its sinning — they have gone much further. They have devised ceremonies completely foreign to the institution of the Supper, with the sole purpose of offering divine honor to the sign. 'We render this worship to Christ,' they say. First, even if this

were done during the Supper itself, I would say that the only legitimate worship is that which does not rest in the sign but is directed to Christ sitting in heaven. But now — on what basis do they claim to worship Christ in that bread, when they have no promise to that effect? They consecrate what they call a host, to carry it about in solemn procession, to display it for public viewing, to be looked upon, worshipped, and called upon. I ask by what power they think it is rightly consecrated. They will produce the words: 'This is my body.' But I will point out in reply that it was also said: 'Take and eat.' And I will not do so without reason. For when a promise is joined to a command, the promise is so contained within the command that when the two are separated, the promise ceases to be a promise. This will be made clearer by a parallel example. God gave a command when He said, 'Call upon me' (Psalm 50:15), and He added a promise: 'I will hear you.' If someone calls upon Peter and Paul and claims this promise, will not everyone cry out that he is misusing it? And what else are they doing — those who set aside the command about eating and latch onto an incomplete promise, 'This is my body,' to turn it into ceremonies foreign to Christ's institution? Let us therefore remember: this promise is given to those who keep the command that accompanies it. Those who redirect the sacrament to any other use are left without any word from God at all. We have already discussed how the mystery of the holy Supper serves our faith before God. But the Lord here does not only bring to our remembrance so great an abundance of His grace — as we have shown — He as it were places it directly in our hands and stirs us to acknowledge it. At the same time He warns us not to be ungrateful for such lavish generosity, but rather to proclaim it with fitting praise and advance it with thanksgiving.

Therefore, when He gave the institution of the sacrament itself to the apostles, He taught them to do it in remembrance of Him. Paul explains this as proclaiming the Lord's death (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:26) — that is, publicly and with one voice openly confessing that all our confidence of life and salvation rests in the death of the Lord — so that we may glorify Him through our confession and by our example move others to give Him glory. Here again it is clear to what end this sacrament is directed: to exercise us in the remembrance of Christ's death. For the command to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes to judge means nothing other than publicly declaring with the confession of our mouths what our faith has acknowledged in the sacrament — that the death of Christ is our life. This is the second use of the sacrament, which pertains to outward confession.

Third, the Lord also willed it to serve us as an exhortation — one which nothing else can more powerfully stir and kindle us toward purity and holiness of life, and toward love, peace, and unity. For in the Supper the Lord so shares His body with us that He becomes thoroughly one with us, and we with Him. Since He has only one body, of which He makes us all partakers, it is necessary that we all also be made one body through that sharing. The bread given in the sacrament represents this unity: just as it is made from many grains so blended together that one cannot be told from another — so we also ought to be joined and knit together with such harmony of hearts that no disagreement or division arises among us. I prefer to express this in Paul's own words: 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is the sharing of the blood of Christ; and the bread which we break is the sharing of the body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 10:16). 'Therefore we, though many, are one

body, because we all partake of one bread.' We will have gained very much from the sacrament if this thought is impressed and engraved in our minds: that none of the brothers can be harmed, despised, rejected, abused, or wronged by us without doing the same to Christ in our injurious treatment of them; that we cannot be at odds with our brothers without also being at odds with Christ; that Christ cannot be loved by us without being loved in our brothers; and that the care we have for our own body we must equally have for our brothers, who are members of that body. Just as no part of our body feels pain without that pain spreading to all the other parts — so we must not allow our brother to suffer any evil without being moved to compassion by it ourselves. Therefore Augustine calls this sacrament 'the bond of charity' — and not without reason. For what sharper spur could be applied to stir mutual charity among us, than when Christ, giving Himself to us, not only draws us by His own example to dedicate and give ourselves to one another — but also, in making Himself common to all, makes all of us one in Himself?

This also confirms what I said in another place: that the true administration of the sacrament cannot stand apart from the word. Whatever benefit comes to us from the Supper requires the word -- whether we need to be strengthened in faith, trained in confession, or stirred up to duty and prayer. Therefore, nothing could be done more improperly in the Supper than to turn it into a silent ceremony, as was done under the Pope's tyranny. They claimed the whole power of consecration depended on the priest's intention, as if this had nothing to do with the people -- who most of all needed to have the mystery explained. But this error grew from the fact that they did not realize the promises by which the

consecration is made are directed not to the elements themselves but to those who receive them. Christ does not speak to the bread commanding it to become His body. He commands His disciples to eat and promises them the sharing of His body and blood. Paul teaches the same order: that along with the bread and the cup, the promises should be offered to the faithful. This is certainly how it should be. We must not imagine any magical spell, as if it were enough to mutter words over the elements as though they could hear them. Instead, let us understand that those words are a living sermon that edifies the hearers, penetrates their minds, is imprinted and settled in their hearts, and demonstrates its effectiveness in fulfilling what it promises. For these reasons, it is clearly wrong to store the sacrament -- as many urgently demand -- for extraordinary distribution to the sick. Either they will receive it without the recitation of Christ's institution, or the minister will join the true declaration of the mystery with the sign. Silence involves misuse and fault. If the promises are recited and the mystery explained so that those who receive it may benefit, there is no reason to doubt that this is the true consecration. In that case, what purpose would a separate consecration serve, whose effect does not even reach the sick? But those who do this point to the practice of the early church. I grant that. But in so important a matter, where great error leads to great danger, nothing is safer than to follow the truth itself.

As we see, this holy bread of the Lord's Supper is spiritual food -- no less sweet and delightful than healthful to the godly worshippers of God. By tasting it, they experience that Christ is their life. It stirs them to thanksgiving and encourages them to mutual love among themselves. But on the other hand, it turns into a deadly

poison for all those whose faith it does not nourish and confirm, and whom it does not move to confession of praise and love. Just as physical food, when it enters a stomach filled with bad humors, is itself made bad and does more harm than good, so this spiritual food -- when it lands on a soul corrupted by malice and wickedness -- throws it headlong into a deeper fall. This is not the fault of the food itself, but because nothing is pure for the defiled and unbelieving, no matter how sanctified it may be by the Lord's blessing. As Paul says, those who eat and drink unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and eat and drink judgment on themselves because they do not discern the body of the Lord. People who thrust themselves forward like pigs to take the Lord's Supper -- without any spark of faith, without any love for others -- do not discern the body of the Lord. Since they do not believe that body is their life, they dishonor it as much as they can, stripping it of all its dignity. By receiving it in such a way, they profane and defile it. And since they dare to mix the holy sign of Christ's body with their quarrels, even while they are alienated and divided from their brothers and sisters, it is no thanks to them that Christ's body is not torn apart limb from limb. They are therefore rightly guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, which they defile with such sacrilegious ungodliness. By this unworthy eating, they bring condemnation on themselves. Although they have no faith in Christ, by receiving the sacrament they profess that salvation is found nowhere except in Him and renounce all other trust. So they are their own accusers, their own witnesses against themselves, and they seal their own condemnation. Again, though they are divided from their brothers and sisters -- that is, from the members of Christ -- by hatred and ill will, and have no part in Christ, they still testify

that the only salvation is to share in Christ and become one with Him. For this reason, Paul commands each person to examine themselves before eating this bread or drinking this cup. By this (as I understand it) he meant that every person should look inward and ask: do they rest with sincere trust of heart in the salvation Christ has won? Do they acknowledge it by confessing with their mouth? Are they striving earnestly for innocence and holiness, aspiring to follow Christ's example? Are they willing to give themselves to their brothers and sisters, sharing themselves with those with whom they have Christ in common? Do they regard all their brothers and sisters as members of their own body, desiring to care for, defend, and help them as they would their own members? Are they eager to cherish, protect, and support them? Not that these duties of faith and love can be perfect in us now, but because we ought to aim for this and long toward it with all our desires, that we may daily grow in the faith we have begun.

When they set out to prepare people to receive the Supper worthily, they tormented and troubled poor consciences with great cruelty — yet they provided nothing that actually helped. They said that those who were in a state of grace ate worthily. They defined being in a state of grace as being pure and cleansed from all sin. By this teaching, every person who had ever lived or was then living on earth was barred from the sacrament. For if we try to find our worthiness within ourselves, we are completely undone. Only despair and damnable ruin awaits us. No matter how hard we try, our greatest effort will only make us feel more unworthy the more we strive to find worthiness. To solve this problem, they devised a way to attain worthiness: by carefully examining ourselves, calling ourselves to account for everything we have done, and then cleans-

ing our unworthiness through contrition, confession, and satisfaction. But we have already shown elsewhere what this kind of cleansing actually amounts to. For our present purpose, I will simply say that these are far too thin and fleeting comforts for discouraged consciences crushed with horror at their sin. For if the Lord by a solemn prohibition admits only the righteous and innocent to His Supper, then a person needs very strong assurance of that righteousness which God requires. But how can someone be certain that he has done all he was able to do? And even if it were possible to do so, when could anyone ever be bold enough to feel sure he had actually done it? So when no certain assurance of worthiness can be found, the entry remains permanently shut by that dreadful prohibition — which declares that those who eat and drink unworthily eat and drink judgment to themselves.

It is now easy to see what kind of teaching reigns in the papacy and what kind of author produced it — a teaching that, through its outrageous severity, robs and strips miserable sinners tormented by fear and grief of the comfort of this sacrament, in which all the sweetness of the Gospel was set before them. Surely the devil could find no quicker way to destroy people than to make them so numb that they could not taste or savor the food with which the most gracious heavenly Father willed to feed them. So that we do not fall into this trap, let us remember that this holy banquet is medicine for the sick, comfort for sinners, and a generous gift for the poor — it brings no benefit to the healthy, righteous, and rich, if any such people could be found. For since Christ is given to us in it as food, we understand that without Him we waste away and starve, just as famine destroys the living strength of the body. And since He is given to us as life, we understand that without Him we are com-

pletely dead in ourselves. Therefore the worthiness — the only and best worthiness we can bring to God — is to offer Him our own unworthiness, so that He in His mercy may make us worthy of Him. It is to despair of ourselves so that we may be comforted in Him; to humble ourselves so that we may be lifted up by Him; to accuse ourselves so that we may be justified by Him. Beyond this, it is to aspire to that unity which He commends to us in His Supper — and since He makes us all one in Himself, to desire that we all share one soul, one heart, one voice. If we have weighed and considered these things thoroughly, such thoughts — though they may shake us — will never overthrow us. For how could we, being needy and stripped of all good things, defiled with the filth of sins, half dead, eat the body of the Lord worthily? We will rather think this: that as the poor we come to the generous Giver, as the sick we come to the Physician, as sinners we come to the Author of righteousness, and as dead people we come to Him who gives life. We will think that the worthiness God requires consists chiefly of faith — which rests everything in Christ and nothing in us — and next of love, and that same love it is enough to offer to God even in its imperfect state, so that He may increase it, since we cannot give it perfect. Some people agree with us that worthiness consists in faith and love, yet have gone badly wrong in how much they require — demanding a perfection of faith to which nothing can be added, and a love equal to that which Christ has shown toward us. But in doing this they drive everyone away from the Supper just as surely as the others did. For if their standard were accepted, no one could receive worthily, since everyone without exception would stand convicted of imperfection. And it would show remarkable dullness — I will not say foolishness — to require such perfec-

tion in the sacrament as would make the sacrament empty and unnecessary. It was not ordained for the perfect, but for the weak and frail — to awaken, stir up, spur on, and exercise the affection of faith and love, and to correct the deficiencies of both.

As for the outward form of administration — whether the faithful receive it in their hand or not, whether they divide the bread or each eat what is given them, whether they pass the cup back to the deacon or hand it to the person next to them, whether the bread is leavened or unleavened, whether the wine is red or white — none of this matters. These things are indifferent and left to the liberty of the church. It is certain, however, that the practice of the early church was for each person to take the bread in his own hand. And Christ said, 'Divide it among you.' The historical records show that the bread was leavened and common bread before the time of Alexander, Bishop of Rome, who was the first to prefer unleavened bread. I cannot see what his reason was, unless he wanted to draw the eyes of the common people to marvel at the spectacle rather than to instruct their minds in true religion. I urge all who have even the slightest genuine zeal for godliness to honestly consider whether they do not clearly see how much more brightly the glory of God shines in simplicity, and how much more abundant spiritual comfort comes to the faithful, than from these cold and theatrical ceremonies — which serve no purpose except to deceive the senses of a dazzled people. They call this 'keeping the people in religion,' when in reality the people have been made foolish and senseless by superstition and are led wherever the leaders please. If anyone defends such inventions by appealing to antiquity, I am well aware how ancient is the use of anointing and blowing in baptism, and how early the Lord's Supper was corrupted. But this is

simply the waywardness of human boldness — which cannot restrain itself from playing loosely with the mysteries of God. Let us remember that God values obedience to His word so highly that He calls us to judge by it even angels and the whole world. Now, setting aside that great pile of ceremonies, here is how the Supper might most fittingly be administered — ideally celebrated often, at least every week, with the congregation present. It should begin with public prayers. Then a sermon should be preached. Then the minister, with bread and wine set on the table, should recite the institution of the Supper and declare the promises left to us in it. He should also exclude by excommunication all those whom the Lord's prohibition bars from the table. Then he should pray that the Lord, who has so generously given us this holy food, would instruct and prepare us to receive it with faith and thankfulness, and that since we are not worthy in ourselves, He would in His mercy make us worthy of such a banquet. Then either psalms should be sung or Scripture read, and the faithful should partake of the holy banquet in good order — the ministers breaking the bread and distributing it to the people. After the Supper, an exhortation should be made to sincere faith and confession of faith, to love, and to lives worthy of Christians. Finally, thanksgiving should be offered and praises sung to God. When this is finished, the congregation should be dismissed in peace.

Everything we have said about this sacrament makes it abundantly clear that it was not ordained to be received once a year and then only as a formality, as has now become the common custom. Rather, it was meant to be used frequently by all Christians, so that by repeated remembrance they might revisit Christ's suffering — and through that remembrance sustain and strengthen their faith,

stir themselves to confess praise to God and declare His goodness, and nourish and demonstrate mutual love among one another as they see it bound together in the unity of the body of Christ. For as often as we partake in the sign of the Lord's body, we bind ourselves to one another in all the duties of love — pledging that none of us will do anything to offend a brother, and that none will fail to help when there is need and the ability to do so. That this was the practice of the apostolic church, Luke records in Acts when he says that the believers continued steadily in the apostles' teaching, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42). It was altogether fitting that no assembly of the church should take place without the word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and giving of alms. That this order was also established among the Corinthians can be clearly gathered from Paul. It is also certain that this practice continued for many ages afterward — from which came the ancient canons attributed to Anacletus and Calixtus, requiring that after the consecration all who wish to remain inside the church must partake. And it is written in those ancient canons known as the Canons of the Apostles that those who do not stay to the end and do not receive the holy communion must be corrected as those who disturb the order of the church. At the Council of Antioch it was decreed that those who enter the church, hear the Scriptures, and then abstain from communion should be removed from the church until they amend this fault. At the first Council of Toledo this was either somewhat softened or at least expressed in milder terms — yet even there it was decreed that those who are found never to partake after hearing the sermon should be warned, and if they continue to abstain after the warning, they should be excluded.

These holy men intended by these ordinances to preserve the frequent use of communion, which they had received from the apostles themselves, which they knew to be most beneficial for the faithful, and which they saw was gradually falling away due to the negligence of ordinary people. Augustine testifies of his own time: 'The sacrament of this thing — of the unity of the Lord's body — is in some places prepared on the Lord's table daily, in other places at certain intervals. It is received at that table by some to life and by others to destruction.' And in his first letter to Januarius: 'Some receive the body and blood of the Lord daily; others receive it on certain days. In some places no day passes on which it is not offered; in others only on Saturday and Sunday; and in still others, only on Sunday.' But since the common people were, as we have said, rather sluggish, the holy men called on them urgently with sharp rebukes, so as not to appear to tolerate such laziness. Such an example is found in Chrysostom's commentary on the letter to the Ephesians. 'It is not said to the one who dishonored the banquet: Why did you sit down? but: Why did you come in?' 'Whoever is not a partaker of the mysteries acts wickedly and shamelessly by standing here present.' 'I beg you — if someone is invited to a banquet, washes his hands, sits down, appears to prepare himself to eat, and then tastes nothing — does he not shame both the banquet and the host?' 'So you, standing among those who are preparing themselves with prayer to receive the holy food, have by your very presence confessed that you are one of their number — and then you do not partake. Would it not have been better had you not come at all?' 'You will say: I am unworthy.' 'Then you were also unworthy to join in the prayer, which is the preparation for receiving the holy mystery.'

In truth, the custom commanding communion only once a year is most certainly an invention of the devil, by whatever means it was introduced. They say Zepherinus was the author of that decree, but it likely was not originally what we now have it. For his ordinance perhaps made reasonable provision for the church, given the circumstances of the time. There is no doubt that in those days the holy Supper was set before the faithful as often as they assembled together, and there is equally no doubt that a good portion of them did partake. But since it rarely happened that everyone communed together at the same time, and since those who were mixed among unbelievers and idolaters needed some outward sign to testify to their faith — this holy man, for the sake of order, appointed a particular day on which all the Christian people would make their confession of faith by partaking of the Lord's Supper. This ordinance of Zepherinus, though good in itself, was badly distorted by those who came after, when a law was made requiring communion only once a year. The result was that nearly everyone, having communed once, considered themselves fully discharged for the rest of the year and slept soundly without a further thought. It should have been done very differently. At least every week the Lord's table should be spread before the assembly of Christians. The promises should be declared, to feed them spiritually at it. No one should be compelled by force, but all should be earnestly exhorted and urged forward. The sluggishness of the lazy should be rebuked. All should come crowding together to such a feast, like hungry people. So I was not wrong at the outset to complain that this custom was pushed in by the craft of the devil — for by appointing one single day each year, it makes people negligent for all the rest of the year. We can see that this corrupt practice

had already crept in even during Chrysostom's time — but we can also see how greatly it displeased him. For he complains with bitter words in the very passage I just quoted that there was such great inequality in this matter: people sometimes would not even come when they were spiritually clean, yet at Easter they came even when they were spiritually unclean. Then he cries out: 'O custom! O presumption!' 'Then the daily offering is in vain! In vain we stand at the altar! There is no one who partakes together with us!' He was clearly far from giving his approval to this practice.

From the same source came another ordinance that has stolen away — or violently seized — half the Supper from the greater part of God's people: namely, the sign of the blood. This was denied to laypeople (for that is how they demean God's own inheritance), becoming the exclusive possession of shaved and anointed men. The eternal God commands that all should drink. Yet man dares to override and repeal this commandment with a new and contrary law, commanding that not all should drink. To avoid appearing to fight against God without reason, they invent potential dangers that might arise if the holy cup were commonly given to all — as though the eternal wisdom of God had not foreseen and accounted for these dangers. Then, with clever reasoning, they argue that one element is sufficient for both. 'For if it is the body,' they say, 'it is the whole Christ, who cannot now be separated from His body. Therefore, by accompaniment, the body contains the blood.' See how human reasoning agrees with God when it has been given free rein to run wild and unrestrained. The Lord, showing bread, says it is His body. When He shows the cup, He calls it His blood. The boldness of human reason cries out the opposite: that the bread is the blood and the wine is the body — as though the Lord had sepa-

rated His body from His blood in both words and signs for no reason, or as though anyone had ever heard the body or blood of Christ called God and man. Truly, if He had meant to signify His whole self, He could have said, 'It is I' — as He is accustomed to speak in Scripture — rather than, 'This is my body; this is my blood.' But willing to help our weakness, He set the cup apart from the bread, to teach that He is no less sufficient as drink than as food. Take away one element, and we find only half of that nourishment in Him. Therefore, even if it were true — as they claim — that the blood accompanies the body in the bread, and the body accompanies the blood in the cup, they still cheat godly souls of the confirmation of faith that Christ appointed as necessary. So, setting aside their clever arguments, we must hold firmly to the benefit Christ intended in ordaining both signs.

I know that Satan's servants cavil here, as they routinely do when mocking Scripture. First they claim that a rule binding the church to perpetual observance cannot be drawn from a single act. But they lie when they call it a single act — for Christ not only distributed the cup but also commanded His apostles to do the same going forward. The words 'Drink all of you from this cup' are the words of a commander. And Paul not only recounts this as something that was done but also commends it as a definite rule. Another escape they try is this: only the apostles were received by Christ to the Supper, since He had already chosen and appointed them to the order of sacrificing priests. But I would have them answer five questions from which they will not be able to escape without exposing their falsehoods. First: from what oracle did they receive this interpretation, so foreign to the word of God? Scripture says twelve sat with Jesus, but it does not so demean

Christ's dignity as to call them sacrificing priests — a title we will address in its proper place. Even though He gave it to the twelve at that time, He commanded that they should do the same — distributing it among those gathered. Second: why, for nearly a thousand years after the apostles — that better age — was everyone without exception made a partaker of both signs? Was the early church ignorant of what guests Christ had received at His Supper? It would be utterly shameless to hesitate or quibble over admitting this. The church histories remain; the writings of the ancient authors remain — and they provide plain testimony on this matter. 'The flesh is fed with the body and blood of Christ,' says Tertullian, 'so that the soul may be nourished by feeding on God.' 'How,' said Ambrose to Theodosius, 'will you receive the holy body of the Lord with such hands? With what boldness will you with your mouth partake of the cup of the precious blood?' Jerome says: 'The priests who celebrate the thanksgiving and distribute the blood of the Lord to the people.' Chrysostom says: 'It is not as in the old law, where the priest ate one portion and the people another. One body is set before all, and one cup. The things pertaining to the thanksgiving are all common to both priest and people.' Augustine testifies the same in many places.

But why am I debating what is so well known? Read through all the Greek and Latin writers and such testimonies will appear everywhere. Nor did this practice fall out of use while any trace of purity remained in the church. Gregory — whom you may rightly call the last true bishop of Rome — teaches that it was still observed in his day. 'What the blood of the Lamb is, you have now learned not by hearing but by drinking. His blood is poured into the mouths of the faithful.' Indeed, the practice endured even four

hundred years after his death, when all else had gone to corruption. For it was regarded not merely as a custom but as an inviolable law. In those days the reverence for God's institution was still felt, and people had no doubt that it was sacrilege to separate what the Lord had joined together. Thus Gelasius says: 'We have found that some, receiving only the portion of the holy body, abstain from the cup. Let them either receive the sacraments whole, or be excluded from them altogether — because they appear to be bound by some superstition. For to divide this mystery is not done without great sacrilege.' The words of Cyprian also deserve to be heard, for they ought to move any Christian heart. 'How do we teach or encourage them to shed their blood in confessing Christ,' he asks, 'if we deny His blood to those who must fight? Or how do we make them ready for the cup of martyrdom, if we do not first admit them in the church, by the right of communion, to drink the cup of the Lord?' As for the canonists who restrict Gelasius's decree to priests alone — that is so childish a cavil it does not even deserve a refutation.

Third: why did He say simply of the bread that they should eat, but of the cup that they should all drink — as though He deliberately intended to forestall Satan's deception? Fourth: if, as they would have it, the Lord admitted only sacrificing priests to His Supper, what man ever dared to invite others to partake of it — those whom the Lord had excluded — and to offer a gift whose power was not in their own hands, without any command from the only One who could give it? And on what authority do they distribute the sign of Christ's body to the common people even today, if they have neither a command nor an example from the Lord to do so? Fifth: was Paul lying when he told the Corinthians that he had

received from the Lord what he had delivered to them? For he then declares what he delivered — that all without distinction should partake of both signs. If Paul received from the Lord that all should be admitted without distinction, then let those who drive away nearly all God's people explain from whom they received their different rule — for they can no longer claim God as its author, since with Him there is no contradiction. And yet to cover over such abominations, they still dare to invoke the name of the church and hide behind that claim. As though these Antichrists were the church — they who so readily trample, scatter, and destroy the doctrine and institution of Christ — while the apostolic church, in which the full power of true religion flourished, was not the church at all.

¶THE .XVIII. CHAPITER. ¶OF THE
POPISHE MASSE, BY WHICHE SACRI-
LEGE THE SUPPER OF CHRIST HATH
NOT ONLY BEN PROPHANED, BUT
ALSO BROUGHT TO NOUGHT.



Through these and similar inventions, Satan has labored to spread darkness over the holy Supper of Christ — to obscure and defile it so that its purity could no longer be maintained in the church. But the crowning horror of his abominations came when he promoted an error by which the Supper would not merely be darkened and distorted but utterly blotted out and erased from human memory. He blinded nearly the whole world with a most deadly error: the belief that the Mass is a sacrifice and an offering to obtain forgiveness of sins. I have no interest in how the sounder scholastic theologians originally understood this doctrine. I am done with their tangled subtleties — which, however cleverly defended, deserve to be rejected by all good people because they do nothing but cast thick darkness over the brightness of the Supper. Setting them aside, let readers understand that I am here taking on the opinion which the Roman Antichrist and his spokesmen have spread throughout the whole world — namely, that the Mass is an

act by which the sacrificing priest who offers up Christ, and those who participate in the same offering, earn God's favor. Or that it is a purifying sacrifice by which they reconcile God to themselves. This has not merely been received as a popular belief — the practice itself is constructed as a kind of appeasement by which satisfaction is made to God for the cleansing of the living and the dead. The words used in the Mass express this same thing, and the daily practice of it confirms no other conclusion. I know how deeply this pestilence has taken root, under how attractive an appearance it hides, how it bears the name of Christ on its surface, and how many people believe the single word 'Mass' contains the entire sum of the faith. But when it is proven most clearly from the word of God that this Mass — however much it may be adorned and made to look glorious — shamefully dishonors Christ, buries and suppresses His cross, causes His death to be forgotten, takes away the fruit that flows from it to us, and weakens and destroys the sacrament in which the memory of His death was left to us — will any root then be so deep that this strong arm, the word of God, cannot cut it down and overthrow it? Is there any face so fair that this light cannot expose the evil lurking beneath it?

Let us then demonstrate what we stated first: that in the Mass there is intolerable blasphemy and dishonor done to Christ. He was consecrated by His Father as priest and bishop — not for a limited time, as we read of those ordained in the Old Testament, whose priesthood, like their mortal lives, could not last forever. Because of this, successors were needed to take the place of those who died. But in the place of Christ, who is immortal, no substitute is needed. He was therefore ordained by the Father as a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek, to exercise an ever-

lasting priesthood. This mystery had long been prefigured in Melchizedek. When Scripture first introduces him as the priest of the living God, it never mentions him again — as though his life had no end. Following this pattern of resemblance, Christ was called a priest according to his order. Now those who offer a daily sacrifice must appoint priests to make the offerings — placing them as though they were successors and substitutes for Christ. By substituting others in His place, they not only strip Christ of His honor and rob Him of the prerogative of an eternal priesthood — they also labor to thrust Him down from the right hand of the Father, where He cannot sit as immortal without remaining the eternal priest. They should not try to excuse themselves by claiming their minor sacrificers are not placed in Christ's stead as if He were dead, but are merely helpers of His eternal priesthood, which therefore continues uninterrupted. For they are held too firmly by the apostle's own words to escape in this way — the apostle says that many priests were made because they were prevented from continuing by death. Therefore there is only one who is not hindered by death, and He needs no companions. Yet in their stubbornness they arm themselves with the example of Melchizedek to defend their error. Because it is said that he offered bread and wine, they conclude he prefigured their Mass — as though the resemblance between him and Christ were in the offering of bread and wine. This is so empty and trivial that it needs no refutation. Melchizedek gave bread and wine to Abraham and his companions to refresh them after their weary journey and battle. What does this have to do with a sacrifice? Moses praises the generosity of this holy king. These men invent a mystery out of nothing — one that the text does not mention at all. They also try to paint their er-

ror with another color by pointing to what immediately follows: 'And he was the priest of the Most High God.' I answer that they wrongly apply to the bread and wine what the apostle refers to the blessing. For as the priest of God, he blessed Abraham. From this the apostle himself — and we need no better interpreter — draws the conclusion that Melchizedek was greater, because the lesser is blessed by the greater. But if Melchizedek's offering had truly been a figure of the sacrifice of the Mass, would the apostle — who traces out even the smallest details — have forgotten something so significant and important? So however much they trifle, they will fail in their attempt to overthrow the apostle's own argument: that the right and office of the sacrificing priesthood among mortal men has come to an end, because Christ — who is immortal — is the one and only eternal priest.

Another evil of the Mass is that it suppresses and buries the cross and suffering of Christ. This is absolutely certain: the cross of Christ is overthrown the moment an altar is set up. For if He offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross to sanctify us forever and to purchase for us eternal redemption — then the force and effectiveness of that sacrifice continues without end. Otherwise we would think no more highly of Christ than of the oxen and calves sacrificed under the law, which were proven ineffectual and weak by the very fact that they had to be repeated over and over. Therefore we must either confess that the sacrifice of Christ which He accomplished on the cross lacked the power of eternal cleansing, or that Christ finished everything with one sacrifice, once and for all. This is what the apostle says: that this great High Priest, Christ, appeared once at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the offering of Himself. Again: that we are sanctified by the will of

God through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Again: that by a single offering Christ has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. To this the apostle adds a notable statement: that where forgiveness of sins has once been obtained, there is no longer any offering for sin. Christ Himself signified this with His final word, spoken in His last breath, when He said, 'It is finished.' We naturally pay close attention to the last words of dying people, as though they were solemn declarations. Christ, as He died, testified that by His one sacrifice everything necessary for our salvation was completed and accomplished. Is it then permissible for us to tack on countless daily sacrifices to such a sacrifice — the completeness of which He so powerfully declared — as though it were imperfect? When the holy word of God not only affirms but cries out and insists that this sacrifice was offered once and its power remains forever — does anyone who requires another sacrifice not accuse it of imperfection and weakness? As for the Mass, which has been set up in such a way that a hundred thousand sacrifices might be offered every day — what does this amount to except burying and drowning the suffering of Christ, by which He offered Himself as the one sacrificial offering to the Father? Who, unless they are blind, cannot see that this boldness is Satan's assault against such a plain and obvious truth? I am not unaware of the deceptions that this father of lies uses to disguise his fraud — saying that these are not multiple or different sacrifices but the one same sacrifice repeated. But such smoke is easily blown away. For throughout his entire argument the apostle labors to prove not only that there are no other sacrifices but that the one sacrifice was offered once and will not be repeated. The more sophisticated try to slip out through a narrower gap, saying it is not a

repetition but an application. But this subtle argument is just as easily refuted. For Christ did not offer Himself once on the condition that His sacrifice would need to be daily confirmed by new offerings. Rather, the fruit of it was to be shared with us through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the holy Supper. So Paul says that Christ our Passover was offered up, and bids us eat of Him. This is the means — I say — by which the sacrifice of the cross is rightly applied to us: when it is communicated to us so that we may benefit from it, and we receive it with true faith.

It is worth examining what other foundations besides these are used to uphold the sacrifice of the Mass. They appeal to the prophecy of Malachi, in which the Lord promises that the time will come when throughout the whole world incense and a pure offering will be offered to His name. But it is nothing new or unusual for the prophets, when speaking of the calling of the Gentiles, to express the spiritual worship of God — to which they urge people — in terms of the outward ceremonies of the law, in order to explain more clearly to the people of their own day that the Gentiles would be called into the true fellowship of religion. They customarily describe in figures drawn from the law the truth that would be delivered through the Gospel. So they depict turning to the Lord as ascending to Jerusalem; they depict the worship of God as the offering of all kinds of gifts; they depict the fuller knowledge of God to be given to the faithful in the kingdom of Christ as dreams and visions. What they cite, therefore, is comparable to another prophecy of Isaiah, where the prophet foretells that three altars would be set up in Assyria, Egypt, and Judah. First, I ask whether they grant that this prophecy is fulfilled in the kingdom of Christ. Second: where are these altars, or when were they ever set up?

Third: do they think a separate temple — like the one in Jerusalem — is assigned to each separate kingdom? If they consider these things carefully, I believe they will admit that the prophet, using figures appropriate to his own time, was prophesying about the spiritual worship of God that would spread throughout the whole world. That is our answer to their argument. Since examples of this kind are everywhere common, I will not spend more time listing them. There is also another serious error they make: they acknowledge no sacrifice except the Mass, when in fact the faithful do now sacrifice to the Lord and do offer a pure offering — of which more will be said shortly.

I come now to the third charge against the Mass: that it blots out the one true death of Christ and removes it from human memory. Just as among people a will's power depends on the death of the person who made it, so our Lord confirmed by His death the testament in which He gave us forgiveness of sins and eternal righteousness. Those who dare to alter or add anything new to this testament deny His death and treat it as though it has no power. But what is the Mass except a new and entirely different testament? Why? Because does not each individual Mass promise a new forgiveness of sins and a new purchasing of righteousness — so that there are now as many testaments as there are Masses? Then let Christ come again and confirm this testament with another death — or rather, confirm the countless testaments of the Masses with countless deaths. Was I not right at the outset to say that the one true death of Christ is blotted out by the Mass? What shall we say about the fact that the Mass points directly toward the goal of having Christ slain again if that were possible? 'For where there is a will,' says the apostle, 'the death of the one who made it must be

established.' The Mass presents itself as a new testament of Christ, and therefore it requires His death. Moreover, the host that is offered must necessarily be slain and sacrificed. If Christ is sacrificed at each individual Mass, then at every moment He must be cruelly slain in a thousand places. This argument is not mine — it belongs to the apostle: 'If it had been necessary to offer Himself often, He would have had to die repeatedly since the foundation of the world.' I know they have an answer ready, and they also charge us with slander for this argument. They say we are holding against them something they never intended and never could do. We know that the life and death of Christ is not in their hands. We are not asking whether they intend to kill Him. Our only purpose is to show what absurd conclusions follow from their wicked and ungodly doctrine. I prove this very thing from the apostle's own words. Even if they cry out a hundred times that this sacrifice is bloodless — I will deny that it is within human power to change the nature of sacrifices, for by doing so God's holy and inviolable ordinance would fail. And from that follows this sure principle of the apostle: that the shedding of blood is required so that cleansing may not be absent.

Now I come to the fourth charge against the Mass: that it robs us of the fruit that came to us from Christ's death by causing us not to acknowledge it or think about it. For who can remember that he is redeemed by the death of Christ when he sees a new redemption being offered in the Mass? Who can trust that his sins are forgiven when he sees a new forgiveness being purchased? Nor will anyone escape this charge by saying that we obtain forgiveness of sins in the Mass only because it was already purchased by Christ's death. That argument amounts to nothing more than claiming that Christ

redeemed us on the condition that we would redeem ourselves. For this is the teaching that Satan's ministers have spread and that they still maintain today with shouting, with sword, and with fire: that when in the Mass we offer up Christ to His Father, we obtain forgiveness of sins through that act of offering, and thereby become partakers of Christ's suffering. What then is left to Christ's suffering except to serve as an example of redemption, teaching us to be our own redeemers? Christ Himself, when He sealed the assurance of pardon in the Supper, did not tell His disciples to rest in that act — He pointed them to the sacrifice of His death, making clear that the Supper is a memorial by which they would learn that the atoning sacrifice, by which the Father was to be appeased, needed to be offered only once. For it is not enough to know that Christ is the only sacrifice — that unique, once-for-all offering must be joined with it, so that our faith may be anchored to His cross.

I come now to my conclusion: the holy Supper, in which the Lord had left the remembrance of His suffering engraved and expressed for us, has been taken away, erased, and destroyed by the setting up of the Mass. The Supper itself is a gift of God, meant to be received with thanksgiving. The sacrifice of the Mass is presented as a payment made to God, which He receives as satisfaction. As great as the difference is between giving and receiving, so great is the difference between the sacrifice and the sacrament of the Supper. And this is the most wretched ingratitude of humanity: that where God's generous bounty ought to be acknowledged and thanked, they instead make God their debtor. The sacrament declared that by the death of Christ we were not only restored to life once but are continually made alive — because in that death all the

parts of our salvation were fulfilled. The sacrifice of the Mass tells a very different story: that Christ must be sacrificed daily in order to benefit us at all. The Supper was to be distributed in the common assembly of the church, to teach us about the communion by which we all cling together in Christ Jesus. The sacrifice of the Mass dissolves and tears apart this community. For once the error grew strong — that there must be sacrificers who offer sacrifice on behalf of the people — the Lord's Supper, as though handed over entirely to them, ceased to be distributed to the congregation of the faithful according to the Lord's command. The door was opened to private Masses, which more closely resemble a kind of excommunication than the fellowship ordained by the Lord — for in them a petty sacrificer, wishing to consume the sacrifice by himself alone, separates himself from the entire people of God. I call it a private Mass — so no one is confused — any Mass at which there is no sharing of the Lord's Supper among the faithful, even if a large crowd of people happens to be present.

Where the very name 'Mass' first came from I have never been able to determine with certainty, except that it seems likely to me it was taken from the offerings that were given — which is why the older writers commonly use it in the plural. But leaving aside disputes about the name, I say that private Masses are directly contrary to the ordinance of Christ and are therefore a wicked profaning of the holy Supper. For what did the Lord command? Did He not say to take the bread and divide it among themselves? What form of observing this command does Paul teach? Is it not the breaking of bread, which is the communion of the body and blood? (1 Corinthians 10:16) So when one person takes it without distributing it, what resemblance does this have to Christ's institu-

tion? They say that this one person does it on behalf of the whole church. By what command? Is this not openly mocking God — when one man privately takes to himself what ought not to be done except among many? Since the words of Christ and Paul are clear enough, we may briefly conclude that wherever there is no breaking of bread in the communion of the faithful, there is no Lord's Supper — only a false and unauthorized imitation of it. But a false imitation is a corruption. And the corruption of such a great mystery is not without wickedness. Therefore private Masses involve a wicked abuse. And as one error in religion tends to breed another — once this practice of offering without communion crept in, they gradually began to multiply Masses in every corner of the churches, endlessly drawing people here and there rather than gathering them into one assembly where they might recognize the mystery of their own unity. Now let them go ahead and deny that it is idolatry — displaying bread in their Masses to be worshipped in place of Christ. Their boasts about the promises of Christ's presence are worthless. However those promises may be understood, they were certainly not given so that wicked and godless people could, whenever they wish and for whatever purpose they please, manufacture the body of Christ. They were given so that the faithful, when they follow Christ's command with reverent observance in celebrating the Supper, might enjoy the true partaking of Him.

This perverseness was unknown to the purer church. However much the more shameless among our opponents try to cover this with false arguments, it is most certain that all of antiquity is against them — as we have shown elsewhere and as any consistent reading of the ancient writers will confirm. But before I finish speaking about this, I have a question for our Mass-teaching doc-

tors. Since they know that obedience is valued by God more than sacrifices, and that He demands that His voice be heard more than that offerings be brought — how do they believe that this manner of sacrificing is acceptable to God, for which they have no clear command, and which they cannot find approved by a single word of Scripture? Furthermore, when they hear the apostle say that no one takes to himself the name and honor of the sacrificing priesthood except one who is called as Aaron was — indeed, that even Christ Himself did not presume to act on His own but submitted to His Father's call — they must either produce God as the author and founder of their sacrificing priesthood, or they must confess that the honor into which they have broken with reckless boldness and without being called is not from God (1 Samuel 16:22). But they cannot show a single letter of Scripture that establishes their sacrificing priesthood. Why then should their sacrifices not collapse entirely, since they cannot be offered without a priest?

If anyone collects brief passages from the ancient writers here and there and tries to use their authority to prove that the sacrifice performed in the Supper should be understood very differently from how we explain it — let this be the brief answer: if the question is whether the fabricated notion of sacrifice that the papists have invented in the Mass is approved by the ancient writers, those writers never speak in defense of such sacrilege. They do use the word 'sacrifice' — but they immediately explain that they mean nothing other than the remembrance of that true and only sacrifice which Christ our only priest (as they consistently describe Him) made on the cross. 'The Hebrews,' says Augustine, 'in the sacrifices of animals which they offered to God, celebrated a prophecy of the sacrifice to come, which Christ offered. The Christians celebrate

with the holy offering and partaking of the body of Christ a remembrance of the sacrifice already made.' Here he teaches exactly the same thing that is written at greater length in the book *Faith* for Peter the Deacon, whoever its author may be. The words are these: 'Believe most firmly and do not doubt at all that the only-begotten Son, having become flesh for us, offered Himself for us as a sacrifice and offering to God for a pleasing aroma. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, animals were sacrificed in the time of the Old Testament. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit — with whom He shares one Godhead — the holy church throughout the whole world does not cease to offer the sacrifice of bread and wine.' 'For in those bodily sacrifices there was a foreshadowing of the flesh of Christ which He would offer for our sins, and of His blood which He would shed for the forgiveness of sins.' 'But in this sacrifice there is thanksgiving and the recalling of the flesh of Christ which He offered for us, and of His blood which He shed for us.' For this reason Augustine himself explains it in many places as nothing other than a sacrifice of praise. In short, you will commonly find in him that the Lord's Supper is called a sacrifice for no other reason than that it is the remembrance, image, and testimony of that singular, true, and only sacrifice by which Christ has cleansed us. There is also a notable passage in the fourth book of his work on the Trinity, chapter twenty-four, where after discussing the only sacrifice he concludes: 'In a sacrifice four things are to be considered: to whom it is offered, by whom, what is offered, and for whom.' 'The same one true mediator, reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace, remains one with Him to whom He offered; makes them one in Himself for whom He offered; is Himself the one who offered; and is the offering itself.' Chrysostom

speaks to the same effect. Yet they assign the honor of the sacrificing priesthood so fully to Christ alone that Augustine declares it to be the voice of Antichrist if any person makes a bishop the intercessor between God and people.

We do not deny that the offering up of Christ is represented to us in the Supper in such a way that the sight of the cross is in a manner set before our eyes — just as the apostle says that Christ was crucified before the eyes of the Galatians when the preaching of the cross was proclaimed to them. But since I see that the ancient Fathers also bent this remembrance further than was consistent with the Lord's institution — because their Supper contained I know not what repeated or at least renewed form of sacrificing — the safest course for godly hearts is to rest in the pure and simple ordinance of God. The Supper is called the Lord's Supper precisely because His authority alone should govern it. Since I find that they held a sound and true understanding of the whole mystery, and I do not perceive that they intended to take away even the slightest thing from the Lord's one sacrifice, I cannot condemn them as ungodly. Yet I think they cannot be fully excused — they did err in their manner of celebration. For they imitated the Jewish manner of sacrificing more closely than either Christ had ordained or the nature of the Gospel could bear. Therefore the one thing for which they may rightly be criticized is this misguided imitation of heavenly things — that not being content with Christ's simple and natural institution, they drifted toward the shadows of the law.

If a person carefully weighs the distinction which the word of God establishes between the sacrifices of Moses and our thanksgiving, he will see this: while those sacrifices represented to the Jewish people the same effectiveness of Christ's death that is now

delivered to us in the Supper, the manner of representation was different. In those sacrifices, the Levitical priests were commanded to foreshadow what Christ would accomplish. An animal was brought as a substitute for Christ Himself. There was an altar on which it was offered. Everything was arranged so that an image of the sacrifice to be offered to God as an atoning cleansing was placed before their eyes. But now that the sacrifice has been completed, the Lord has appointed a different order for us: to convey to the faithful people the fruit of the sacrifice offered to Him by His Son. Therefore He has given us a table at which we should eat — not an altar on which sacrifice should be offered. He has not consecrated priests to sacrifice but ministers to distribute the holy banquet. The higher and holier the mystery is, the more reverently and carefully it ought to be handled. There is therefore no safer path than to set aside all presumption of human understanding and hold fast to what Scripture alone teaches. And truly, if we consider that this is the Lord's Supper and not a human institution, there is no reason why we should allow ourselves to be moved from it even a hair's breadth by any human authority or ancient custom. Therefore when the apostle wanted to cleanse the Supper of all the faults that had crept into the church at Corinth, his approach was the most direct possible: he called it back to its original institution alone, from which he shows that a permanent rule must be drawn.

Now, so that no contentious person stirs up strife over the words 'sacrifice' and 'sacrificing priest,' I will briefly explain what I mean by each term throughout this discussion. I cannot see any reason for stretching the word 'sacrifice' to cover all religious ceremonies and holy acts. We know that throughout Scripture, a sacri-

fice is what the Greeks sometimes call *thusia*, sometimes *prosphora*, and sometimes *telete*. In its broad sense this includes anything offered to God in any way. We must therefore make a distinction — but a distinction that draws on the higher pattern of the sacrifices under Moses' law, through whose shadows the Lord intended to represent the whole truth of sacrifice to His people. Although the sacrifices under the law took many forms, they can all be grouped into two categories. Either an offering was made for sin as a kind of satisfaction — by which guilt was atoned for before God — or it was a sign of worship toward God and a testimony of devotion. The latter served at times as a petition to seek God's favor, at times as thanksgiving to acknowledge gratitude for blessings received, and at times simply as an exercise of godliness to renew the establishment of the covenant. To this second category belonged burnt offerings, drink offerings, grain offerings, firstfruits, and peace offerings. So let us also divide our own sacrifices into two kinds. For teaching purposes, let us call the first the sacrifice of worship and devout dedication — because it consists in honoring and worshipping God, which the faithful both owe to Him and render to Him. Or, if you prefer, call it the sacrifice of thanksgiving, since it is given to God by those who, overwhelmed by His countless benefits, give themselves and all their deeds back to Him. The second kind may be called the propitiatory sacrifice — the sacrifice of expiation. The sacrifice of expiation is one that aims to appease God's wrath, to satisfy His judgment, and thereby to wash and wipe away sins — so that the sinner, cleansed from their filth and restored to righteous purity, may be brought back into God's favor. So under the law, those sacrifices offered for the purging of sins were called sacrifices — not because they were sufficient

to recover God's favor or to remove sin, but because they foreshadowed the true sacrifice that was ultimately and completely accomplished by Christ alone. By Christ alone — because no one else could accomplish it. Once — because the power and effectiveness of that one sacrifice which Christ fully accomplished is eternal, as He Himself declared with His own words when He said it was finished and fulfilled. That is: everything necessary for reconciling the Father's favor, for obtaining forgiveness of sins, for righteousness and salvation — all of it was performed and completed in that single offering, nothing was lacking, and therefore no room was left for any further sacrifice.

I therefore declare that it is a most wicked outrage and an intolerable blasphemy against both Christ and the sacrifice He fully accomplished by His death on the cross — for anyone to think that by offering a new oblation he can purchase pardon for sins, appease God, and obtain righteousness. But what else is done in the Mass except to claim that through the merit of a new offering we become partakers of Christ's suffering? And as if this madness were not enough, they thought it too small to say that a single sacrifice was offered indifferently for the whole church — they went further and claimed the power to apply it specifically to any individual they chose, or rather to anyone willing to buy such goods with ready money. Now since they could not quite match the price that Judas got, yet to preserve some resemblance to their predecessor, they kept the same number: Judas sold Christ for thirty silver coins; these men sell Him, in French currency, for thirty copper coins — but Judas sold Him once, while these men sell Him as often as they can find a buyer. In this same sense we also deny that they are sacrificing priests — that is, we deny that they serve as

mediators before God on behalf of the people, or that by appeasing God they can purchase the atoning cleansing of sins. For Christ is the only high priest and sacrificing priest of the new covenant. All priesthoods have been transferred to Him, and in Him they are enclosed and brought to an end. Even if Scripture had said nothing about the eternal priesthood of Christ, the apostle's argument would still be unanswerable — since God, having taken away the old priesthoods, has appointed no new ones: no one takes this honor to himself except one who is called by God. With what boldness, then, do these robbers of God — who boast of themselves as the slaughterers of Christ — dare to call themselves the sacrificing priests of the living God?

Plato has an excellent passage in the second book of his Republic where, discussing the ancient manner of expiation, he ridicules the foolish confidence of wicked people and evildoers. These people thought that their crimes were hidden behind such rituals as behind a screen, so that the gods could not see them — and, as though they had secured a kind of covenant with the gods granting them immunity, they followed their own desires all the more carelessly. He seems to be describing precisely the kind of satisfactory purging offered by the Mass as it exists in the world today. Everyone knows it is wrong to deceive and undermine another person. To oppress widows with unjust dealings, to rob orphans, to exploit the poor, to seize other people's goods through scheming, to force one's way into someone's property through perjury and fraud, to crush people with violence and tyrannical intimidation — everyone confesses these things to be wicked. How then do so many people openly do all these things, as though they were completely free to act this way? Truly, if we examine it honestly,

nothing encourages them more than the confidence that through the sacrifice of a Mass — as if paying the full price in compensation — they will satisfy God, or at least find an easy way to settle accounts with Him. Plato then goes further and mocks their thick-headed foolishness — those who think that by such atoning rituals they can buy their way out of the punishments they would otherwise suffer after death. And what are annual requiem Masses and the greater part of all Masses used for today, but to ensure that those who throughout their entire lives have been the cruelest tyrants, the most greedy robbers, or the most devoted to every kind of wickedness, may — as though redeemed by this price — escape the fires of purgatory?

Under the other kind of sacrifice, which we have called the sacrifice of thanksgiving, fall all the faithful acts of charity by which, when we serve our brothers, we honor the Lord Himself in His members. Under it also fall all our prayers, praises, thanksgivings, and everything we do in the worship of God. All of these, ultimately, depend on the greater sacrifice by which we are consecrated in soul and body to be a holy temple for the Lord. For it is not enough that our outward actions be applied to obeying Him. Rather, we ourselves — and then everything that belongs to us — ought to be consecrated and dedicated to Him, so that everything in us may serve His glory and reflect an earnest desire to advance it. This kind of sacrifice does absolutely nothing to appease God's wrath, nothing to obtain forgiveness of sins, and nothing to earn righteousness. It is occupied solely in magnifying and glorifying God. For it can only be pleasing and acceptable to God from those whom He has already reconciled to Himself through forgiveness of sins received by other means, and whom He has therefore acquit-

ted of guilt. But it is so necessary for the church that the church cannot exist without it. It will therefore endure as long as the people of God continue — as we have already shown from the prophet. For in that sense I will interpret this prophecy: 'For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name will be great among the Gentiles, says the Lord.' Far be it from us to seek to abolish this. So Paul commands us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God — our reasonable service. He spoke pointedly when he added that this is our reasonable service, for he meant the spiritual manner of worshipping God, which he was quietly contrasting with the physical sacrifices of the law of Moses. So generous giving and sharing are called sacrifices with which God is pleased. So the generosity of the Philippians, by which they had relieved Paul's poverty, is called a fragrant offering. So all the good works of the faithful are called spiritual sacrifices.

Why do I need to search out more examples? This manner of speaking occurs frequently throughout Scripture. Even while God's people were still held under the outward instruction of the law, the prophets made it sufficiently clear that the truth was present under those physical sacrifices — truth which the Christian church holds in common with the nation of the Jews. In this way David prayed that his prayer might ascend like incense before God. Hosea called acts of thanksgiving 'calves of our lips,' which David elsewhere calls sacrifices of praise. The apostle himself follows this pattern, calling them sacrifices of praise and explaining them as the fruit of lips that confess His name. The Lord's Supper cannot be without this kind of sacrifice. For when in it we proclaim His death and

render thanksgiving, we do nothing other than offer the sacrifice of praise. For this office of sacrificing, all of us Christians are called a royal priesthood — because through Christ we offer to God that sacrifice of praise of which the apostle speaks: the fruit of lips that confess His name. For we do not come before God with our gifts without an intercessor. Christ is the one who, coming between us as mediator, brings us and all that is ours to the Father. He is our high priest who, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, has opened the way for us. He is the altar on which we lay our gifts, so that in Him we may have confidence in everything for which we dare to come before God. It is He, I say, who has made us a kingdom and priests to the Father.

What remains but for the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and even children to understand this abomination of the Mass? Served in a golden cup, it has made the kings and peoples of the earth drunk from the greatest to the least — striking them with such stupor and dizziness that, more senseless than brute animals, they have placed the whole hope of their salvation in this deadly and consuming pit. Truly Satan has never employed a stronger weapon to assault and overthrow the kingdom of Christ. This is the Helen for whom the enemies of the truth fight today with such fierce rage, such furious violence, such cruelty — and a Helen indeed, with whom they defile themselves with spiritual fornication, which is the most accursed of all. I will not even touch with a single finger those gross abuses with which they might disguise the unholy corruption of their holy Mass: the filthy selling of Masses, the shameful profits they extract from their celebrating, the insatiable greed with which they fill their covetousness. I am only pointing out — briefly and plainly — what kind of thing the very holiest form of

the Mass is, the form for which it has deserved such honor and reverence in certain past ages. To lay out these great mysteries with the attention they deserve would require a larger work. And I am unwilling to mingle here those filthy corruptions that openly parade before everyone's eyes — so that all people may understand this: that the Mass, taken in its purest and most polished form, presented in the best possible light and stripped of its appendages, is from top to bottom swarming with every kind of wickedness, blasphemy, idolatry, and sacrilege.

Readers now have gathered into a brief summary nearly everything we have judged necessary to know about these two sacraments. Their use has been delivered to the Christian church from the beginning of the new covenant and is to continue to the very end of the world. Baptism serves as the entry point, the admission into the faith. The Supper serves as the continual food by which Christ spiritually nourishes the household of His faithful. Therefore, as there is one God, one faith, one Christ, one church which is His body — so there is one baptism, and it is not repeated. But the Supper is distributed repeatedly, so that those who have once been received into the church may understand that they are continually fed by Christ. Besides these two, God has ordained no other sacrament, and therefore the church of the faithful ought to acknowledge no other. That the establishment of new sacraments does not lie within human power will be easily understood by anyone who remembers what has already been plainly enough declared here: that sacraments are appointed by God for the purpose of instructing us in some promise of His and testifying His goodwill toward us. It will also be understood by anyone who remembers that no one has been God's counselor — no one who could

promise us any certainty about His will, assure us and put us at rest about what His disposition is toward us, what He will give us, or what He will withhold. For this also settles the matter: no human being can set up a sign as a testimony of any of God's will or promises. Only God Himself can testify to us of Himself through a sign He has given (Isaiah 40:13; Romans 11:34). I will say it more briefly — perhaps more bluntly, but more plainly. A sacrament can never exist without a promise of salvation. All human beings put together can of themselves promise nothing about our salvation. Therefore they cannot of themselves establish or institute a sacrament.

Therefore let the Christian church be content with these two sacraments. Let her not only refuse to admit or acknowledge any third for the present age, but also not desire or look for any addition until the end of the world. Now, various additional sacraments beside their ordinary ones were given to the Jews at different periods — manna, water springing from the rock, the bronze serpent, and others like them. The very change and variation of these signs reminded the Jews not to cling to such figures, whose status was not permanent, but to look to God for something better that would endure without decay and without end. But we are in a very different situation. Christ has been openly revealed to us, and in Him all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hidden in such abundance that to hope for or look for any new addition to these treasures is truly to provoke God and stir His anger against us. We must hunger for, seek, look upon, learn, and come to know Christ alone — until that great day appears when the Lord will openly display the full glory of His kingdom, and will Himself be seen by us as He truly is. For this reason our age is described in Scripture as

the last hour, the last days, the last times — so that no one deceives himself by waiting for some new doctrine or revelation. In many ways and at many times He spoke before through His prophets. In these last days the heavenly Father has spoken through His beloved Son, who alone can clearly reveal the Father — and indeed He has revealed Him fully, as much as is fitting for us in our present state, while we still see Him as through a glass. Since, then, it is no longer within human power to create new sacraments in the church of God, it should be equally our goal that as little of human invention as possible be mixed into the sacraments that God Himself has given. For just as wine is diluted and loses its strength when water is poured in, and just as a whole lump of dough turns sour when leaven is scattered through it — so the purity of God's mysteries is defiled when anything of human origin is added. Yet we can see how far the sacraments have been twisted from their natural purity in the way they are handled today. Everywhere there is far too much pomp, ceremony, and elaborate gesture — while the word of God, without which the sacraments are not sacraments at all, receives no consideration and no mention. Indeed, even the ceremonies that God Himself ordained can barely lift their head in such a crowd of additions — they lie buried beneath it all. How little of baptism itself is visible in baptism — the one thing that alone ought to shine and be seen there, as we have rightly complained elsewhere. As for the Supper, it has been utterly buried since it was turned into the Mass, except that it appears once a year in a mutilated and half-torn form.

CHAPTER 19: OF THE FIVE FALSELY
NAMED SACRAMENTS, WHERE IS
DECLARED THAT THE OTHER FIVE
WHICH HAVE BEEN HITHERTO
COMMONLY TAKEN FOR
SACRAMENTS ARE NOT
SACRAMENTS, AND THEN IS SHOWED
WHAT MANNER OF THINGS THEY BE



O ur earlier discussion of sacraments might well have satisfied the sober and teachable, so that they would not go further and embrace any sacraments besides the two they know to have been ordained by the Lord. But since the opinion of seven sacraments has been passed around in common speech, spread through every school and pulpit, and over time taken root through sheer repetition — and is still firmly settled in people's minds — I thought it worth the effort to examine separately and more closely each of the other five that are commonly counted among the true and proper sacraments of the Lord. My aim is to strip away all misleading appearances, and set them plainly before simple readers for what they are, and to show how wrongly they

have been treated as sacraments. First, I declare to all godly people that I am not entering this dispute over the word out of any love of arguing. I am compelled by serious reasons to fight against the abuse of it. I know that Christians are, in a sense, masters of words as they are of all things, and may therefore apply words to things as they see fit, as long as a sound meaning is maintained, even if the expression is not entirely precise. I grant all of this — although it is better to make words conform to things than things to words. But the word 'sacrament' raises a different concern. Those who make seven sacraments attach to all of them this definition: that they are visible forms of invisible grace. They make them all vessels of the Holy Spirit, instruments through which righteousness is given, and causes of obtaining grace. Indeed, the Master of the Sentences himself denies that the sacraments of the law of Moses are properly called by this name, because they did not actually deliver the thing they represented. Is it to be tolerated that the signs which the Lord sanctified with His own mouth and adorned with excellent promises should not be counted as sacraments — while at the same time this honor is transferred to practices that people have either invented themselves or observe without any clear command of God? Therefore let them either change their definition, or stop misusing this word — which gives rise to false and absurd opinions. 'Extreme anointing,' they say, 'is a figure and cause of invisible grace, because it is a sacrament.' If we cannot grant what they conclude from this, then we must resist them on the word itself, so that it gives no occasion for such error. Again, when they seek to prove it is a sacrament, they add this reason: that it consists of an outward sign and the word. But if we find neither command nor promise attached to it, what can we do but protest?

It is now clear that our dispute is not merely about words but is a genuinely important controversy about the substance of the matter. We must therefore hold firmly to what we have already established by unassailable argument: the power to institute a sacrament belongs to God alone. For a sacrament must lift up and comfort the consciences of the faithful with a certain promise — a certainty that no human being could ever provide. A sacrament must be for us a testimony of God's goodwill toward us — and no person or angel can serve as that witness, since none has been God's counselor. Therefore God alone has the authority to testify of Himself to us through His word. A sacrament is a seal by which God's covenant or promise is confirmed. But it could not be sealed with physical things and earthly elements unless God by His power has shaped and appointed them for that purpose. Therefore no human being can ordain a sacrament — for it is not within human power to cause the great mysteries of God to lie hidden under such lowly things. The word of God must come first and make a sacrament to be a sacrament, as Augustine rightly teaches. Furthermore, it is important to maintain some distinction between the sacraments and other religious ceremonies, unless we want to fall into many absurdities. The apostles prayed on their knees — so by this logic, kneeling must constitute a sacrament. The disciples are said to have prayed facing east — so looking eastward must be a sacrament. Paul instructs people everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, and holy people are recorded as frequently praying with hands raised — so let the raising of hands be a sacrament as well. In the end, every gesture of the saints becomes a sacrament. I

would not be very troubled by these particular absurdities on their own — except that they are connected to other far more serious errors.

If they press us with the authority of the early church, I say they are misrepresenting it. For the number seven is nowhere found among the ecclesiastical writers, nor is it known when it first crept in. I grant that the early writers sometimes use the word 'sacrament' quite freely — but what do they mean by it? Simply all ceremonies, outward rites, and religious exercises. But when they speak of the signs that should serve as testimonies of God's grace toward us, they are content with two: baptism and the Supper. Lest anyone think I am making a false boast about this, I will cite a few testimonies from Augustine. To Januarius he writes: 'First I want you to hold firmly to the chief point of this discussion — that our Lord Christ, as He Himself says in the Gospel, has placed us under a light yoke and a light burden. Therefore He has bound together the fellowship of the new people with sacraments that are few in number, easy to observe, and excellent in meaning — such as baptism consecrated in the name of the Trinity, the communion of the body and blood of the Lord, and whatever else is set forth in the canonical Scriptures.' Again, in his book on Christian doctrine: 'Since the Lord's resurrection, the Lord Himself and the teaching of the apostles have delivered a few signs in place of the many — very easy to perform, very reverent in meaning, very pure in observance — such as baptism and the celebration of the body and blood of the Lord.' Why does he make no mention here of the sacred number — that is, the number seven? Is it likely he would have passed over it in silence if it had by then been established in the church — especially since he is elsewhere more curious about

numbers than necessary? And when he names baptism and the Supper and says nothing about the rest — does he not sufficiently indicate that these two mysteries stand out in unique dignity, while the other ceremonies occupy a lower rank? Therefore I say that these sacrament-doctors lack not only the word of the Lord but also the agreement of the early church — however much they boast of that pretense. But now let us turn to the specific practices themselves.

CONFIRMATION.

In ancient times the custom was this: when the children of Christians came to the age of reason, they were brought before the bishop to fulfill the duty that was required of adults who presented themselves for baptism. For adults sat among the catechumens until they had been fully instructed in the mysteries of the faith and could make a confession of faith before the bishop and the people. Therefore those who had been baptized as infants — since they had not then made their confession of faith before the church — were presented again by their parents toward the end of childhood or the beginning of the age of discretion. They were examined by the bishop according to the standard catechism that was common at the time. And so that this act — which in itself ought to be solemn and holy — might carry even greater reverence and dignity, the ceremony of the laying on of hands was added. So the child, having his faith approved, was sent away with a solemn blessing. The ancient writers often mention this practice. Pope Leo writes: 'If anyone returns from heretics, let him not be rebaptized. But let him receive what he lacked among the heretics — the power of the Spirit given by the bishop's laying on of hands.' Our opponents will

cry out that something in which the Holy Spirit is given is rightly called a sacrament. But Leo himself explains what he means by those words in another place: 'Whoever has been baptized among heretics, let him not be rebaptized, but confirmed with the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit — for he received only the outward form of baptism without the sanctifying of it.' Jerome also mentions it in his writing against the Luciferians. Although I do not deny that Jerome errs somewhat here — in saying that this is an apostolic practice — he is nevertheless far from the absurdities these men promote. He himself also qualifies the point when he adds that this blessing belongs to bishops alone, more in honor of their office than out of any requirement of law. Therefore this kind of laying on of hands — performed simply in place of a blessing — I commend, and I would very much like to see it restored to its proper and pure use today.

But a later age, having in effect abandoned the original practice, invented in its place some kind of fabricated confirmation and called it a sacrament of God. They invented the idea that the power of confirmation is to give the Holy Spirit for the increase of grace — grace which was given in baptism for innocence — and to strengthen for battle those who were newly born to life in baptism. This confirmation is performed with anointing and with these words: 'I sign you with the sign of the holy cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' All of this is done with great ceremony and flair. But where is the word of God promising the presence of the Holy Spirit here? They cannot produce a single word of it. By what means then will they assure us that their chrism is the vessel of the Holy Spirit? We see oil — a thick, greasy liquid — and noth-

ing more. 'Let the word be added to the element,' says Augustine, 'and there shall be a sacrament.' Let them, I say, produce this word — if they want us to see anything in the oil besides oil. If they acknowledged themselves to be ministers of the sacraments, as they should, we would need to argue no further. The first rule for any minister is that he do nothing without a command. Come then — let them produce any command for this ministerial act, and I will not say another word. If they have no command, they cannot excuse their sacrilegious boldness. In this same way the Lord asked the Pharisees whether John's baptism was from heaven or from human beings. If they had answered 'from human beings,' He would have made them confess it was worthless and empty. If they said 'from heaven,' they were compelled to acknowledge John's teaching. Therefore, rather than slander John, they dared not confess it was from human beings. If confirmation is from human beings, then it is proven to be worthless and empty. If they want to persuade us it is from heaven, let them prove it.

They defend themselves with the example of the apostles, whom they believe acted with full divine authority. Very well — nor would we blame them if they were truly following the apostles' example. But what did the apostles actually do? Luke reports in Acts that the apostles at Jerusalem, when they heard that Samaria had received the word of God, sent Peter and John there. They prayed for the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit, who had not yet come upon any of them — they had only been baptized in the name of Jesus. When they had prayed, they laid their hands on them, and through this laying on of hands the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. Luke mentions this laying on of hands several times. I hear what the apostles did — they faithfully carried

out their ministry. The Lord willed that the visible and extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit which He then poured out on His people should be administered and distributed through the apostles' laying on of hands. But I do not think any deeper mystery was contained in this laying on of hands. My explanation is that they added this ceremony as an outward act signifying that they were commending to God — and as it were offering to Him — the person upon whom they laid their hands. If this ministry which the apostles then exercised were still present in the church, the laying on of hands ought also to be maintained. But since that same gift has ceased to be given, what purpose does the laying on of hands serve? The Holy Spirit is indeed still present with the people of God — without His guidance and direction the church of God cannot stand. For we have the eternal and ever-standing promise by which Christ calls to Himself all who thirst, to come and drink living water. But those miraculous powers and visible workings that were distributed through the laying on of hands have ceased — and rightly so, for they were intended only for a time. It was fitting that the preaching of the Gospel, when it was new, should be gloriously confirmed and magnified by unheard-of miracles. When the Lord stopped these miracles, He did not abandon His church — He showed that the majesty of His kingdom and the authority of His word had been sufficiently and splendidly displayed. In what respect, then, will these performers claim to be following the apostles? If they truly followed them, they should be laying on hands in such a way that the evident power of the Holy Spirit immediately manifested itself. They do not produce this. Why then do they

boast that the laying on of hands supports their practice — a practice the apostles did indeed use, but for an entirely different purpose?

This is comparable to someone who would teach that the breath with which the Lord breathed on His disciples is a sacrament by which the Holy Spirit is given. But since the Lord did this once, He did not also intend for us to repeat it. In the same way the apostles laid on hands during the time when it pleased the Lord that the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit should be distributed through their prayers — not so that those who came after should merely imitate an empty and cold sign in a theatrical performance, without the reality, as these imitators do. But even if they could prove that they are following the apostles in the laying on of hands — in which they have nothing in common with the apostles except some perverse and distorted counterfeit — where does their oil come from, the oil they call the oil of salvation? Who taught them to look for salvation in oil? Who taught them to assign to it the power of strengthening? Was it Paul — who pulls us far away from the elementary principles of this world, who condemns nothing more strongly than clinging to such petty outward observances? But I say this boldly — not on my own authority, but from the Lord. Whoever calls oil the 'oil of salvation' forsakes the salvation that is in Christ. They deny Christ. They have no part in the kingdom of God. For 'food is for the stomach and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both.' All these perishable earthly elements, which decay through very use, have nothing to do with the kingdom of God, which is spiritual and will never decay. But then, someone will say: are you measuring with the same standard the water in which we are baptized and the bread and wine through

which the Lord's Supper is given? I answer that in sacraments given by God, two things are to be considered: the substance of the physical element set before us, and the form which the word of God has stamped upon it — and in that word lies all the power. So with regard to the bread, wine, and water offered to our senses in the sacraments — insofar as they retain their own substance — Paul's words always apply: 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food — God will destroy both.' For they pass away with the fashion of this world. But insofar as they are sanctified by the word of God to serve as sacraments, they do not hold us to earthly things but truly and spiritually instruct us.

But let us look more closely at the monsters this greasy liquid nourishes and sustains. These anointers say that the Holy Spirit is given in baptism for innocence, and in confirmation for the increase of grace — that in baptism we are newly born to life, and in confirmation we are prepared for battle. And they are so shameless as to claim that baptism cannot properly be administered without confirmation. What wickedness! Are we not in baptism buried together with Christ, made partakers of His death, so that we may also share in His resurrection? But Paul explains this fellowship with the death and life of Christ as the mortifying of our flesh and the quickening of our spirit — so that our old self is crucified and we may walk in newness of life. If this is not being armed for battle, then what is? If they counted it nothing to trample the word of God underfoot, why did they not at least show respect for the church, to whom they wish in every way to appear so obedient? And what stronger evidence could be brought against their doctrine than the decree of the Council of Milevis? 'Whoever says that baptism is given only for the forgiveness of sins and not as a help

for grace to come — let him be accursed.' Now when Luke, in the passage we have cited, says that those baptized in the name of Jesus Christ had not received the Holy Spirit — he does not simply mean they had received none of the Spirit's gifts at all, since they believed in Christ with their hearts and confessed Him with their mouths. He means that specific receiving of the Spirit by which visible and extraordinary powers were given. So it is said that the apostles received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost — even though Christ had already told them, 'It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaking through you.' Behold, all who are God's people — the malicious and poisonous deceit of Satan. What was truly given in baptism, he falsely claims is given in his confirmation, so that he may stealthily lead you away from baptism without your noticing. Who can now doubt that this is the doctrine of Satan — which cuts the promises properly belonging to baptism away from baptism and transfers them to something else? It is now plain on what foundation this pious anointing rests. The word of God is: all who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ with His gifts. The word of the anointers is: they received in baptism no promise by which they may be armed for battle. The one is the voice of truth — therefore the other must be the voice of lying. I can therefore define this confirmation more accurately than they have ever defined it: it is a notorious slander of baptism that obscures and abolishes its proper use. It is a false promise of the devil that draws us away from the truth of God. Or if you prefer: it is oil defiled by the devil's lies, which — like a spreading darkness — deceives the eyes of the simple.

They further add that all the faithful must receive the Holy Spirit after baptism through the laying on of hands, so that they may be counted as complete Christians — for, they say, no one will ever truly be a Christian who has not been anointed with the bishop's confirmation. These are their own words verbatim. But I had thought that everything belonging to Christianity was set down in writing and contained in Scripture. Now, as I can see, the true form of religion must be sought and learned from somewhere other than Scripture. So the whole wisdom of God, the heavenly truth, and the complete doctrine of Christ only make a person begin as a Christian — and oil makes him perfect. By this sentence all the apostles are condemned, and all the martyrs as well — people we know with certainty were never anointed, since the oil that would have completed them or made them Christians had not yet been made. But even if I say nothing, they refute themselves thoroughly. For how many people in their own flocks have they anointed after baptism? Why then do they allow so many half-Christians to remain in their care, when this deficiency could easily be remedied? Why do they so carelessly permit them to skip something that cannot be omitted without grave offense? Why do they not press more urgently the keeping of something so necessary — without which, by their own account, salvation cannot be obtained, unless one is perhaps overtaken by death? Truly, when they so freely allow it to be neglected, they are quietly admitting that it is not worth as much as they claim.

Finally they determine that this holy anointing deserves greater reverence than baptism — because this anointing is administered exclusively by the hands of the chief bishops, whereas baptism is commonly distributed by every priest. What can one say

here except that they have lost their minds entirely, so flattering their own inventions that in comparison they carelessly despise the holy ordinances of God? O mouth that robs God — do you dare set a greasy liquid, defiled only with the stench of your own breath and enchanted by the murmuring of words, against the sacrament of Christ and compare it with water consecrated by the word of God? But your wickedness counted even this too small unless you also placed it above baptism itself. These are the pronouncements of the Holy See — these are the oracles of the apostolic throne. But some of them, even by their own reckoning, have begun to moderate this unbridled madness somewhat. 'It is to be held in greater reverence,' they say — 'perhaps not because of greater virtue or benefit it confers, but because it is given by worthier men and applied to the worthier part of the body, namely the forehead. Or because it brings a greater increase of virtues, even though baptism is more effective for forgiveness.' But in the first argument, do they not expose themselves as Donatists — measuring the power of a sacrament by the worthiness of the minister? Very well, I will grant that confirmation may be called worthier by reason of the bishop's dignity. But if someone asks them where this great privilege of the bishops comes from, what reason will they offer besides their own desire? Did the apostles alone exercise the power that alone distributed the Holy Spirit? Are the bishops alone apostles? Indeed, are they apostles at all? But grant even that. Why do they not by the same argument conclude that bishops alone should handle the sacrament of the blood in the Lord's Supper — which they deny to lay people on the grounds that the Lord gave it to the apostles alone? If it was given to the apostles alone, why do they not conclude: therefore to bishops alone? But in that case they treat the

apostles as simple priests — while here their inconsistency suddenly promotes them to bishops. Finally, Ananias was no apostle, yet Paul was sent to him to receive his sight, be baptized, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. I will add this to the pile as well: if by God's law this was the proper office of bishops, why were they so bold as to hand it over to common priests — as we read in a certain letter of Gregory?

As for their other argument — how trivial, foolish, and ridiculous it is to call their confirmation worthier than God's baptism because the forehead is anointed with oil, while in baptism it is the back of the head — as though baptism were done with oil and not with water. I call all godly people to witness whether these men aim at nothing but corrupting the purity of the sacraments with their leaven. I have already said elsewhere that in the sacraments, the things that are from God barely shine through the gaps left by the crowd of human inventions. If anyone did not believe me then, let him at least now believe his own teachers. Look — setting aside the water and counting it as nothing, they hold the oil in baptism in the highest esteem. We, on the contrary, say that in baptism the forehead is also touched with water. Compared to this, we count your oil — whether in baptism or in confirmation — not worth a piece of dung. If anyone argues that it is sold for a higher price — the addition of a price corrupts whatever goodness it might have had, and a filthy deception stolen at a high price is all the more shameful. In their third argument they expose their own ungodliness, babbling that confirmation gives a greater increase of virtues than baptism. The apostles distributed the visible gifts of the Spirit through the laying on of hands. In what way does their greasy liq-

uid show any such fruitfulness? But away with these would-be moderators who cover one sacrilege with many sacrileges. It is like the Gordian knot — better cut apart than laboriously untied.

But now, when they find themselves lacking both the word of God and sound reason, they fall back — as usual — on claiming that this is a very ancient practice established by the consensus of many centuries. Even if that were true, it would gain them nothing. A sacrament is not from the earth but from heaven — not from human beings but from God alone. They must prove God to be the author of their confirmation if they want it received as a sacrament. But why do they appeal to antiquity when the ancient writers, whenever they speak precisely, never number more than two sacraments? If the defense of our faith were to be drawn from human sources, we have an unconquerable stronghold: the ancient fathers never acknowledged as sacraments what these men falsely claim to be sacraments. The ancient writers do speak of the laying on of hands — but do they ever call it a sacrament? Augustine plainly states that it is nothing other than prayer. Let them not try to argue against me here with their stale distinctions — that Augustine meant this not of the laying on of hands used in confirmation but of that used in healing or reconciliation. The book remains and is available for anyone to read. If I twist its meaning to anything different from what Augustine himself wrote, I give them full leave to attack me in their usual manner — not just with insults but with contempt. For he is speaking of those who returned from schism to the unity of the church. He denies that they needed to be rebaptized, saying that the laying on of hands is sufficient — that through the bond of peace the Lord may give them the Holy Spirit. But since it might seem strange that the laying on of hands should

be renewed rather than baptism, he explains the difference. 'For what else,' he says, 'is the laying on of hands but prayer over a person?' That this is his meaning is confirmed by another passage where he writes: 'A hand is laid on amended heretics for the joining of charity — which is the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit — without which, whatever holy things a person possesses avail nothing for salvation.'

I wish to God we still observed the custom I described as belonging to earlier times — before this prematurely born imitation of a sacrament was invented. Not the confirmation they have fabricated, which cannot even be named without injury to baptism — but rather a catechetical examination, in which children or those approaching the age of reason would give an account of their faith before the church. The best form of catechism would be a written summary, laying out clearly and accessibly the substance of all the articles of our religion — articles about which the whole church of the faithful ought to be in complete agreement. A child of about ten years old would present himself to the church to make his confession of faith. He would be examined on every article and required to answer each one. If he was ignorant of anything or did not understand it, he could be taught. He would then profess before the church — with the congregation watching and witnessing — the one, true, and pure faith in which the people of God worship the one God with one mind. If this discipline were still in force to-day, the laziness of some parents — who carelessly neglect their children's instruction as though it were no concern of theirs — would be sharpened, since they could not then omit it without open shame. There would be greater unity of faith among the Christian people, and less of the deep ignorance and crudeness so

widespread today. Fewer people would be so rashly swept away by new and unfamiliar doctrines. And everyone would have, as it were, a structured grounding in Christian learning.

PENANCE.

In the next place they set penance, which they treat so confusedly and disorderly that no one can take away from their doctrine anything certain or sound. We have already elsewhere given a thorough account of what Scripture teaches about repentance and what they also teach about it. Here we need only to touch on the reason they have had for elevating penance to the status of a sacrament — an opinion that has long held sway in churches and schools. But first I will say briefly something about the practice of the early church, which they have misappropriated to establish their fabricated invention. The order they kept in public penance was this: those who had completed the penances assigned to them were reconciled with a solemn laying on of hands. This was the sign of absolution — by which the sinner himself was lifted up before God with confidence of pardon, and the church was gently reminded to receive him back into fellowship and forget his offense. Cyprian often calls this 'giving peace.' To give this act greater dignity and make it more respected by the people, it was ordained that the bishop's authority should always be involved. From this came the decree of the second Council of Carthage: 'It is not lawful for a priest to reconcile a penitent publicly at the Mass.' And another decree of the Council of Orange: 'Let those who depart this life during the time of their penance be admitted to communion without the laying on of hands used in reconciliation. If they recover from illness, let them stand in the rank of penitents, and when the

time is fully completed, let them receive from the bishop the laying on of hands used in reconciliation.' Again the decree of the third Council of Carthage: 'Let no priest reconcile a penitent without the bishop's authority.' All these measures aimed at ensuring that the seriousness with which they wanted this matter handled would not be weakened by too much leniency. They therefore wanted the bishop to serve as judge in this — a person more likely to examine the matter with care. Yet Cyprian shows in one place that not only the bishop but the entire clergy laid their hands on the person. For he says: 'When the time of their penance is completed, they come to receive communion, and through the laying on of hands by the bishop and the clergy they receive the right to participate in communion.' Over time this ceremony was also used in private absolutions alongside public penance. From this came the distinction in Gratian between public and private reconciliation. I regard that ancient practice which Cyprian describes as holy and beneficial for the church, and I would like to see it restored today. As for the later practice, while I would not presume to condemn it outright or speak against it too harshly, I think it is less necessary. Whatever may be said of it, the laying on of hands in penance is a ceremony of human — not divine — institution. It belongs among the secondary and outward practices of the church, which are not to be despised, but which should occupy a lower rank than those commanded to us by the word of the Lord.

But the Romanists and the scholastics — who habitually corrupt everything by misinterpreting it — are very industrious in finding a sacrament here. This should not surprise us, since they look for knots in rushes. But even at their best, they leave the matter tangled, uncertain, and thrown into confusion by conflicting

opinions. They say either that outward penance is a sacrament — and if so, it should be taken as the sign of inward penance, that is, contrition of heart, which would then be the 'thing' of the sacrament — or that both together form one sacrament, not two, but one complete one. Or again: that outward penance is the sacrament only; that inward penance is both the thing and the sacrament; and that forgiveness of sins is the thing but not the sacrament. Let anyone who remembers the definition of a sacrament we have already set out test by that definition what these men call a sacrament — and they will find it is not an outward ceremony ordained by the Lord for the confirming of our faith. If they object that my definition is not a law they are bound to obey, let them hear Augustine, whom they profess to hold in the highest honor. He says: 'Visible sacraments were ordained for the sake of people of the flesh, so that by the steps of sacraments they might be led from what is seen by the eyes to what is understood by the mind.' What do they themselves see — or what can they show to others — in what they call the sacrament of penance? Augustine also says in another place: 'It is therefore called a sacrament because in it one thing is seen and another thing is understood. What is seen has a bodily form; what is understood has a spiritual fruit.' None of this applies in any way to the sacrament of penance as they have invented it, where there is no bodily form that can represent a spiritual fruit.

And to fight them on their own ground — if a sacrament is to be found anywhere here, could it not be said with far more plausibility that the priest's absolution is a sacrament than that inward or outward penance is? For one could readily argue that absolution is a ceremony assuring our faith of the forgiveness of sins, and that

it has the promise of the keys — as they call it — 'Whatever you bind or loose on earth shall be bound or loosed in heaven.' But someone might object that most of those absolved by priests receive no such thing from the absolution — whereas by their own doctrine the sacraments of the new covenant must actually accomplish what they signify. But this is only worth laughing at. For just as in the Supper they posit a double eating — sacramental eating common to both the good and the wicked, and spiritual eating belonging only to the good — why could they not also claim that absolution is received in two ways? But I have never been able to understand what they meant by this doctrine, which we have already shown at length to be at odds with the truth of God when we addressed that argument directly. My only point here is to show that this difficulty does not prevent them from calling the priest's absolution a sacrament. For they could answer, drawing on Augustine, that sanctification exists without the visible sacrament, and the visible sacrament without inward sanctification. Again, that the sacraments work what they signify only in the elect. Again, that some put on Christ only to the extent of partaking in the sacrament, others to the extent of sanctification — the first, both good and wicked do equally; the second, only the good do. Truly they have erred in a more than childish way, and are blind in the full light of day, when with all their laboring they have failed to notice something so plain and obvious to everyone.

Yet lest they become too proud, wherever they locate the sacrament, I deny that penance ought rightly to be counted as a sacrament at all. First, because there is no specific promise attached to it — and the promise is the only substance of a sacrament. Second, because whatever ceremony is displayed here is a pure invention of

human beings, whereas we have already proven that the ceremonies of sacraments can only be ordained by God. Therefore the sacrament of penance which they invented is a lie and a deception. They have adorned this fabricated sacrament with a fitting title, calling it 'a second plank after shipwreck' — meaning that if someone has ruined the garment of innocence received in baptism through sin, he may repair it through penance. This saying comes from Jerome, and whoever wrote it cannot be excused — it is utterly wrong if interpreted in their sense. As though baptism were erased by sin, rather than called to mind by every sinner, each time he thinks of the forgiveness of sins, so that he may rally himself, recover confidence, and strengthen his faith that the forgiveness promised him in baptism will be obtained. But what Jerome said harshly and loosely — that by penance baptism is repaired (meaning the baptism from which those fall away who deserve excommunication from the church) — these fine interpreters twist to their own wickedness. Therefore you will speak most accurately if you call baptism the sacrament of repentance, since it is given as a confirmation of grace and a seal of assurance to those who purpose repentance. And lest you think this is our own invention — besides agreeing with the words of Scripture, it clearly appears to have been commonly stated as an unquestioned principle in the early church. For in the book *Faith for Peter*, attributed to Augustine, baptism is called 'the sacrament of faith and of repentance.' But why do we reach for uncertain sayings? As though we could require anything plainer than what the evangelist records — that John preached the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

EXTREME UNCTION, AS THEY CALL IT.

The third fabricated sacrament is extreme unction — performed only by a priest, and only at the point of death (as they call it), with oil consecrated by a bishop, and with these words: 'By this holy anointing and by His most tender mercy, may God pardon you whatever you have sinned through sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste.' They claim it has two powers: the forgiveness of sins and the relief of bodily sickness if appropriate — and if not, the salvation of the soul. They say its institution is stated by James, whose words are: 'Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him' (James 5:14). This anointing belongs in the same category as the laying on of hands we discussed earlier — it is a theatrical pretense by which they imitate the apostles without reason and without result. Mark records that the apostles, at their first sending out, healed the sick by the command they had received from the Lord — and that in healing the sick they used oil (Mark 6:13). 'They anointed many sick people with oil,' he says, 'and they were healed.' This is what James had in view when he commanded the elders to be called together to anoint the sick person. That no higher mystery is contained in such ceremonies will be easily judged by those who observe how great liberty the Lord and His apostles used in outward things. When restoring sight to the blind, the Lord made clay from dust and spittle; He healed others by touching them; others with only His word (John 9:6; Matthew 9:29; Luke 18:42; Acts 3:6; Acts 5:16; Acts 19:12; Psalm 45:8). In the same way, the apostles healed some diseases by word

alone, others by touch, and others by anointing. It is reasonable to suppose that this anointing was not employed without purpose, like other things too. I grant that — yet not as a means of healing, but only as a sign, so that those of slower understanding might be reminded where such great power was coming from, so they would not give credit to the apostles themselves. And it is a common and well-established thing that oil signifies the Holy Spirit and His gifts. But that same gift of healing has vanished, just as the other miracles have — miracles the Lord willed to be displayed for a time in order to magnify the new preaching of the Gospel permanently. Therefore, even granting all we can grant, that anointing was a sacrament of those healing powers ministered through the apostles' hands at that time — it now has nothing to do with us, to whom the ministry of such powers has not been committed.

And by what stronger argument do they make a sacrament of this anointing than of all the other signs described to us in Scripture? Why do they not designate a pool of Siloam for sick people to bathe in at regular intervals? 'That would be done in vain,' they say. Truly, no more in vain than anointing. Why do they not lie down on top of dead people, since Paul raised a dead child by lying upon him (Acts 20:10)? Why is clay made from spittle and dust not a sacrament? But the others, they say, were only singular examples — this one was given by James as a command. Truly James spoke for that time, when the church still enjoyed such blessings from God. They claim that the same power is still present in their anointing — but experience shows us otherwise. Let no one marvel now that they have dared with such boldness to mock souls — souls they know are senseless and blind when robbed of the word of God, that is, of their life and light — since they are not

even ashamed to try to mock the living and feeling bodily senses. They make themselves worthy of ridicule when they boast of being endowed with the grace of healing. Truly the Lord is present with His people in every age, and as often as need arises He aids their sicknesses no less than He did in ancient times. But He no longer displays those visible powers or distributes miracles through the hands of apostles — because that gift was both temporary and has in part been lost through human ingratitude.

Therefore, just as the apostles had good reason to testify openly, through the sign of oil, that the grace of healing given to them was not their own power but the power of the Holy Spirit — so on the other side, those who make a foul and powerless oil to be the Holy Spirit's power do wrong to the Holy Spirit. This is entirely like saying that all oil is the power of the Holy Spirit because oil is used in Scripture with that meaning, or that every dove is the Holy Spirit because He appeared in that form (Matthew 3:16; John 1:32). But let them deal with these matters themselves. For our present purposes, this much is sufficient: we see with complete certainty that their anointing is no sacrament — for it is neither a ceremony ordained by God nor does it have a promise from God. For when we require these two things in a sacrament — that it be a ceremony ordained by God and that it have a promise of God — we also require that the same ceremony be given to us and that the promise belong to us. No one claims that circumcision is now a sacrament of the Christian church, even though it was both an ordinance of God and had a promise attached to it — because it was neither commanded to us, nor was the promise attached to it given to us under the same conditions. That the promise they proudly boast of in their anointing is not given to us, we have clearly shown

— and they demonstrate it themselves through experience. The ceremony should only have been used by those endowed with the gift of healing — not by these butchers, who are more skilled at killing and destroying than at healing.

But even if they were to establish that what James commands about anointing applies to our age — which they are very far from doing — even then they would have little success in proving the unction they have practiced on us. James says all sick people should be anointed. These men smear their greasy oil not on sick people but on half-dead bodies at the point of death, when life is already laboring at their very lips — or, as they themselves say, 'in extremis.' If their sacrament contains a remedy that can ease the severity of illness or at least bring some comfort to the soul, they are very cruel in never administering it in time. James says the sick person should be anointed by the elders of the church. These men allow no one to anoint but the sacrificing priest. They interpret the Greek word *presbyteros* in James as meaning priests, and foolishly claim the plural number is used merely for stylistic reasons — as though the churches at that time were swarming with troops of sacrificing priests who could walk in long solemn processions carrying a pageant of holy oil. When James simply says sick people should be anointed, I understand nothing other than common oil to be meant — and that is all that appears in Mark's account. These men will use no oil except what has been consecrated by a bishop — that is, warmed by much breathing upon it, enchanted with much mumbling, and greeted nine times with kneeling in this fashion: three times, 'Hail, holy oil'; three times, 'Hail, holy chrism'; three times, 'Hail, holy balm.' From whom did they suck in such conjuring? James says: when the sick person has been

anointed with oil and prayer has been offered over him, if he has committed sins they will be forgiven him — meaning that with guilt removed they may be released from punishment. Not that sins are washed away with grease, but that the prayers of the faithful, by which the suffering brother is commended to God, will not be in vain. These men lie wickedly that through their holy — that is, their abominable — anointing sins are forgiven. See how well they will succeed when they have been freely allowed to abuse the testimony of James at their pleasure. And so that we do not need to labor long to prove this, their own chronicles relieve us of the difficulty. For they report that Pope Innocent, who governed the church of Rome in Augustine's time, decreed that not only priests but all Christians should use oil to anoint themselves and others when needed. Sigebert records this in his *Chronicles*.

ECCLESIASTICAL ORDERS.

The fourth place in their catalog is held by the sacrament of order — itself so fruitful that it produces from itself seven little sacraments. It is quite laughable that while they insist there are seven sacraments, when they actually count them out they arrive at thirteen. They cannot excuse this by saying these are all one sacrament because they all lead to the priesthood and are merely steps toward it. For since it is evident that each one has its own separate ceremony, and they themselves say that each confers different graces, no one can doubt they should be called seven distinct sacraments if their position is accepted. Why argue about it as though it were uncertain, since they themselves clearly and separately declare seven? But first we will briefly gather up along the way the many disagreeable absurdities they press on us when they commend

their orders to us as sacraments. Then we will examine whether the ceremony churches use in ordaining ministers ought to be called a sacrament at all. They therefore make seven ecclesiastical orders or ranks, which they honor with the name of a sacrament. These are: doorkeepers, readers, exorcists, acolytes, subdeacons, deacons, and priests. Seven, they say, corresponding to the seven-fold grace of the Holy Spirit — which those promoted to these ranks ought to receive and which is given more abundantly at their ordination. This number is consecrated through a distorted reading of Scripture. They think they have read seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah — whereas Isaiah actually lists only six, and the prophet was not intending to give a complete list, since the Spirit is elsewhere also called the Spirit of life, of sanctification, and of adoption, in addition to the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. Some more subtle thinkers make not seven orders but nine, after the likeness — as they say — of the triumphant church in heaven. But even among them there is disagreement: some want the tonsure of the clergy to be the first order of all, and the bishopric the last; others leave out the tonsure entirely and count the archbishopric among the orders. Isidore divides them differently, making psalmists and readers into separate offices — psalmists for singing and readers for reading Scripture to instruct the people. The canons maintain this same distinction. In such great diversity, what are we to follow or avoid? Should we say there are seven orders? The schoolmaster teaches this — but the most enlightened doctors determine otherwise. And even they disagree among themselves. Moreover, the

most sacred canons point in yet another direction. This is what happens when people dispute about matters of religion without the word of God.

But this surpasses all foolishness — the claim that in every one of these orders Christ joins His example to theirs. He exercised the office of doorkeeper, they say, when He drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple with a whip made of cords. He showed Himself to be a doorkeeper when He said: 'I am the door.' He took on the office of reader when He read from Isaiah in the synagogue. He performed the office of exorcist when, touching the tongue and ears of the deaf-mute, He restored his hearing. He showed Himself to be an acolyte in these words: 'Whoever follows me does not walk in darkness.' He carried out the office of subdeacon when, girded with a linen cloth, He washed the disciples' feet. He played the part of a deacon when He distributed His body and blood in the Supper. He fulfilled the office of priest when He offered Himself as a sacrifice to His Father on the cross. These things can hardly be heard without laughing — I am amazed that they could have been written without laughing, if indeed those who wrote them were human beings. Most notable is the subtlety with which they philosophize about the name 'acolyte,' calling him a 'ceroferar' — a candle-bearer — with a word apparently invented by sorcery, a word utterly unknown in any nation or language, whereas the Greek *akolouthos* simply means 'follower.' However, if I were to spend serious time refuting these men, I myself would rightly deserve to be laughed at — such nonsense and mockery it all is.

But so that they may not continue to deceive even simple people with false appearances, their vanity must be briefly exposed. They ordain readers, psalmists, doorkeepers, and acolytes with

great pomp and ceremony — for offices which they then assign to children or to those they call laymen. For who for the most part lights the candles, who pours wine and water into the cruet, but a child or some ordinary lay person making his living by it? Do not these same people sing? Do they not open and close the church doors? For who has ever seen an acolyte or doorkeeper in their churches actually performing his office? Rather, the boy who performed the acolyte's duties when he was young — once he is admitted to the order of acolytes, ceases to do the very thing he now claims the title of, so that they seem deliberately to shed the office the moment they take on the name. Behold why they need to be consecrated by sacraments and receive the Holy Spirit — namely, so that they may do nothing. If they appeal to the disorder of the times — arguing that this is the waywardness of the age, causing men to abandon and neglect their ministries — then let them also confess that today there is no use or fruit of their holy orders in the church, which they praise so extravagantly. Let them confess that their whole church is under a curse: because it allows candles and cruets to be handled by children and laypeople, when none but consecrated acolytes are worthy to touch them; and because it assigns the singing to children, when only a consecrated mouth should be heard. As for their exorcists — to what purpose do they consecrate them? I know the Jews had their exorcists — but they were so called because of the exorcisms and incantations they actually used. Who has ever heard of these counterfeit exorcists actually giving any demonstration of their supposed calling? They are said to have been given power to lay their hands on the deranged, on catechumens, and on the demon-possessed — but they cannot convince the demons that they have any such power, because the

demons not only refuse to obey their commands but actually exercise authority over them. For you can hardly find one in ten of these exorcists who is not himself led by an evil spirit. Therefore everything they babble about their petty orders is patched together from foolish and tasteless lies. We have spoken elsewhere about the ancient acolytes, doorkeepers, and readers when we described the order of the church. Our purpose here is only to fight against this newly devised invention of the sevenfold sacrament in ecclesiastical orders — of which nothing is to be read anywhere except among these foolish chatterers, the Sorbonists and canonists.

Now let us consider the ceremonies they use in connection with these orders. First, all those they receive into their clerical ranks are admitted by one common ceremony: the shaving of the crown of the head. They shave the crown, they say, so that it may signify kingly dignity, because the clergy ought to be kings — ruling themselves and others. For Peter says of them: 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession.' But it was sacrilege to claim for themselves alone what was given to the whole church, and to boast proudly in a title they had stolen from the faithful. Peter speaks to the whole church — these men twist it to apply to a few shaved men, as though it were said to them alone: be holy; as though they alone were purchased by the blood of Christ; as though they alone were made by Christ into a kingdom and priesthood for God. Then they assign further reasons: the top of the head is left bare so that it may show that the mind is free for the Lord, who may behold the glory of God with uncovered face. Or so that they may learn that the sins of their eyes and mouths must be cut away. Or the shaving of the head represents the putting away of earthly things, while the ring of hair left

around the crown represents the goods retained for their support. All of it in signs — because, of course, the veil of the temple has not yet been torn in two. So, satisfied that they have fully performed their duty by representing all these things through their tonsure, they perform none of those things in actual fact. How long will they mock us with such false appearances and deceits? The clergy, by the shearing of a few hairs, signify that they have cast away the abundance of earthly goods, that they behold the glory of God, and that they have put to death the lusts of ears and eyes — yet no class of people is more greedy, more dull and senseless, or more given to lust. Why do they not rather truly practice holiness, instead of counterfeiting its appearance with lying signs?

Moreover, when they say that the clergy's tonsure originates from the Nazirites, what are they claiming except that their practices are derived from Jewish ceremonies — or rather that they are nothing but Jewish ritual? And when they further say that Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul himself, having made a vow, shaved their heads for purification — they reveal their own gross ignorance. Priscilla is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture as having shaved her head. Aquila's case is also doubtful, since the shaving described in Acts may just as well be attributed to Paul alone. But so that we may not deprive them of the example of Paul which they claim, let simpler readers note this: Paul never shaved his head for any act of sanctification, but only to accommodate the weakness of his brothers. I am accustomed to call such vows vows of charity rather than of godliness — that is, not undertaken as service to God, but to bear with the frailty of the weak — as Paul himself says, that he became a Jew to the Jews. Therefore he did this just once, and for a brief time, simply to conform himself temporarily

to the Jews. When these men imitate the purifications of the Nazirites without any purpose, what are they doing but creating a new Judaism — while wrongly striving to follow the old one? With the same kind of religious logic was composed that decretal letter which, appealing to the apostle, forbids the clergy from letting their hair grow and requires them to cut it round like a bowl. As though the apostle, in teaching what is becoming for all people, had the round haircut of the clergy in mind. From this, let readers judge the value and quality of those other mysteries that follow, for which this serves as the entrance.

Where the clergy's tonsure actually originated can be seen clearly enough from Augustine alone. In his day, only vain and effeminate men who desired an excessively groomed and polished appearance let their hair grow. It seemed poor example to allow the clergy to do the same. Therefore, clergy were commanded either to cut or shave their heads so as to show no trace of womanish vanity. But this became so widespread that certain monks, wishing to distinguish their holiness by a notably different appearance from other people, allowed their hair to grow long. Later, when the fashion shifted to wearing long hair — and certain nations were added to Christendom where long hair had always been customary, such as France, Germany, and England — it is likely that clergy everywhere shaved their heads to avoid appearing to seek a fashionable appearance. Finally, in a more corrupt age, when all ancient practices had either been distorted or degenerated into superstition — and since no one could see any reason for the clergy's shaving (for nothing remained but a pointless imitation) — they searched for a mystical meaning and now superstitiously press this upon us to justify their sacrament. At the consecration of door-

keepers, they receive the keys of the church — to signify that its keeping is committed to them. Readers receive the holy Bible. Exorcists receive the formulas of exorcism to use over the deranged and those to be catechized. Acolytes receive the candles and the cruet. Behold — these are the ceremonies in which, so God wills, there resides such hidden power that they are not only signs and tokens but also causes of invisible grace. This is what their definition demands of them, if they are to be counted among the sacraments. But to conclude briefly: it is an absurdity that they make these minor orders sacraments in their schools and canons — when even by the admission of those who teach this, these orders were unknown to the primitive church and devised many centuries later. For sacraments, since they contain a promise of God, cannot be ordained by angels or human beings but by God alone, whose exclusive office it is to make promises.

Three orders remain, which they call the major orders. Subdiaconate — as they call it — was moved into that number after the group of lesser orders began to grow. Because they believe they have scriptural testimony for these, they honor them with the special title of holy orders. But now we must see how badly they abuse the ordinances of God to serve their purpose. We will begin with the order of the priesthood — or the sacrificial office, as they also call it. By these two names they mean one thing: those to whom belongs the offering of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ on the altar, the pronouncing of prayers, and the blessing of the gifts of God. Therefore at their consecration they receive the paten and the host as tokens signifying the power given them to offer acceptable sacrifices to God. Their hands are anointed, by which sign they are taught that they have been given power to consecrate. We

will speak of the ceremonies later. Concerning the substance of the matter, I say this: it has no claim in the word of God — which they pretend to follow — and they could not have more wickedly corrupted the order God established. This must be accepted as settled — as we affirmed when treating of the papal Mass — that all who call themselves sacrificing priests to offer a sacrifice of appeasement do wrong to Christ. He was appointed and consecrated by the Father as priest with an oath, according to the order of Melchizedek, without end and without successor. He once offered a sacrifice of eternal, atoning cleansing and reconciliation, and now — having entered the heavenly sanctuary — He makes intercession for us. In Him we are all sacrificing priests — but for praises and thanksgivings, to offer ourselves and all we have to God. It was His singular and exclusive office to appease God and purge sins through His one offering. When these men take this upon themselves, what can be said of their sacrificing priesthood except that it is ungodly and full of sacrilege? Truly they are too wicked in daring to honor it with the name of a sacrament. As for the true office of ministry, which is commended to us by the mouth of Christ — I willingly count that among the sacraments. For it involves a ceremony drawn first from Scripture, and one that Paul testifies is not empty or superfluous but is a faithful sign of spiritual grace. The reason I have not listed it as a third sacrament alongside the other two is that it is not universal and common to all the faithful but is a special rite for a particular office. But whatever honor is given to the Christian ministry, this gives no grounds for pride to the papal sacrificers. For Christ commanded that distributors of His Gospel and mysteries should be ordained — not sacrificers consecrated. He gave them the command to preach the

Gospel and feed the flock — not to offer sacrifices. He promised them the grace of the Holy Spirit not to make atoning purification for sin, but to rightly execute and maintain the government of the church.

The ceremonies fit the substance very well. When our Lord sent out the apostles to preach the Gospel, He breathed on them. By this sign He represented the power of the Holy Spirit which He was giving them. These men have retained this breathing — and as though they were pushing the Holy Spirit out through their throats, they whisper over the sorry priests they make: 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' They leave nothing unperversely imitated — not like actors, who use their gestures with both art and meaning, but like apes, who mimic everything carelessly and without discernment. 'We are following the Lord's example,' they say. But the Lord did many things He did not intend as examples for us to follow. The Lord said to His disciples: 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' He also said to Lazarus: 'Lazarus, come forth.' He said to the paralyzed man: 'Rise and walk.' Why do they not say the same to every dead person and every paralyzed person? He demonstrated a proof of His divine power when He breathed on the apostles and filled them with the grace of the Holy Spirit. If they attempt to do the same thing, they are enviously presuming to rival God and practically challenging Him to a contest — yet they fall far short of the effect, and with this foolish gesture do nothing but mock Christ. Truly they are so shameless as to claim they give the Holy Spirit. How true that is, experience declares loudly — so many as are consecrated priests are turned from horses into donkeys, from fools into madmen. Yet I am not arguing with them about that. My only point is to condemn the ceremony itself, which should never have been adopted

as a pattern to follow, since Christ used it as a singular sign for one unique miracle — so far is it from excusing them to claim they are following His example.

But from whom did they receive the anointing? They answer that they received it from the sons of Aaron, from whom their order also took its origin. They would always rather defend themselves with wrongful examples than confess that they have invented what they practice without any warrant. But in the meantime they fail to see that by claiming to be successors of the sons of Aaron, they are doing wrong to the priesthood of Christ — the priesthood that all the ancient sacrificial offices merely foreshadowed and prefigured. In Him, therefore, they were all contained and fulfilled; in Him they came to an end — as we have repeatedly said, and as the letter to the Hebrews plainly testifies without needing any commentary. But if they are so delighted with the ceremonies of Moses, why do they not also quickly bring oxen, calves, and lambs to offer as sacrifices? They have indeed retained a large portion of the ancient tabernacle ritual and the whole Jewish manner of worship — yet what is missing from their religion is that they do not sacrifice calves and oxen. Who cannot see that this practice of anointing is far more harmful than circumcision ever was — especially when joined with the superstitious Pharisaic notion that the outward act itself earns merit? The Jews placed their confidence of righteousness in circumcision; these men place spiritual graces in anointing. Therefore, in their desire to counterfeit the Levites, they become apostates from Christ and disqualify themselves from the office of pastor.

This is, if you will, the holy oil that imprints an indelible mark. As though oil could not be wiped off with dust and salt — or if it has soaked in more deeply, with soap. But, they say, this mark is spiritual. What does oil have to do with the soul? Have they forgotten what they so often quote to us from Augustine — that if the word is taken away from the water, it is nothing but water, and that it is from the word that it becomes a sacrament? What word will they point to in their greasy liquid? Will they show the command given to Moses concerning the anointing of the sons of Aaron? But there is also a command given about the coat, the ephod, the turban, the crown of holiness with which Aaron was to be adorned, and the coats, sashes, and caps with which the sons of Aaron were to be clothed. There is a command to kill a calf and burn its fat as incense, to cut up rams and burn them, to consecrate their ears and garments with the blood of another ram — along with countless other requirements. Having passed over all of these, I am amazed that only the anointing with oil pleases them. But if they love being sprinkled, why do they prefer oil to blood? Truly they are cleverly constructing a single religion out of Christianity, Judaism, and paganism — stitching patches together. Therefore their anointing is without worth, lacking the salt — that is, the word of God. The laying on of hands remains. While I grant that in true and lawful ordinations it is a sacrament, I deny that it has any part in this theater, where they neither obey the command of Christ nor look to the purpose to which the promise ought to lead us. If they will not be denied the sign, they must apply it to the thing itself for which it was appointed (Exodus 30:30).

About the order of deacons I would not argue with them, if the ministry that existed in apostolic times and in the purer church were restored to its uncorrupted form. But what resemblance is there between that and those whom these men present to us as deacons? I am not speaking of the men themselves — lest they complain that the doctrine is being judged unfairly by the faults of individuals. I am saying that as a matter of doctrine they wrongly appeal to the example of deacons ordained by the apostolic church for those whom they present to us. They say it belongs to their deacons to stand beside the priests and assist in all the sacramental acts — in baptism, in the chrism, with the paten and the chalice; to bring in the offerings and place them on the altar; to prepare and cover the Lord's table; to carry the cross; and to proclaim and sing the Gospel and Epistle to the people. Is there a single word here of the true ministry of deacons? Now let us hear how they are instituted. At the ordination of a deacon, the bishop alone lays on his hand. He places a prayer book and a stole on his left shoulder, to signify that he has received the light yoke of the Lord, by which he may subject to the fear of God all things that belong to the left side. He gives him the text of the Gospel, that he may understand himself to be a proclaimer of it. And what do any of these things have to do with deacons? It is as if someone said he was ordaining apostles — but appointed them only to burn incense, clean statues, sweep churches, catch mice, and drive out dogs. Who could tolerate such people being called apostles and compared with the actual apostles of Christ? Therefore let them stop falsely calling deacons those whom they ordain only for their theatrical performances. Indeed, even by the very name they use, they make clear what kind of office they have in mind — for they call them Levites and trace

their order and origin back to the children of Levi. I am happy to grant them this, so long as they do not afterward dress them in borrowed plumage.

What purpose is there in speaking of subdeacons? Whereas in ancient times they were actually appointed to care for the poor, these men assign to them I know not what trivial tasks — to bring the chalice and paten, the little cruet of water, and the towel to the altar; to pour water for handwashing; and the like. When they speak of receiving and presenting offerings, they mean those they devour as set apart for their holy use. The form of their consecration fits this office very well: the subdeacon receives from the bishop the paten and the chalice; from the archdeacon, the cruet of water, the hand cloth, and such other paraphernalia. Within these trifles they demand that we acknowledge the Holy Spirit to be enclosed. What godly person could bring themselves to grant this? But to conclude — we may determine the same of these as of the rest, and need not repeat what has already been said. This should be enough to teach the sober and teachable, whom I have undertaken to instruct: there is no sacrament of God except where a ceremony is joined to a promise — or rather, where a promise is seen in a ceremony. Here not a single syllable of any definite promise is to be found. Therefore it is pointless to look for a ceremony to confirm the promise. Furthermore, not one of the ceremonies they use is found to have been instituted by God. Therefore there can be no sacrament here.

MATRIMONY.

The last is matrimony, which everyone acknowledges to have been ordained by God — yet no one until the time of Gregory ever regarded it as a sacrament. And what sober person would ever have thought so? It is a good and holy ordinance of God — but so are farming, carpentry, shoemaking, and barbering, which are all lawful ordinances of God, yet no one calls them sacraments. For a sacrament requires not only that it be a work of God, but that it be an outward ceremony appointed by God to confirm a promise. That nothing of the kind is present in matrimony, even children can judge. But, they say, matrimony is a sign of a holy thing — namely, of the spiritual union of Christ with the church. If by the word 'sign' they mean a token set before us by God to raise up the assurance of our faith, they are far from the truth. If they simply use 'sign' to mean something that expresses a resemblance, I will show how clever their reasoning is. Paul says: 'As one star differs from another star in glory, so shall it be in the resurrection of the dead.' There is one sacrament. Christ says: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed.' There is another. And again: 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.' There is a third. Isaiah says: 'Behold, the Lord will feed His flock like a shepherd.' There is a fourth. And in another place: 'The Lord will go forth like a mighty man.' There is a fifth. Where will this end? By this logic, anything can be a sacrament. There are as many sacraments in Scripture as there are parables and comparisons. Indeed, theft itself would be a sacrament, since it is written that the day of the Lord comes like a thief. Who can bear such foolish prattling from these sophists? I grant that whenever we see a vine, it is very good to call to mind what Christ says: 'I am the vine, you are the branches, my Father is the vinedresser.' And whenever a shepherd comes toward us with

his flock, it is good to recall: 'I am the good shepherd; my sheep hear my voice.' But if anyone adds such comparisons to the number of sacraments, he needs to be sent to a madhouse.

But they press further with the words of Paul, in which they claim he gives the name 'sacrament' to matrimony: 'He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church — because we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I am speaking of Christ and the church.' But to handle the Scriptures this way is to mix heaven and earth together. Paul, in order to show married men what exceptional love they ought to bear toward their wives, sets Christ before them as an example — for as He poured out the fullness of His compassion on the church which He had betrothed to Himself, so every man ought to be disposed toward his own wife. It follows: 'He who loves his wife loves himself, as Christ loved the church.' Now, to show how Christ loved the church as Himself — indeed, how He made Himself one with His bride the church — Paul applies to Christ what Moses records Adam said of himself. When Eve was brought before him, shaped from his side, Adam said: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.' Paul testifies that all of this was spiritually fulfilled in Christ and in us when he says we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones — indeed, one flesh with Him. Finally Paul adds his conclusion: 'This is a great mystery.' And so that no one would be confused by the double meaning of his words, he makes clear that he is not speaking of the physical union of man and woman, but of the spiritual marriage of Christ and the

church. And truly it is a great mystery indeed — that Christ allowed a rib to be taken from Himself from which we might be formed; that is, when He was strong He chose to become weak so that we might be strengthened with His strength, and that we might no longer live for ourselves but He might live in us.

The word "sacrament" deceived them. But was it right for the whole church to suffer the penalty of their ignorance? Paul said "mystery." The translator could have left the Greek word as it was, since Latin readers were familiar with it, or could have translated it as "secret." Instead, he chose to use the word "sacrament" -- but in no other sense than Paul had called it a "mystery" in Greek. Now let them go and rail against the knowledge of languages, through ignorance of which they were so terribly blind for so long in such an easy matter that anyone could have seen through it. But why do they cling so stubbornly to the word "sacrament" in this one passage while ignoring it elsewhere? The translator used it in the first Epistle to Timothy and in the same Epistle to the Ephesians -- in every case for "mystery." But let that slip be forgiven them. At the very least, liars should have a good memory. Once they have dressed up marriage with the title of a sacrament, they then turn around and call it uncleanness, defilement, and fleshly filthiness. How dizzyingly inconsistent is that? How absurd it is to bar priests from a sacrament! If they deny that they bar them from the sacrament and claim they only bar them from the act of sexual union, they still do not escape. They teach that the physical union itself is part of the sacrament, and that by it alone the union we have with Christ in our shared nature is represented -- because a man and woman become one only through physical union. However, some of them have found two sacraments here: one of God and the soul

(in the betrothed couple), and another of Christ and the church (in husband and wife). In any case, the physical union is part of the sacrament. No Christian should be barred from it -- unless perhaps the sacraments of Christians are so incompatible that they cannot coexist. There is also another contradiction in their teaching. They claim that grace of the Holy Spirit is given in every sacrament. They teach that marriage is a sacrament. Yet they deny that the Holy Spirit is ever present in the act of marriage.

And because they would not simply mock the church, consider what a long chain of errors, lies, deceptions, and abuses they have linked to this one error! A person might well say they did nothing but build a den of wickedness when they turned marriage into a sacrament. Once they achieved this, they took over the hearing of marriage cases. It was a spiritual matter, they said, that secular judges had no right to handle. Then they made laws to establish their tyranny -- laws that were partly openly wicked against God and partly deeply unjust toward people. For example: marriages made between young people without their parents' consent should remain in force. Marriages between relatives up to the seventh degree of kinship are not lawful, and any such marriages must be dissolved. They fabricated these degrees in contradiction to the laws of all nations and Moses' civil laws. A man who has divorced an adulteress may not remarry. People related through spiritual kinship (such as godparents) may not marry each other. No marriages may be performed from Septuagesima to the octave of Easter, for three weeks before Midsummer, or from Advent to Epiphany. And countless other such rules that would take too long to list. At last,

we must climb out of this mud, where our discussion has lingered longer than I would have liked. Yet I think I have accomplished something by partly stripping the lion's skins from these donkeys.

CHAPTER 20



Since we have previously described two kinds of government in humanity, and since we have already discussed the one that deals with the soul or inner person and concerns eternal life, this section requires us to say something about the other kind -- the one that pertains only to civil affairs and the outward standards of behavior. The topic seems disconnected from the spiritual teaching of faith that I undertook to discuss. Yet the following pages will show that I am right to join them together -- indeed, that I am compelled to do so. On the one hand, deranged and barbarous people furiously try to overthrow this order that God established. On the other hand, the flatterers of princes elevate their power beyond all measure, setting it up against the empire of God Himself. Unless both of these dangers are addressed, the purity of faith will be lost. Besides, it is no small benefit for us to know how lovingly God has provided for humanity in this area. This knowledge should foster in us a greater desire for godliness as we show our gratitude. First, before we get into the subject itself, we must hold firmly to the distinction we set down earlier. We must not unwisely mix these two things together, as many commonly do, since they require entirely different consideration. When some people hear that the Gospel promises a liberty that acknowledges no king

or magistrate among people but looks only to Christ, they think they cannot enjoy any fruit of their freedom as long as they see any authority over them. So they think nothing will be safe until the whole world is rebuilt into a new form -- with no courts, no laws, no magistrates, nothing they think stands against their freedom. But whoever can distinguish between body and soul, between this present passing life and the life to come that is eternal, will not have difficulty understanding that the spiritual kingdom of Christ and the civil government are very different things. Since it is a Jewish error to seek and confine Christ's kingdom within the elements of this world, let us rather think, as Scripture plainly teaches, that it is a spiritual fruit gathered from the benefit of Christ. Let us remember to keep within its proper bounds all the liberty promised and offered to us in Him. Why does the same apostle who commands us to stand firm and not submit to the yoke of slavery also, in another place, tell slaves not to worry about their status? Because spiritual liberty can exist perfectly well alongside civil servitude. His other statements should be understood in this same sense: "In the kingdom of God there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free." Again: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free -- but Christ is all and in all." He means that it does not matter what your status is among people or under whose laws you live, because the kingdom of Christ does not consist in such things.

Yet this distinction should not lead us to think that the whole system of civil government is something impure and irrelevant to Christians. That is indeed what the deluded people who delight in unbridled lawlessness shout and boast. Since we have died with

Christ to the elements of this world and now sit in the heavenly places as those removed into God's kingdom, they think it is beneath our dignity to be occupied with the mundane and impure concerns of worldly affairs. "What is the purpose of laws without courts and judges?" they say. "And what does a Christian have to do with courts?" "Indeed, if it is not lawful to kill, what use are laws and courts among us?" But just as we warned above that this kind of government is separate from the spiritual and inward kingdom of Christ, so it must also be known that the two do not conflict with each other. Civil government begins in us even now on earth certain foundations of the heavenly kingdom. In this mortal, passing life, it gives us, as it were, a taste of immortal and imperishable blessedness. But the purpose of this civil government, as long as we live among other people, is to nurture and support the outward worship of God, defend sound doctrine and the well-being of the church, shape our lives for human community, form our conduct according to civil righteousness, bring us into harmony with one another, and maintain common peace and order. All of this I grant would be unnecessary if the kingdom of God, as it now exists among us, were to end this present life. But if it is God's will that while we long for our heavenly homeland we should be pilgrims on the earth, and if the journey requires such helps, those who would take them from people are taking away their very humanity. When they claim there is such great perfection in the church of God that its own self-governance serves as law, they foolishly imagine a perfection that can never be found in any human community. Since the pride and wickedness of evil people are so great that they cannot be restrained even by the full force of the law, what do we

think they would do if they saw unpunished freedom open to their wickedness -- people who can barely be kept from doing evil even by force?

The proper ordering of civil government will be discussed in another, more fitting place. For now, I only want to establish that attempting to do away with it is outrageous barbarism. Its use among people is no less essential than bread, water, sun, and air -- and its dignity is far greater. It serves not only the purpose that all these things serve (enabling people to breathe, eat, drink, and sustain life -- though indeed it encompasses all of these by enabling people to live together). It also ensures that idolatry, sacrileges against the name of God, blasphemies against His truth, and other religious offenses do not spring up and spread among the people. It keeps public peace undisturbed. It protects each person's property. It allows people to conduct their affairs without harm. It maintains decency and modesty. In short, it upholds a public expression of religion among Christians and civilized behavior among all people. Let no one object that I am now assigning the care of establishing religion to civil governance, when I seemed before to have placed it beyond human judgment. I am not giving people permission to make laws about religion and the worship of God according to their own preferences, any more than I did before. I simply approve of civil governance that works toward this end: that the true religion contained in God's law not be openly violated and defiled with public sacrilege. But with the help of a clear outline, readers will better understand what should be thought about the whole subject of civil government if we treat its parts separately. There are three parts to it: the magistrate, who is the guardian and keeper of the laws; the laws, according to which the

magistrate governs; and the people, who are governed by the laws and obey the magistrate. Therefore, let us first consider the office of the magistrate -- whether it is a legitimate calling approved by God, what kind of office it is, and how great its authority is. Then let us discuss what laws should order a Christian civil society. Finally, let us consider what benefit the laws bring to the people and what respect is owed to the magistrate.

The Lord has not only testified that the office of magistrates is approved and acceptable to Him but has also adorned it with the most honorable titles, greatly commending it to us. To mention a few: wherever those who hold the office of magistrate are called gods, let no one think this title carries little significance. It means they have received their commission from God, are equipped with God's authority, and altogether represent the person of God, whose role they in a sense fulfill. This is not my own interpretation but the explanation of Christ. "If Scripture called them gods," He says, "to whom the word of God was given" -- what is this but saying God has entrusted His business to them? They should serve in His office, as Moses and Jehoshaphat told their appointed judges: they should sit in judgment not for man but for God. Solomon's wisdom, speaking through God's mouth, serves the same purpose: it is God's work that kings reign and counselors decree just things, that princes bear authority and all the judges of the earth execute judgment. This amounts to saying that it is not by human perverseness that the government of all things on earth is in the hands of kings and other rulers. It is by the providence and holy decree of God, to whom it seemed good to manage the affairs of humanity in this way, since He is both present among them and presiding over them in making laws and carrying out justice. Paul also teaches

this plainly when he lists government among the gifts of God. These gifts, being distributed according to the diversity of grace, should be used by Christ's servants for building up the church. Although he is specifically speaking there of a council of senior leaders appointed in the early church to oversee public discipline (what he calls "government" in his letter to the Corinthians), since the purpose of civil power points to the same end, there is no doubt he is commending every form of just government to us. But he speaks more directly where he makes a full argument about the subject. He shows that governmental power is God's ordinance, that there are no powers except those ordained by God, and that the rulers themselves are God's ministers -- praising those who do good and avenging God's wrath against evildoers. To this we may add the examples of holy men: some held kingdoms, like David, Josiah, and Hezekiah; some held positions of lordship, like Joseph and Daniel; and some held civil offices in a free nation, like Moses, Joshua, and the Judges. The Lord has declared that He approves of all their offices. Therefore, no one should now doubt that civil authority is a calling that is not only holy and lawful before God, but the most sacred and honorable of all callings in the whole of human life.

Those who want to establish a society without rulers object that although in ancient times kings and judges ruled over uncivilized people, today this servile kind of government does not fit with the perfection Christ has brought through His Gospel. In saying this, they expose not only their ignorance but also their devilish pride, claiming for themselves a perfection of which not even the hundredth part is visible in them. Whatever kind of people they are, their position is easy to refute. When David urges all

kings and rulers to kiss the Son of God, he does not tell them to give up their authority and retire to private life. Instead, he tells them to submit the power they hold to Christ, so that He alone may have supreme authority. Likewise, when Isaiah promises that kings will be foster fathers of the church and queens will be its nurses, he does not strip them of their honor. Rather, he gives them the honorable title of defenders of God's worshippers. That prophecy refers to the coming of Christ. I gladly pass over many testimonies that appear everywhere, especially in the Psalms, where every ruler's authority is upheld. But the clearest of all is Paul's statement. When instructing Timothy that prayers must be made for kings in public worship, he immediately adds the reason: so that under them we may lead a quiet life in all godliness and dignity. In these words, he entrusts the well-being of the church to their protection and care.

This truth should constantly occupy the minds of magistrates themselves, since it can serve as a powerful spur to drive them forward in their duty and bring them remarkable comfort to ease the many great difficulties of their office. With what great commitment to fairness, wisdom, gentleness, self-control, and integrity should they carry out their work, knowing they have been appointed as ministers of God's justice! How could they allow injustice into their courtroom when they know it is the throne of the living God? How could they pronounce an unjust verdict with mouths they know are appointed as instruments of God's truth? How could they sign wicked decrees with hands they know are ordained to record God's acts? In short, if they remember they are God's representatives, they must watch with all care, earnestness, and diligence to present to people a certain image of God's provi-

dence, protection, goodness, kindness, and justice. They must constantly keep this before their eyes: if all who carry out God's work of vengeance in a deceitful way are cursed, those who behave deceitfully in such a righteous calling are cursed far more severely. When Moses and Jehoshaphat wanted to motivate their judges to do their duty, they had nothing more effective to move them than what we have already discussed: "Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of man but on behalf of God, who is with you in the matter of judgment." "Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you." "Be careful and diligent, because there is no corruption with the Lord our God." And in another place it says that God stood in the assembly of the gods and sits as judge among the gods, so that they may be encouraged to do their duty when they realize they are God's deputies. They must one day give account for how they handled their responsibilities. This warning should carry great weight with them. If they fail in any way, they are not only wronging the people they unjustly oppress but also slandering God Himself, whose holy judgments they corrupt. On the other hand, they also have a source of exceptional comfort when they realize they are not occupied in secular affairs unworthy of a servant of God. They are engaged in a most holy office, serving as God's representatives.

As for those who are not moved by so many testimonies of Scripture and still dare to attack this holy ministry as something incompatible with Christian religion and godliness -- what are they doing but attacking God Himself? The dishonor of God cannot be separated from the contempt of His minister. Truly, they are not merely rejecting magistrates. They are casting away God so that He should not reign over them. If the Lord spoke this truth about

the people of Israel when they rejected Samuel's leadership, why would it be less true today of those who rage against all the governments God has established? But some object that since the Lord told His disciples that the kings of the nations lord it over them, but among His followers it should not be so -- the one who would be first must become the least -- this statement forbids all Christians from taking kingdoms or government positions. What fine interpreters! A dispute had arisen among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. To suppress this pointless ambition, the Lord taught them that their ministry is not like earthly kingdoms, where one person has authority over the rest. I ask you: what does this comparison have to do with diminishing the dignity of kingship? Indeed, what does it prove at all, except that the ministry of an apostle is not the office of a king? Furthermore, although there are various forms of government among magistrates, there is no difference in this respect: we must accept them all as God's ordinances. Paul includes all of them when he says there is no power except from God. The form that pleased him least of all is actually commended with notable praise above the others -- namely, the rule of one. Because it brings with it a universal submission of all people (except the one to whose will all things are subject), it was never popular with the more noble and excellent sort of people in ancient times. But Scripture, to counter these unfair judgments, specifically declares that it is by God's wise providence that kings reign and particularly commands that the king be honored.

It would be truly pointless for private citizens to debate which form of government is best for the place where they live, since they have no right to decide how any commonwealth should be orga-

nized. The question also cannot be simply answered without rashness, since the right answer depends largely on circumstances. If you compare the forms of government against each other without considering circumstances, it is not easy to determine which outweighs the others in usefulness -- they are so evenly matched. The slide from monarchy to tyranny is easy. But the slide from the rule of leading citizens to the faction of a few is not much harder. And the easiest slide of all is from popular government to anarchy. If we consider the three forms of government that philosophers describe in themselves, I will not deny that either the rule of the best citizens, or a system combining their rule with popular government, far excels all others. This is not because of any inherent advantage, but because it rarely happens that kings restrain themselves so that their will never deviates from what is just and right. Nor are they always equipped with such sharp judgment and wisdom that each one sees everything that is needed. Therefore, the weakness and limitations of human beings make it safer and more tolerable for many to share the government. They can help one another, teach and correct one another. And if anyone gets out of line, there are overseers and colleagues to restrain their willfulness. Experience has always confirmed this, and the Lord also validated it with His authority when He established a government of leading citizens among the Israelites -- very close to a representative form -- at the time when He intended them to be in their best condition, until He brought forth an image of Christ in David. I freely grant that no form of government is more blessed than this one, where freedom is balanced with proper restraint and is established for the long term. I also consider those most fortunate who enjoy this condition. If they work courageously and steadfastly to

preserve and maintain it, I agree they are doing nothing against their duty. The magistrates especially ought to work with the greatest diligence to ensure that the people's freedom, of which they are appointed guardians, is not diminished or dissolved in any way. If they are negligent about this, they are breaking faith with their office and betraying their country. But if they try to impose this form of government on themselves when the Lord has appointed them a different one -- so that the desire for change motivates them -- such thinking is not only foolish and pointless but harmful. If you do not fix your eyes on just one city but look around the whole world, or at least survey a wider range of countries, you will certainly find that it was not without purpose that God's providence arranged for different countries to be ruled by different forms of government. Just as the elements hang together through an unequal balance, so countries are also very well maintained by a certain inequality of systems. However, all these arguments are wasted on those for whom God's will is sufficient. If it is His pleasure to set kings over kingdoms, or senates and officials over free cities, whatever rulers He establishes in the places where we live, it is our duty to show ourselves obedient and submissive to them.

Now the office of magistrates must be briefly described: what its nature is as the word of God defines it, and what it involves. If Scripture did not teach that it extends to both tables of the law, we could learn this from secular writers. No one who has written about the duty of magistrates, the making of laws, or the common good has begun anywhere other than with religion and the worship of God. They have all acknowledged that no government can be happily ordered if the first concern is not godliness, and that laws

which neglect the rights of God and provide only for human affairs are backward. Since religion has always held the first place among all philosophers, and this has been confirmed by the universal agreement of all nations, let Christian princes and magistrates be ashamed of their laziness if they do not devote themselves to this concern. We have already shown that this duty is especially required of them by God, as is fitting. They should use their efforts to defend and maintain His honor, since they are His representatives and govern by His blessing. This is why the holy kings are praised in Scripture: they restored the worship of God when it had been corrupted or overthrown, or they took care that religion would flourish, pure and safe, under their rule. On the other hand, Scripture counts a society without rulers among its faults, saying there was no king in Israel, and therefore everyone did what pleased them. This refutes the foolishness of those who would have magistrates ignore the care of God and only settle legal disputes among people. As if God appointed rulers in His name to decide human controversies while leaving out the far weightier matter of ensuring that He Himself is worshipped according to the prescribed rule of His law. But it is the desire to overhaul everything without consequences that drives troublemakers to wish that all enforcers of the law were removed. As for the second table of the law, Jeremiah warns kings to execute justice and righteousness, to rescue the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor, not to mistreat the foreigner and widow, not to do wrong, and not to shed innocent blood (Jeremiah 22:3). The exhortation in Psalm 82 serves the same purpose: they should defend the rights of the poor and needy, rescue the poor and needy, and deliver them from the hand of the oppressor (Psalm 82:3-4). Moses instructs the leaders he

appointed in his place: let them hear the disputes between their brothers and judge fairly between each person, their fellow citizen, and the foreigner. They should show no partiality. They should hear the small and the great alike and not be afraid of anyone, because judgment belongs to God (Deuteronomy 1:16-17). I will not discuss the instructions that kings should not accumulate excessive horses, should not be greedy, should not be arrogant above their brothers, and should study the law of the Lord continually throughout their lives. Nor will I discuss how judges should not show favoritism or accept bribes. In describing the office of magistrates here, my purpose is not so much to instruct the magistrates themselves as to teach others what magistrates are and why God has established them. We see, then, that they are appointed as defenders and protectors of innocence, decency, integrity, and peace. Their sole effort should be to provide for the common safety and well-being of all. David pledged to be an example of these virtues when he took the royal throne: he would not consent to any wrongdoing but would hate wicked people, slanderers, and the proud, and would gather honest and faithful people from everywhere. But since they cannot fulfill this role unless they defend good people from the injuries of the wicked, they must also be armed with power to severely suppress open criminals whose wickedness disturbs the common peace. We have thoroughly confirmed by experience what Solon said: that communities are held together by reward and punishment, and that when these are removed, the whole discipline of society falls apart. The desire for fairness and justice grows cold in many minds unless proper honor awaits virtue, and the willfulness of the wicked cannot be restrained without the severity and pain of punishment. The prophet captures

both of these aspects when he instructs kings and other rulers to practice justice and righteousness. Righteousness means taking the innocent under your protection, embracing them, defending them, avenging them, and delivering them. Justice means resisting the boldness of the wicked, suppressing their violence, and punishing their offenses.

But here a great and difficult question seems to arise: if all Christians are forbidden by God's law to kill, and the prophet prophesies about the holy mountain of God (that is, the church) that in it they shall not harm or destroy, how can magistrates be both godly and executioners? But if we understand that the magistrate, in carrying out punishments, does nothing on their own authority but executes God's own judgments, this difficulty disappears. The law of the Lord forbids killing. But to ensure that murder does not go unpunished, the lawgiver Himself places the sword in the hands of His ministers, to be drawn against all murderers. To harm and destroy is not the way of the godly. But to carry out the Lord's command by avenging the afflictions of the godly is not to harm or destroy. I wish this were always before our minds: that nothing is done here by human recklessness, but everything by the authority of God who commands it. As long as we follow His lead, we never stray from the right path. Unless someone wants to put a restraint on God's justice, preventing it from punishing wrongdoing. But if it is not lawful to impose limits on His justice, why should we criticize those who serve as His instruments? "They do not bear the sword for nothing," Paul says. "They are God's servants, agents of wrath against evildoers." Therefore, if princes and other rulers know that nothing will be more pleasing to God than their obedience, let them devote themselves to this work if they

want to demonstrate their godliness, righteousness, and integrity. This is the motivation that drove Moses when, knowing he was appointed by God's authority to deliver his people, he struck down the Egyptian. Again, when he executed vengeance for the people's sacrilege by killing three thousand men in a single day. David also, when near the end of his life, he commanded his son Solomon to execute Joab and Shimei. For the same reason, he lists it among the virtues of a king to destroy the wicked of the land, so that all evildoers may be driven from the city of God. The praise given to Solomon also serves this point: "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness." How did that gentle and mild nature of Moses burst into such severity that, sprinkled and stained with the blood of his brothers, he ran through the camp to carry out more executions? How did David, a man of such great gentleness throughout his life, leave that bloody final testament, commanding that his son not let the gray heads of Joab and Shimei go peacefully to the grave? Both of them, by executing the vengeance God entrusted to them, sanctified their hands through their severity. Those hands would have been defiled by showing mercy. Solomon says: "It is an abomination for kings to do injustice, because their throne is established by righteousness." Again: "A king who sits on the throne of judgment sifts all evil with his eyes." Again: "A wise king scatters the wicked and drives the wheel over them." Again: "Remove the dross from the silver, and a vessel comes out for the refiner. Remove the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be firmly established in righteousness." Again: "The one who justifies the wicked and the one who condemns the righteous -- both are an abomination to the Lord." Again: "A rebellious person seeks evil, and a cruel messenger is sent against him." Again: "Whoever

says to the wicked, 'You are righteous,' will be cursed by peoples and nations." Now if their true righteousness is to pursue the guilty and wicked with drawn sword, let them instead put away their sword and keep their hands free from blood while ruthless criminals rampage with murders and slaughter. Then they will make themselves guilty of the greatest wickedness, and they will earn no praise for goodness and justice. But let there be no harsh and cruel brutality, and let the courtroom not become a place of terror that could rightly be called the ruin of the accused. I am not one who either favors extreme cruelty or thinks a just sentence can be pronounced without clemency -- the best and surest counselor of kings, as Solomon says, the preserver of the king's throne. As someone rightly said in ancient times, clemency is the principal virtue of princes. Yet a magistrate must guard against two extremes: neither wounding rather than healing through excessive strictness, nor falling into a most cruel gentleness through a misguided show of mercy -- dissolving into soft, loose leniency that leads to the destruction of many. This is why it was commonly said in ancient times under the emperor Nerva that it is indeed bad to live under a ruler who permits nothing, but far worse to live under one who permits everything.

Since kings and peoples must sometimes take up the sword to carry out public justice, we may also conclude by the same reasoning that wars undertaken for this purpose are lawful. If power is given to them to maintain peace in their territories, to suppress the rebellious stirrings of troublemakers, to help the violently oppressed, and to punish wrongdoing, can they put this power to better use than against someone who disturbs the peace of individuals and of the whole community, who stirs up rebellion, who commits

violent oppression and serious crimes? If they are to be the preservers and defenders of the laws, they must also defeat the schemes of all those whose wickedness corrupts the order of law. Indeed, if they rightly punish thieves whose crimes affect only a few individuals, should they allow an entire country to be plundered and devastated without punishment? It makes no difference whether it is a king or the lowest commoner who invades another's territory without right and plunders it like an enemy. All such people should equally be considered and punished as robbers. Both natural fairness and the rule of duty teach that princes are armed not only to restrain private wrongs through legal punishments but also to defend the territories entrusted to their care through war, when those territories are attacked in the same way. The Holy Spirit declares such wars to be lawful through many testimonies in Scripture.

If someone objects that the New Testament provides no witness or example showing that war is lawful for Christians, I answer first that the same principle of just warfare that existed in ancient times remains in effect today. Conversely, there is nothing that should prevent magistrates from defending their subjects. Second, an explicit discussion of these matters should not be expected in the apostolic writings, since their purpose was not to establish a civil government but to build up the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Third, even in their writings it is shown in passing that Christ's coming changed nothing in this regard. "If Christian teaching condemned all wars," to use Augustine's own words, "the soldiers who asked for counsel about salvation would have been told to throw away their weapons and completely withdraw from military service." But instead they were told: "Do not harm anyone, do not ex-

tort money, and be content with your wages." He who taught them that their wages should be enough certainly did not forbid them from being soldiers. But all magistrates must take great care not to follow their own desires in any way. If they must punish, let them not be carried away by reckless anger, driven by hatred, or consumed by unrelenting severity. As Augustine says, let them pity our common human nature even in the one whose individual fault they punish. If they must take up arms against an enemy -- that is, an armed robber -- let them not seek the occasion lightly or take it up when offered unless they are driven to it by absolute necessity. If we ought to do far more than what one ancient writer required, who said that war should be seen as a search for peace, then we certainly ought to try everything else before resorting to armed conflict. In both situations, let them not allow themselves to be driven by any personal feelings. They must be guided only by concern for the public good. Otherwise, they seriously abuse the power given to them -- power that was not granted for their own benefit but for the benefit and service of others. From this same principle of just warfare comes the proper basis for military garrisons, alliances, and other civil defense measures. By garrisons I mean the troops stationed in cities to defend a country's borders. By alliances I mean the treaties made with neighboring rulers under which, if trouble arises in their lands, they may mutually help one another and combine their forces to suppress the common enemies of humanity. By civil defense measures I mean the provisions used in the art of war.

Finally, I will add this: taxes and tributes are the lawful revenues of rulers. They may use them primarily to fund the common expenses of their office, but they may also use them for their per-

sonal dignity, which is in a way connected to the honor of the position they hold. We see that David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Jehoshaphat, and other holy kings -- as well as Joseph and Daniel -- spent from the public treasury according to their position without offending godliness. We read in Ezekiel that a very large portion of land was assigned to the king. Although Ezekiel is portraying the spiritual kingdom of Christ, he draws the pattern for his picture from the lawful kingdom of men. Yet rulers must also remember that their treasuries are not so much their own private funds as the resources of the whole people (as Paul testifies). They may not waste or plunder them without clear injustice. Indeed, these funds are the very blood of the people, and failing to protect them is the cruelest inhumanity. Let them consider that their taxes, fees, and other kinds of revenue are nothing but supports for public needs. To burden the common people with these for no reason is tyrannical extortion. These things are not meant to encourage rulers toward wasteful spending and luxury (there is certainly no need to add fuel to their desires, which are already burning too strongly). But since it greatly matters that they be able to do with pure conscience before God everything they dare to do -- so that they do not fall into a wicked boldness that leads to despising God -- they must be taught what is permissible for them. This teaching is also not pointless for private citizens, so they do not rashly and stubbornly complain about any expenses of their rulers, even those that may exceed ordinary and usual levels.

Next to the magistrate in civil society come the laws, which are the strongest sinews of the commonwealth -- or as Cicero (following Plato) calls them, the soul. Without them, the magistrate cannot function, just as they without the magistrate have no living

force. Nothing could be more truly said than this: the law is a silent magistrate, and the magistrate is a living law. I promised to discuss what laws should order a Christian civil society. But there is no reason for anyone to expect a lengthy discourse on the best kind of laws, which would be an endless topic and is not relevant to our present purpose. I will simply touch briefly, almost in passing, on what laws a government may use to be godly before God and rightly governed among people. I would have preferred to pass over this entirely in silence, except that I know many people err dangerously on this point. Some deny that a commonwealth is well ordered if it ignores the civil laws of Moses and is instead governed by the common laws of the nations. How dangerous and troubling this idea is, let others consider. It is enough for me to have shown that it is false and foolish. The common division must be maintained: the whole law of God published through Moses is divided into moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws. Each part must be examined separately so we can know what applies to us and what does not. Let no one be troubled by the concern that the judicial and ceremonial laws also relate to morals. The early writers who taught this division were well aware that these two categories had a bearing on moral conduct. But because they could be changed and abolished while the moral law remained intact, they did not call them moral. They reserved that name specifically for the first category, without which true holiness of life and the unchangeable rule of right living cannot exist.

The moral law (to begin there), since it is contained in two main points -- one commanding us to worship God with pure faith and godliness, the other commanding us to embrace all people with genuine love -- is the true and eternal rule of righteousness. It

is prescribed for all people of all ages and times who are willing to order their lives according to God's will. This is His eternal and unchangeable will: that He be worshipped by all of us, and that we mutually love one another. The ceremonial law was the education of the Jews, with which it pleased the Lord to train the childhood of that people until the time of fullness came, when He would fully reveal His wisdom to the earth and deliver the reality of the things that were then represented in shadows (Galatians 4:4). The judicial law, given to them as a system of civil order, provided certain rules of fairness and justice by which they could live together peacefully and without harm. Just as the ceremonial practices properly related to the teaching of godliness (keeping the Jewish church in the worship and religion of God) yet could be distinguished from godliness itself, so the judicial laws (although they served no other end than maintaining the charity commanded by the eternal law of God) still had something distinct from the very command to love. Just as the ceremonies could be abolished while godliness remained safe and intact, so these judicial regulations could also be removed while the perpetual duties and commands of charity continued. If this is true, then every nation has the freedom to make whatever laws it foresees will be beneficial for its people. Yet these laws must be shaped by the perpetual rule of charity, so that while they may vary in form, they share the same underlying principle. I believe that barbarous and savage laws -- such as those that honored thieves, allowed promiscuity, and other practices even more disgraceful and contrary to reason -- should not be considered true laws. They violate not only all righteousness but also natural human decency and kindness.

What I have said will be clear if in all laws we examine two things as we should: the enactment of the law, and the principle of fairness on which the enactment is founded. Fairness, because it is natural, can only be one and the same for all laws. Therefore, every law, according to the nature of the matter, should aim at one common goal of fairness. As for the specific enactments of laws, since they depend partly on particular circumstances, they do not all need to be the same, as long as they all aim together at the single standard of fairness. Since the law of God that we call the moral law is nothing other than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience God has engraved in human minds, the entire standard of fairness we are discussing is fully set forth in it. Therefore, it alone must also be the target, rule, and goal of all laws. Whatever laws are framed according to this standard, directed toward this target, and bounded by this goal -- there is no reason for us to reject them, however much they may differ from the Jewish law or from one another. God's law forbids stealing. The penalty appointed for theft in the Jewish civil law can be seen in Exodus (Exodus 22:1). The most ancient laws of other nations punished theft by requiring double repayment. Later laws distinguished between theft caught in the act and theft discovered afterward. Some proceeded to exile, some to whipping, and some eventually to the death penalty. False witness was punished among the Jews by an equal penalty (Deuteronomy 19:18); in some places it was punished only with public shame, in others with hanging, and in still others with crucifixion. Murder is universally punished by all laws with bloodshed, though with various methods of execution. For adultery, some places established harsher penalties, others milder. Yet we see how all these different laws aim at the same end. With

one voice they all declare punishment against the offenses that have been condemned by the eternal law of God -- murder, theft, adultery, and false witness. But in the specific manner of punishment, they do not agree. Nor is agreement necessary, or even desirable. Some countries would be destroyed by murders and robberies unless they made terrifying examples of murderers. Some times call for increased severity of penalties. If trouble arises in a commonwealth, the evils that typically grow from it must be corrected with new regulations. In wartime, all humanity would collapse amid the noise of weapons unless an unusual fear of punishment were imposed. In times of famine or plague, unless greater strictness is applied, everything will fall apart. Some nations are more prone to a particular vice, unless it is most firmly suppressed. How spiteful and hostile to the public good would someone be who is offended by such diversity -- the very thing most suited to maintaining the observance of God's law! The claim some make that Moses' law is dishonored when it is set aside and new laws are preferred above it is completely unfounded. Other laws are not preferred above it as though they were inherently superior. They are approved in relation to the particular conditions of time, place, and nation. Nor is Moses' law abrogated, since it was never given to us in the first place. The Lord did not give that law through Moses to be proclaimed to all nations and enforced everywhere. Rather, having taken the Jewish nation into His care, protection, and keeping, He chose to be their specific lawmaker. Like a wise legislator, He crafted His laws with special attention to their particular circumstances.

Now it remains to consider what we placed last: what benefit laws, judicial processes, and magistrates bring to the Christian community. Connected to this is another question: how much private citizens should yield to magistrates, and how far their obedience should extend. Many have thought the office of magistrate is unnecessary among Christians, since they supposedly cannot rightfully seek the magistrate's help -- being forbidden to take revenge, to go to court, and to have any disputes. But since Paul on the contrary clearly testifies that the magistrate is God's servant to us for good, we understand from this that he is ordained by God so that, defended by his hand and help against the malice and injuries of wicked people, we may live in quiet and security. If the magistrate is given to us by the Lord for our defense, and it is lawful for us to make use of this benefit, then it is clear enough that we may also without wrongdoing appeal to him and make our case. But here I must deal with two kinds of people. There are many who burn with such a fever for lawsuits that they are never at peace with themselves unless they are in conflict with others. They pursue their disputes with deadly hatred, with a mad desire for revenge and harm, and they chase them with relentless stubbornness all the way to the destruction of their opponent. Meanwhile, to look righteous, they hide their wickedness behind the cover of the law. But even if the law permits you to sue your brother, you may not therefore hate him, or burn with a furious desire to hurt him, or stubbornly persecute him.

So let this be said to such people: the use of the law is legitimate if a person uses it properly. The right use -- both for the one bringing the case and for the one defending it -- is this: the defendant, when summoned, appears on the appointed day and defends

their case with whatever arguments they can, but without bitterness. Their only motive should be to defend what is legally theirs. The plaintiff, when unjustly harmed either in their person or property, turns to the magistrate for protection, makes their complaint, and seeks what is fair and right -- but far removed from any desire to harm or take revenge, far from harshness and hatred, far from the heat of conflict. They should rather be willing to give up something of their own and suffer, than to carry a hostile attitude toward their opponent. On the other hand, when filled with malice, corrupted by envy, inflamed with anger, or breathing revenge -- or when so heated by the conflict that they abandon any part of love - - the entire proceeding, even in the most righteous cause, becomes wicked. This should be a settled principle for all Christians: a dispute, no matter how just, can never be rightly pursued by anyone unless they maintain as much goodwill and love toward their opponent as if the matter in question were already settled by agreement. Someone may say that such restraint is so rarely practiced in litigation that it would be like a miracle to find even one example of it. I admit that in the current state of affairs, a good litigant is rarely seen. Yet the practice itself, when free from any added corruption, remains good and pure. When we hear that the magistrate's help is a holy gift from God, we must be all the more careful not to corrupt it through our own fault.

As for those who flatly condemn all lawsuits, they should understand that they are also despising God's holy ordinance -- a gift that may be pure for those who are pure. Otherwise they must also accuse Paul of wrongdoing, since he both cleared himself of his accusers' slanders by exposing their deceit and malice, and claimed for himself the legal rights of Roman citizenship. When necessary,

he appealed from an unjust governor to the emperor's judgment seat. It does not contradict this that all Christians are forbidden to seek revenge. We also drive the desire for revenge far from the Christian courtroom. If the dispute is about a civil matter, the person going the right way does not seek to pay back evil for evil with innocent simplicity. They commit their cause to the judge as a public defender, never even thinking of returning wrong for wrong -- which is the attitude of revenge. Or if a criminal matter involving life and death is brought forward, we require that the accuser come to court without any burning desire for revenge, without personal resentment. They should only want to prevent a dangerous criminal from harming the community. But if you take away the desire for revenge, the commandment forbidding revenge to Christians is not violated. But they are also commanded not only to refrain from revenge but to wait for the hand of the Lord, who promises He will be a ready avenger of the oppressed and afflicted. So by seeking the magistrate's help for themselves or others, are they not getting ahead of the heavenly avenger? Not at all. We must understand that the magistrate's justice is not human vengeance but God's vengeance, which (as Paul says) He carries out and exercises through the ministry of human beings for our good.

Nor do we disagree with Christ's words, by which He forbids resisting evil and commands turning the other cheek to the one who strikes the left, and giving up your cloak to the one who takes your coat. He truly intends there that His people should so deeply hate the desire for retaliation that they would rather endure a double injury than seek to repay it. We do not lead them away from this patience. Christians truly ought to be a kind of people made to endure insults and injuries, open to the malice, deceit, and mock-

ery of the wicked -- and not only that, but also bearers of all these evils. They should be so shaped in their hearts that, having received one offense, they prepare themselves for another. They should promise themselves nothing in their whole life but the bearing of a continual cross. At the same time, they must also do good to those who wrong them and wish well to those who curse them. Their only victory (which is their true victory) should be to overcome evil with good. With this attitude, they will not seek eye for eye and tooth for tooth, as the Pharisees taught their disciples to seek revenge. Instead (as Christ teaches us), they will endure having their bodies struck and their goods maliciously taken, forgiving and spontaneously pardoning those wrongs as soon as they are done. Yet this balance and moderation of mind will not prevent them -- while maintaining their friendship toward their enemies -- from using the help of the magistrate to protect their property, or from seeking punishment for a guilty and dangerous person out of concern for the public good, knowing that the person cannot be reformed except through death. Augustine rightly explains that all these commands are meant to ensure that a righteous and godly person is ready to patiently bear the malice of those they wish to make into better people. This way, the number of the good increases rather than adding themselves to the number of the evil. Furthermore, these commands apply more to the inner preparation of the heart than to outward actions. In secret, patience and goodwill should be maintained, while outwardly, what appears profitable for those we ought to love should be done.

The common objection that Paul completely condemned all lawsuits is also false. Paul's words make it easy to see that there was an extreme obsession with litigation in the Corinthian church.

It had gone so far that they were exposing the Gospel of Christ and their whole religion to the ridicule and slander of unbelievers. The first thing Paul criticizes is that their excessive quarreling brought the Gospel into disgrace among the unbelievers. The second is that brothers were fighting against brothers. They were so far from bearing wrongs that they greedily grabbed at each other's goods, provoked one another, and caused harm even when unprovoked. Therefore, Paul attacks this frenzy of litigation, not all disputes in general. But he does declare it a fault or weakness that they did not prefer to suffer loss rather than fight to the point of contention over their possessions. The fact that they were so easily stirred by every setback and ran to court over the smallest issues shows that they were too quick to anger and not well trained in patience. Christians certainly ought to be willing to give up their own rights rather than go to court, from which they can hardly emerge without a mind too agitated and inflamed with hatred toward their brother. But when a person sees that they can defend their property without abandoning charity, and when the loss would seriously harm them -- if they do so, they do not violate Paul's teaching. Finally, as we taught at the beginning, charity will give each person the best counsel. Whatever disputes are pursued without charity, and whatever goes beyond it, we consider to be beyond all controversy unjust and wicked.

The first duty of subjects toward their magistrates is to think most honorably of their office. They should recognize it as a jurisdiction entrusted by God, and therefore esteem and reverence them as ministers and representatives of God. There are some who obey their magistrates readily enough. They would not want to be without someone to obey, since they know it benefits the common

good. But they think of the magistrates themselves as nothing more than necessary evils. But Peter requires more of us when he commands us to honor the king. Solomon also requires more when he commands us to fear God and the king. Peter's word "honor" includes a sincere and favorable estimation. Solomon, by joining the king with God, shows that the king's authority carries a certain holy reverence and dignity. Paul also makes a notable point when he says we should obey not only out of fear of punishment but also for the sake of conscience. By this he means that subjects should not be driven to submission merely by fear of rulers and the threat of vengeance (as people yield to an armed enemy when they know punishment will follow if they resist). Rather, the obedience shown to magistrates is shown to God Himself, since their authority comes from Him. I am not speaking about the individuals themselves, as if the mask of their position covered up foolishness, laziness, cruelty, or wicked behavior. I am saying that the office itself is worthy of honor and reverence. Therefore, whoever holds the position of ruler should be esteemed and respected by us simply because of that position.

From this follows another duty: that with hearts inclined to honor them, citizens should demonstrate their obedience in practice -- whether by obeying their decrees, paying taxes, taking on public offices and duties that serve the common defense, or carrying out any other commands. "Let every soul," Paul says, "be subject to the governing authorities." "For whoever resists the authority resists God's ordinance." Paul also writes to Titus: "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey magistrates, and to be ready for every good work." And Peter says: "Submit yourselves to every human institution" (or as I would translate it,

ordinance) "for the Lord's sake -- whether to the king as supreme, or to governors sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do good." Moreover, so that their subjection is not merely pretended but sincere and heartfelt, Paul adds that they should pray to God for the safety and prosperity of those under whom they live. "I urge," he says, "that prayers, requests, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people -- for kings and for all who are in authority, so that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." Let no one deceive themselves here. Since the magistrate cannot be resisted without also resisting God, even though an unarmed magistrate might seem easy to ignore, God is armed and will take strong vengeance when He Himself is despised. Furthermore, under this obedience I include the restraint private citizens ought to observe regarding public affairs. They should not meddle on their own in public matters, should not rashly intrude into the magistrate's role, and should take on nothing publicly without authorization. If something in a public policy needs to be corrected, private citizens should not start riots or take action themselves. They should leave it to the judgment of the magistrate, whose hand alone is free to act in this area. I mean that they should not presume to do anything without orders. When a ruler's command is given, then they are also equipped with public authority. Just as a king's counselors are commonly called his ears and eyes, so those whom the king appoints to carry out his commands by his authority may not unfittingly be called his hands.

Since we have so far described a magistrate who truly lives up to what they are called -- a father of the country, and (as the poet says) the shepherd of the people, the guardian of peace, the protec-

tor of justice, the defender of innocence -- anyone who disapproves of such government would rightly be considered a fool. But since it has been the common experience of nearly every age that some rulers are careless about all the things they should diligently attend to and slothfully wallow in pleasures; others are addicted to profit and put everything up for sale -- laws, privileges, judgments, and grants; others plunder the common people of money only to waste it on insane extravagance; others commit outright robbery, violating women, murdering the innocent -- many people cannot be persuaded to acknowledge such individuals as rulers whose authority they are supposed to obey. In the face of such extreme unworthiness, behavior so contrary to the duty not only of a magistrate but of a decent human being, they see no image of God's likeness (which ought to shine in a magistrate). They see no sign of God's minister who was appointed to praise the good and punish the evil. They also cannot recognize such a governor whose dignity and authority the Scripture commends to us. And truly, it has always been a natural human instinct to hate and despise tyrants just as much as to love and honor legitimate kings.

But if we look to the word of God, it will lead us further: we must be subject not only to the government of rulers who faithfully fulfill their office as they should, but also to all those who hold power by whatever means, even if they do the very opposite of what a ruler should do. Although the Lord testifies that the magistrate is an especially great gift of His generosity for preserving human safety, and although He sets boundaries for magistrates themselves, He also declares that rulers of every kind hold their authority from Him alone. Those who govern for the public good are true examples and patterns of His bounty. Those who rule un-

justly and tyrannically are raised up by Him to punish the wickedness of the people. All equally possess the majesty with which He has furnished legitimate authority. I will not proceed further until I have added some specific proofs of this point. We do not need to work hard to prove that a wicked king is the expression of God's wrath upon the earth, since no one would deny it. Otherwise, we would have to say nothing more about a king than about a common robber who steals your property, an adulterer who defiles your marriage, or a murderer who tries to kill you, since Scripture counts all such calamities among God's curses. But let us focus instead on proving the point that does not settle easily in people's minds: even in a thoroughly evil person, completely unworthy of any honor, if they hold public power, the noble and divine authority remains that the Lord has bestowed on the ministers of His justice and judgment. Therefore, their subjects must hold them in the same reverence and respect -- as far as public obedience is concerned -- as they would the best king if he had been given to them.

First, I want the readers to notice and carefully consider something Scripture repeats with good reason: God's providence and special hand in distributing kingdoms and appointing kings. In Daniel it says: "The Lord changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings." Again: "That the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He wishes." The whole of Scripture is full of such statements, but the book of Daniel is especially packed with them. Now what kind of king was Nebuchadnezzar -- the one who conquered Jerusalem? He was, as we well know, a powerful invader and destroyer of others. Yet in Ezekiel the Lord declares that He gave him the land of Egypt as payment for the service he had done in laying

it waste. Daniel told him: "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the King of heaven has given a mighty, powerful, and glorious kingdom. He has given you all the lands where people live, and the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air. He has placed them in your hand and made you ruler over them all." Again, he said to Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar: "The Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty, greatness, honor, and glory. Because of the greatness He gave him, all peoples, tribes, and languages trembled and feared before him." When we hear that a king is ordained by God, let us call to mind those heavenly instructions about honoring and fearing the king. Then we will not hesitate to assign even the most wicked tyrant to the same position where the Lord has placed him. When Samuel warned the people of Israel what kind of things they would endure from their kings, he said: "This will be the right of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and make them serve his chariots and be his horsemen, and they will plow his fields, harvest his crops, and make his weapons of war." "He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers." "He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his servants." "He will take a tenth of your grain and wine and give it to his officials and servants." "He will take your servants, your maids, and your donkeys and put them to his work." "He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his servants." Kings certainly should not have done this by right, since the law provided excellent instruction in restraint. But it was called a "right" over the people because the people were required to obey. They could not resist, as if Samuel had said: "The

kings' willfulness will run to such excess, and it will not be your place to resist it. The only thing left for you will be to obey their commands and listen to their word."

But there is an especially notable passage in Jeremiah that is worth remembering. Although it is somewhat long, I will gladly quote it because it most clearly settles this entire question. "I have made the earth and the people and the living creatures on the face of the earth by My great strength and outstretched arm, and I will give it to whoever pleases Me." "And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar My servant, and all nations and great kings shall serve him, until the time appointed for that land comes." "And whatever nation or kingdom refuses to serve the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with sword, famine, and plague." "Therefore, serve the king of Babylon and live." We see how great an obedience the Lord required toward this cruel and proud tyrant, for no other reason than that Nebuchadnezzar held the kingdom. By the decree of heaven, he had been placed on the royal throne and elevated to royal majesty, which it was unlawful to violate. If we always keep this before our minds and eyes -- that even the worst kings are placed in power by the same decree that establishes the authority of all kings -- these rebellious thoughts will never enter our minds: that a king should be treated according to what he deserves, and that it is not fitting for us to act as subjects when he does not act as a king toward us.

No one should object that this was a special command given only to the Israelites. We must notice the reason the Lord gives to support it. "I have given the kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar," He says. "Therefore serve him and live." Whoever knows for certain that a kingdom has been given to someone should not doubt that

person must be obeyed. And as soon as the Lord raises anyone to royal power, He declares His will to us that He wants that person to reign. There are general testimonies of this throughout Scripture. Solomon says in chapter 28: "Because of the wickedness of the people, they have many rulers." Job says in chapter 12: "He takes authority away from kings and then girds them with it again." Once this is accepted, there is nothing left but to serve and live. There is also another command from the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah, where He tells His people to seek the peace of Babylon, the city to which they had been carried as captives, and to pray for it, because in its peace they would find their own peace. The Israelites, stripped of all their goods, torn from their homes, driven into exile, and thrown into miserable slavery, are told to pray for the safety of their conqueror. They were not simply praying for their persecutors (as we are commanded to do elsewhere), but praying that the kingdom might be preserved for the king and kept in peace, so that they themselves might also prosper under him. David, already appointed king by God's decree and anointed with His holy oil, was unjustly persecuted by Saul through no fault of his own. Yet he still regarded the head of the man who sought his life as sacred, because the Lord had consecrated him with the honor of the kingdom. "Far be it from me," he said, "before the Lord, to do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed -- to lay my hand on him, because he is the Lord's anointed." Again: "My soul has spared you, and I said, I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed." Again: "Who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be innocent?" "As the Lord

lives, unless the Lord strikes him, or his day comes to die, or he goes down into battle -- far be it from me to lay my hand on the Lord's anointed."

We owe this attitude of reverence -- indeed, devotion -- to all our rulers, regardless of what kind of people they are. I repeat this so often so that we may learn not to investigate what kind of people they are, but take this as sufficient: by the Lord's will they hold the position in which the Lord Himself has stamped and engraved an inviolable majesty. But (you will say) rulers owe mutual duties to their subjects. I have already acknowledged that. But if you conclude from this that obedience is only owed to just governments, you are reasoning foolishly. Husbands are also bound to their wives, and parents to their children, by mutual duties. What if parents show themselves harsh and impossible to please toward their children (whom they are told not to provoke to anger), wearing them out with their unreasonableness? What if husbands treat their wives with utter contempt (whom they are commanded to love and treat gently as weaker vessels)? Should children therefore be less obedient to their parents, or wives to their husbands? They are still subject to both -- even to bad parents and bad husbands who fail in their duties. Indeed, everyone should be more concerned with looking at their own responsibilities rather than examining the duties others owe to them. This is especially true for those who are under the authority of others. Therefore, if we are cruelly tormented by a brutal ruler, if we are greedily plundered by a covetous or wasteful one, if we are neglected by a lazy one, or if we are harassed for our faith by a wicked and ungodly one, let us first remember our own sins. These are undoubtedly being punished by such scourges of the Lord. Humility will then restrain our

impatience. Let us also remember this: it is not our place to remedy such evils. The only thing left for us is to call upon the Lord's help, in whose hand are the hearts of kings and the shifting of kingdoms. He is the God who will stand in the assembly of the gods and will judge among them. Before His face, all kings will fall and be shattered -- all the judges of the earth who have not kissed His Anointed, who have written unjust laws to oppress the poor in judgment, who do violence to the cause of the humble, who make widows their prey, and who rob the fatherless.

And here both His marvelous goodness, power, and providence show themselves. Sometimes He raises up from among His servants open avengers, equipping them with His command to take vengeance on unjust rule and to deliver His people from their miserable oppression. Sometimes He directs the rage of people who intended and planned something entirely different toward the same end. So He delivered the people of Israel from Pharaoh's tyranny through Moses, from the violence of Cushan king of Syria through Othniel, and from other forms of bondage through other kings or judges. So He subdued the pride of Tyre through the Egyptians, the arrogance of the Egyptians through the Assyrians, the ferocity of the Assyrians through the Chaldeans, and the boldness of Babylon through the Medes and Persians when Cyrus had conquered the Medes. He beat down and brought to ruin the ingratitude and wicked stubbornness of the kings of Judah and Israel -- despite His many blessings to them -- sometimes through the Assyrians, sometimes through the Babylonians, though not all in the same way. The first kind of avengers, having been sent to perform these acts by God's legitimate calling, did not violate the majesty established in kings by God's decree when they took up

arms against kings. Armed from heaven, they subdued the lesser power with the greater -- just as it is lawful for kings to punish their subordinate lords. But the latter kind, though they were directed by God's hand wherever it pleased Him and unknowingly carried out His work, had nothing but wickedness in their own minds.

But however we judge the actions of these people, the Lord accomplished His work through them: He broke the bloody scepters of proud kings and overthrew their unbearable governments. Let princes hear this and be afraid. But in the meantime, we must take great care not to despise or offend the authority of magistrates -- full of majestic dignity -- which God has established with the weightiest decrees. This authority deserves our reverence even when it resides with the most unworthy people, who do their best to defile it with their wickedness. Although the correction of tyrannical government belongs to the Lord's vengeance, we must not immediately assume that it has been entrusted to us. We have been given no other command but to obey and endure. I am speaking always of private citizens. If there are today any magistrates appointed to represent the people (such as the Ephors who were set against the kings of Sparta in ancient times, or the Tribunes of the people against the Roman Consuls, or the Demarchs against the Athenian Senate -- and perhaps the same kind of authority that the three estates hold in every kingdom when they convene their principal assemblies), I would not forbid these officials from resisting the outrageous tyranny of kings according to their duty. In fact, if they look the other way while kings willfully trample and oppress the common people, I would say their silence involves a

wicked breach of faith, because they are deceitfully betraying the people's freedom, of which they know themselves to be the appointed protectors by God's ordinance.

But in the obedience we have established as owed to the authorities of rulers, one exception must always be made -- indeed, it must be given the highest priority: this obedience must never lead us away from obeying the One to whose will all kings' desires ought to submit, to whose decrees all their commands ought to yield, and to whose majesty their symbols of office ought to bow. How disordered it would be, in order to satisfy human beings, to run into the displeasure of the One for whose sake we obey people in the first place! The Lord, therefore, is the King of kings. When He has opened His holy mouth, He must be heard above all others and before all others. After Him, we are subject to the people set over us -- but only under Him. If they command anything against Him, it should carry no weight and no account should be taken of it. We must not be at all concerned about the dignity in which the magistrates excel, since no wrong is done to it when it is brought into its proper place beneath the singular and truly supreme power of God. Following this principle, Daniel denied that he had committed any offense against the king when he disobeyed the king's wicked decree. The king had overstepped his limits. He had not only wronged people but had lifted his horns against God, thereby forfeiting his own authority. On the other hand, the Israelites are condemned for being too obedient to their king's wicked commands. When Jeroboam made golden calves, they abandoned God's temple and, to please the king, turned to new superstitions. Their descendants bent just as easily to the decrees of their kings. The prophet sharply rebukes them for embracing the king's com-

mands. So far from deserving praise, the pretense of humility with which court flatterers deceive the simple -- saying it is not lawful for them to refuse anything their rulers command -- is thoroughly condemned. As if God had given up His rights to mortal men by putting them in charge of humanity! As if earthly power is diminished when it is made subject to its Author -- before whom even the heavenly powers humbly tremble in reverence! I know how great and how immediate the danger is that comes with this kind of resolve, because kings can barely tolerate being challenged. Their displeasure, as Solomon says, is a messenger of death. But since the heavenly herald Peter has proclaimed this decree -- that we must obey God rather than men -- let us comfort ourselves with this thought: we are performing the obedience the Lord requires when we choose to suffer anything rather than turn away from godliness. And so that our courage does not fail, Paul adds another motivation: we were redeemed by Christ at such a great price so that we would not submit ourselves as slaves to the corrupt desires of other people -- much less so that we would be bound to ungodliness.

Praise be to God. T.N.

THANKS FOR READING



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