

Monergism

THE LAW OF GOD

BY JOHN CALVIN



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On the Law of God

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"To be Christians under the law of grace does not mean to wander unbridled outside the law, but to be engrafted in Christ, by whose grace we are free from the curse of the law, and by whose Spirit we have the law engraved upon our hearts." ~ **John Calvin**

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We All Stand Condemned by the Law

John Calvin

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. - Gal. 3:11-12

We have seen that men must be worse than insane (whatever they say) if they do not come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. For if they cling to the law, it will only bring damnation, as I have shown; this is borne out sufficiently by our own experience. Indeed, when Paul in his Epistle to the Romans seeks to prove that men are greatly deceived if they trust in their own merits, he points out that the law can only bring God's wrath and vengeance upon us (Rom. 4:15). For although we already stand condemned (even before God has opened his mouth in judgment against us), our evil is exposed by the law because it is written that if we transgress in just one area, we are God's enemies and have provoked his wrath against us. What can be gained by protesting when the sentence is given from the heavenly throne? There is no room for appeal. Thus, to have a proper understanding of the gospel, we must recognise that we need to lean entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ and his mercy alone as our only hope of salvation. We all need to examine our own lives, for if we do so honestly and without hypocrisy, our spiritual standing will be abundantly clear. The Papists will not agree that faith alone can render us acceptable to God. This is because they have never been willing to place themselves before the judgment seat of God, but, instead, prefer to dwell in the darkness, as it were. Therefore, it should not surprise us if they grant themselves complete liberty to do as they please. However, the way of true, pure religion is for each of

us to scrutinise our own lives. Surely, even if we were carefully to examine just one minute of our lives, we would find ourselves worthy of eternal death. Indeed, each one of us would discover ourselves to be sinners, not in just one area but a hundred thousand; not due to some one fault but to countless millions. Now if even we ourselves acknowledge that we are full of so many blemishes, surely God is aware of many more than we could ever perceive, because he sees more deeply than we can, as John writes in his epistle (1 John 3:20). Thus, the case is settled. The verdict is that no one can be justified by the law; justification is through faith alone.

The apostle continues his discourse by adding another argument, which is this: if we seek our righteousness in the law, it will be clean contrary to the righteousness obtained by the elect children of God through faith. 'What is justification by the law?', Paul asks. He answers: 'The man that doeth them shall live in them.' In other words, whoever obeys God and keeps his commandments will have salvation as his reward. This is a wonderful promise, but what good will it do us? If we were to try to do perfectly all that God commands, we would find God revealing just what a grievous state of condemnation we are in, by bringing our failure to the forefront. What sort of salvation would it be, if each of us had to achieve it ourselves and deserve it? At first, when we hear that God is willing to reward with the gift of eternal life all who have honoured and served him by keeping his law, it seems like a wonderful prospect (that is, before we ponder its implications!). 'What!', we say, 'Here is God indebted to us, assuring us that we will inherit paradise if only we serve him and do his will.' But if we pause to place our lives alongside his commandments, we will find that although it appears that God is willing to be so kind and indulgent towards us as to reward us if we serve him and keep his law, the purpose of this is to plunge us deeper into the pit in which we already find ourselves by nature. What hope, therefore, can we have? The solution is set forth here by the apostle in the words of Habakkuk: 'The just shall live by faith' (Hab. 2:4). Let us, therefore, turn away from the promise which the law gives us, for it is of no value to us, and accept the free grace of our God, who is

stretching out his arms to receive us, that is, if we first rid ourselves of all pride. This is, in effect, what Paul means here.

This argument discloses two opposites. Imagine this: one person claims that fire is a source of heat, and another arrives and rather obstinately argues the opposite. We might say to him, 'Can ice or frost create heat, then? Surely, they are opposite elements, and completely incompatible with one another!' Or imagine a quarrel about whether the heat of the sun is necessary to this life of ours or not. Well, what would happen if there were no sun in the world? We would all choke on filthy air, which is only purged by the shining of the sun. Therefore, as there are opposing forces in the realm of nature, so the apostle says that we cannot be justified by both the law and the grace of God! If we desire to be in his favour, it can only be through his own goodness and love for us, which he has revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not through any dignity we possess in and of ourselves. But in order properly to understand this teaching, we need to pay careful attention to Paul's words here. He says that the righteousness of the law is achieved by observing whatever God has commanded us. This proves that keeping the law is quite sufficient to save us, for God has clearly declared, 'This is how you are to live. This is how you are to order your lives', and he has given us the ten commandments contained in the law. This law is an infallible rule for our lives, and we are not to seek for perfect righteousness anywhere else. This is why we are so opposed to the Papists, who think they are serving God so faithfully by devising their own commandments. God demands obedience. Let us be clear that the law contains the perfection of holiness in its teachings; it is not lawful to add anything to it. Man's struggle to introduce devotions which he has conceived in his own imagination is vanity.

However, the fact that the teachings of the law are sufficient to show us the nature of true righteousness, is not the end of the matter. We must move on to the next point, which is, 'Can we do what God has commanded?' We saw this morning that we fall very far short and, thus, the promise for all who keep the law is not applicable to us. The

Papists are greatly deceived in this matter: they still hold to the lie that God has not commanded anything that we cannot accomplish ourselves. Yet, Paul says the very opposite. They claim in support of their error that God must, therefore, be cheating us, because he clearly says, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them.' But it is very easy to resolve this objection. Yes, we would, indeed, be most confused over the meaning of this verse, had not God granted us a remedy to this problem; otherwise, it would mean that no one could live! As I have said, it would seem, superficially, that we have everything to gain, because God tells us that we can be acceptable in his sight by keeping the law, and he promises us a crown of glory; in fact, it would seem that we just cannot lose! But when all is taken into account, we come back to this same conclusion: no man can obtain eternal life in this way, no matter how much he desires it. Why? Because no man observes the law perfectly. It is not written that 'The man who keeps part of the law will live', but all of it. What, then, is justification by the law? A perfect obedience to it which does not fall short in any way. Such obedience cannot be found on earth: it therefore follows that we are all excluded from the promise which is given in the law.

This, however, does not mean that God is cheating us. He makes such a promise because men deceive themselves through pride and boast of their own merits; he therefore wishes to convict us of our guilt and of our inability to fulfil his demands. What would become of us if there were no law, nor such a promise as this? Think of the heathen — they have always sought to be pleasing to God through their own virtuous conduct. Yet, at the same time, they have an awareness of their shortcomings. This is why they retain the use of sacrifices. Of course, they do not understand the true purpose of sacrifice; when the heathen sacrifice something, they confess that they are in debt to God and need to find acceptance with him. Much like the Papists today, they amass many little rituals in their service to help them find reconciliation with God. Pagans throughout the ages have observed the kind of practices that the Papists use today. Whatever they may say, both groups think they can make themselves

worthy of God's salvation. Now, here the Lord is saying that we are wrong if we think he will not reward us, for out of his free goodness he promises to count us righteous if we observe his law. The question is: do we keep it? No; we fall very far short, in fact so short of it that we are made to feel desperate. God has good reason for making such a promise, even though it cannot be realised in our lives. Its intention is to correct the pride which fills us to the point of bursting, and which requires a drastic remedy. And what is this remedy? Well, God knows that we begin to murmur if he does not treat us according to our desires, and therefore he is willing to pour out his grace and blessings upon us in this world, in this passing life. Furthermore, he says he is willing to reserve an immortal inheritance for us, upon condition that we serve him. If we submit to him and keep a good account with him, he says he will reward us both in this life and the next. In saying all these things, he intends that all flesh should remain silent before him, confessing that if God were to punish them, or send them many afflictions and trials, they would be well deserved. For those of us who have properly examined their lives will confess without hypocrisy that we are not even worthy to eat the bread that sustains our physical lives on this earth. How, then, could we possibly merit paradise and the glory that belongs to God alone? How could we reach this by our own virtues? Thus, men's boasting tongues are silenced, even through this most generous and bountiful promise of the Lord.

At this point, we ought to note that this same promise is free in and of itself, but that we fall so far short of its standards that it will do us no good whatsoever until we relinquish our claim upon it. This would seem rather unclear to us, if I did not expound it in more detail. The heathen, as I mentioned earlier, think that God will reward them if they live honest and blameless lives in the sight of men. But this is foolishness, even madness, for how could God possibly be indebted to us? (This is made clear in the seventeenth chapter of Luke — Luke 17:10.) Even if we could do better than the angels in heaven, would it mean that God would be bound to repay us? Not at all! For we belong to him; we are his possession. Our Lord

Jesus Christ uses the picture of a servant; not speaking of a servant as we know it today, but, rather of a slave like the ones they used to have in those days. Even if a servant were killed a hundred times over for his master, as it were, living or dying, he is at his master's disposal. Our Lord Jesus Christ is saying to us, 'You are no more than poor mortal creatures yourselves, yet if any of you has a slave, he treats him like an ass or an ox. After working and labouring hard all day long, he returns home in the evening, but the master will not even let him sit down at his table! Even so, a servant has only done his duty and only that which he was hired to do.' Has God less authority than mortals? Even though you may be his, and are seeking to walk in obedience to his will, it can never be said that he is in any sense beholden to you. Thus (as I have already proved), although the Lord declared in the law, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them', it is important to consider what moved him to make such a bountiful promise of eternal life. It was not because he was indebted to us! If we kill ourselves, as it were, a hundred times in his service, this cannot make him obliged to pay us any wages whatever. But, in his mercy, he draws near and says, 'Although I owe you nothing, and although you can bring me nothing worthy of a reward (for you are bound to me in all points and in every respect), yet I desire to recompense you for your labour. Therefore, do your duty, do whatsoever I command and then you will not be disappointed but will receive your reward.' This is what we need to remember, and we will hear more of this shortly.

As for the Papists, they accept part of this, but not all. Most of them (I refer to those who are the Pope's closest allies) know nothing of these principles. Yet there are some who will grant that the divine promise of the law (to give life to all who have served God) does not teach that the works themselves have any merit in terms of eternal life, but only because of the promise. However, given that God has bound himself in this way, they nevertheless hope to deserve some reward at his hand. Why do they think in this way? Well, they say that, otherwise, his promise ('The man that doeth them shall live in them') was made in vain. However, these wretches do not

understand what I have been expounding, namely, that God's promise does not mean that men can merit salvation by their own works, but was rather intended to convict their souls and to lead them to true humility. This they shun, through their own foolish pride and ambition.

Now we can see the purpose behind Paul's words — if we claim to be justified through the law or through our own works, we must not fail in the least duty or omit to do anything, however small. For it is written, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them'. Now, what man is so proud that he would dare boast he has fully discharged his duty towards God? None but a hypocrite who has been overtaken by devilish pride, or a profane person who despises God and who has never truly repented, whose conscience is either asleep or bewitched. Only such a person can deceive himself into thinking he deserves anything. Thus, since the righteousness of the law is unattainable, and is something from which we are utterly barred, we need to find another righteousness. Put another way, we need God to accept us through his free grace. Instead of God receiving anything from us, we need the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ to be imputed to us, though we do not deserve it. Thus, we are delivered by God from our state of condemnation by nature through the abolition of all our offences and iniquities. In effect, this is what is meant in another passage, where Paul argues so admirably about this very doctrine (Rom. 3:19). In this place, too, the point at issue is the righteousness of the law. It is a wonder to me that the Papists have gone so far astray as to ignore such a clear warning as Paul makes in the latter text. They still protest thus: 'What!', they say, 'You are making a mockery of God! He has promised a reward for good works. Since he has promised on so many occasions to recompense us, how can he not carry it out? Otherwise, men might accuse him of lying.' But Paul answers them thus: 'My friends, if we think God will accept us because we deserve his favour, let us examine the promise he made us. If an argument breaks out between two men over buying or selling or some such thing, they will say, "Let us examine the contract and what is contained within it." As soon as the document

has been read, the case will become plain. One of them will say, ‘This article belongs to you, upon condition that you pay for it. If you do not pay, you can lay no claim to it.’ In the same way, with reference to the way of salvation, we must come to the original and chief contract that God made with us. Now, that contract is the law. Therefore, if men are seeking to be paid according to their service, they will find that this will banish them from everlasting life rather than enable them to obtain it. For God has declared that they have to perform all that he has commanded them, before they can inherit the salvation he has in store.’ All that remains is to find out whether or not it is possible for any man to perform these commandments perfectly.

Well, as we have already discovered, no one fulfils these requirements satisfactorily; thus, the promise cannot apply to us in our natural state. However, this is not what the Papists believe. They hear the words, ‘The man that doeth them shall live in them’ and think the most important thing is to observe the law. It is enough for them that God has given his Word to reward them. Whilst it is true that God has indeed said this, he requires that we actually fulfil his demands. The Papists will then use the following passage, where Paul says, ‘For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified’ (Rom. 2:13). They will use such quotations, but are clearly blind to their meaning, for Paul is saying that we can only be justified if we obey all that is commanded. The Jews used to glory in the law that had been given to them, saying, ‘The law tells us that we are the people of God.’ But there was a condition attached to this. And who has fulfilled that condition? Have you? Not in the least! Thus, we cannot be justified by hearing the law, as Paul says. How foolish if each of us simply came to church to hear the message that was being declared here, and then went away again, gratifying our own lusts. Paul says we must observe what God commands us, yet, since no one can do this properly, we all stand condemned.

The Papists, however, fail to reach the same conclusion because they only cling to half the text: 'But the doers of the law shall be justified.' Yes, this is so if a person has kept the law, but first show me such a man. In the same Epistle to the Romans, Paul later declares that God's promise of eternal life to all who keep his law is of no value to us because we can never perform it adequately (Rom. 8:3). In fact, by nature we are completely hostile to God's righteous standards. Now that he has regenerated us by his Holy Spirit, we are entirely indebted to him; every good thing we possess we have received from his hand, and he simply rewards his own gifts in us. Can we, therefore, speak of merit? No. Indeed, we must go further and say that even though our Lord deigns to crown our works when they are good in his sight, they can only be partly good, for there will always be enough sin mixed in with them to condemn us. Thus, we are stripped of all confidence in our own righteousness, because our works have insufficient worth in the eyes of God. If we were being judged by the text, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them', our works would be shown to be totally offensive to God. He would say, as it were, 'You are all dead, damned and lost. Why? Because none of you have done the things I asked you to do, whereas it was your duty to do so.' This is why we need to consider the second aspect to the solution I mentioned, which is 'living by faith'.

Paul, in the passage I referred to earlier (Rom. 3:21-22), does not quote the words of Habakkuk as he does in Romans chapter one and the seventeenth verse. But he says that the law points to the righteousness which is by faith. The righteousness of the law (that is, the God-given rule in the law which justifies us) is that we must obey and observe all his commandments. But the righteousness of faith speaks another language. It says that it is not for man to seek to win God's favour through the way he lives his life, and thus earn his reward or crown; rather, it is for man to rest entirely upon God's Word, allowing it to dwell in his heart and upon his lips. For if we believe in our hearts that the Lord Jesus Christ has died, and confess with our lips that he has risen again, we shall be counted righteous in God's sight (Rom. 10:9). Notice that Paul explains his meaning at

some length here for us to comprehend why he separates the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith, showing us that they are incompatible and can no more be mixed together than fire and water. Not that there is any contradiction between the law and the gospel (as I have already made clear), for we know that they both proceed from the same God. But we must remember God's purposes, as we have said all along. By giving us the righteousness of the law, he intended to humble us. Next, we will come before him realising we are condemned; this we would never have done if he had not revealed to us our own poverty. When we read that God promises justification if we serve him aright, he is saying in effect, 'Poor creatures, what worth or value do you have in and of yourselves? Weigh up my commandments and consider what they involve, and then reflect upon how each of you have lived. This will make you feel as if you could drown in self-despair.' Yet, though God speaks in this vein, he also grants a remedy — 'Come', he says, 'to the teachings of the gospel'. And what are they? Paul quotes the expression of Habakkuk, from chapter two and the fourth verse: 'The just shall live by his faith'. And in this passage he explains it more clearly, as we have seen, stating that we need to resort wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ. For the 'Word' that should be in our hearts and upon our lips, bringing us to God, and opening the kingdom of heaven to us, is not a Word that makes us cleave to this world below. Nor does it lead us to believe that God will praise us for our merits, allowing us to be puffed up with pride. Not at all; rather, it makes us cling to the Lord Jesus Christ. The righteousness of faith that God grants us involves the following: understanding that our sins are blotted out through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ; understanding also that through his resurrection we have obtained righteousness, and are now heirs of his heavenly kingdom (whereas before we were condemned to the pit of hell, which is the heritage that belongs to us and of which we are worthy by nature). We must also realise that in Jesus Christ, all that we lost in Adam is restored to us. The curse which covered us is removed when God sets us free. This is the righteousness of faith, and indeed, when we examine the context of

the verse Paul quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, we will see that it is to this very doctrine that the Holy Spirit is pointing.

Now, the prophet had spoken about the chastisements and judgments that God would send on the people; therefore, having examined the situation, we might well have concluded that all was lost. Then he says that the pride of the wicked will swell and increase, but that their feet are in a slippery place and they will stumble in the way. The more they seek to exalt themselves, the more grievous will be their fall. This is what the prophet pronounces upon the wicked. On the other hand, he says of the just that they shall 'live by faith'. Notice he says that the just shall live, implying that God's children will not find life here below. Even if they were to travel all over the world, and search high and low, they would soon realise that there is death and decay everywhere and in everything. However, though they do not enjoy this 'life' at the present time, they look forward to a life to come, and cherish it in their hearts and minds by faith. The prophet is seeking to draw the minds of God's elect away from both the world and themselves, so that they may cleave entirely to God, finding his grace alone sufficient for their salvation. Yet, Paul puts the case more briefly in our passage, because he was fully persuaded of the things I have expounded, and had already written of them — he always taught that faith leads us to find salvation in God alone. The law, though it may appear to be teaching something very different, actually shows us that there is no life in us at all, if we understand it aright. The law says, 'Work hard and do what you can to obtain paradise.' Why does it say this? Not to feed man's vain confidence in his own merits — certainly not! Rather, to prepare us to receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in humility. For (as I have said), although we are far away from God, we all like to think we are worthy of his acceptance. But our Lord will be avenged on such presumptuousness. He says to us, 'Let me see what you have done, draw near and we will begin the reckoning. Whichever of us owes anything to the other will have to pay it. I will not disappoint you; I have the reward in my hand. It is all ready. If you have done what I have commanded you, do not worry, you will be well paid for your

labour. Therefore, set to work and let me observe how you will serve me.' In saying this, our Lord, as I have said, prepares and disposes us to know what we are by nature. When we have acknowledged our poverty, then we will come to him to supply what we lack. Thus, the law leads to faith, albeit by a surprising route!

Whatever we may think, there will always be the paradox of which Paul speaks here. That is to say, that a person cannot be justified by faith unless he has first recognised and acknowledged in complete sincerity that he is lost. For salvation must be based upon the knowledge that we deserve damnation. It might seem as if Paul has taken the prophet's words too far, if Habakkuk was simply speaking of the afflictions of this transitory life. The just 'shall live' could mean 'shall survive', even though God may afflict and torment him. He will not fall if he rests upon the promises of God. Paul, however, is not dealing with the question of God comforting us and delivering us from the calamities to which we are subject in this world; he is concerned with the question of our eternal salvation, which is of far greater importance than anything else in this fleeting life. It might appear, therefore, as if he has misapplied the words of the prophet. But let us remember that the words themselves would have been uttered in vain if the thoughts of the prophet had gone no further than this world, for afflictions come upon all, upon good and bad alike. How, then, can we speak of living by faith, if we are constantly falling into the same trials that God has already delivered us from once, twice or three times before? If God has comforted me today in some affliction or other, and shown me his grace, tomorrow he may afflict me with another trial. What would my life be like if I had but this world alone to trust in? Therefore, to sum up, the prophet was saying that although believers may be miserable and may languish in this life, nevertheless, God blesses them in this world, and, furthermore, all the evil they endure here below shall turn to felicity. Why? Because they trust in their God. We ought to be aware, therefore, that there is a better inheritance than this, and we need to seek true, everlasting happiness — the kind that endures.

We must be careful to comment on the word 'just' here. For if Habakkuk had said, 'Wretched sinners shall live by faith', we would perhaps have imagined that his words were addressed to just a handful of people. Most will freely accept that poor sinners need to flee to God for refuge, but as for those of nobler virtues, surely they are exempt from what applies to the common people, God having exalted them to a higher degree? Surely it is their prerogative to be justified? Even today, though the Popish clergy (as they call them), with all their ceremonies, are filthy in God's sight, and ought to be abhorred by both God and man, yet they presume, because of their monkish habit and all the rest of their nonsense, that God is greatly in their debt! These bigots, having done all their babbling, and trotting up and down from altar to altar, and from chapel to chapel on various pilgrimages, hope that God will remember all their works. They hope that all of this will be put towards the payment of their account, with a hundred thousand other things that they plan to present to God! This is why the Lord Jesus Christ said that poor wretched sinners, even harlots, would enter the kingdom of heaven sooner than all these foul toads who are puffed up with pride in their own merits (Matt. 21:31)! Although their lives are full of wicked abominations, yet in their hypocrisy they suppose that God is bound to reward them.

Now, to eliminate all opportunity of entertaining such thoughts, the prophet expressly says, 'The just shall live by his faith.' At first, the meaning of this verse might be obscure to us. Does it mean that in order to have righteousness we must first live by faith? If this is the case, those who do not live by faith cannot be righteous. But what is the justification spoken of in the gospel? It is this — God freely granting us the means by which we may have access to him. We can be acceptable to him in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, for we cannot obtain righteousness through the law. Thus, although a man may live by faith, he is not righteous in and of himself. The prophet, therefore, means that the just are saved by the free grace of God alone. It is as if he were saying, 'Perhaps God will grant you grace to serve him acceptably, impressing upon your heart by his Holy Spirit true fear

and a zeal to glorify him as he deserves. He may well enable you to struggle against the lusts of the flesh to a great extent, striving with the sin which is part of your nature. Yet for all this, you must still turn your back upon all that you have done if you are seeking to please God.' Indeed, we must rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone. If even those who are righteous can only be justified through faith, who is there who will dare to seek to be justified through merit? Only devils, wicked men and the enemies of God.

Thus, when the Papists boast today (as they do) about the purity of their works and meritorious deeds, they only prove that they do not know the meaning of true righteousness. They are flying in the face of both God and nature. They say they want to be righteous — what do they mean? They mean in themselves, through works of merit. But what does the prophet say? He does not say that the just shall live by their works, but that they will be saved by the grace of God alone. If the just renounce, as they ought, all trust in their own merit, it follows that those who think they can come before God in the strength of their own deeds and that he will be bound to reward them, are striking themselves off the register of the righteous. Thus, according to the statement uttered here by the prophet, the Papists are rejected by God if they continue in their errors. Paul quotes the words of David: 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.' He teaches us that the righteous are those who condemn themselves, feeling in the very depths of despair, until God, in his goodness, rescues them (Rom. 4:8; Psa. 32:1ff). When David said, 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin', he was not, at this stage of his life, a wicked or dissolute man, nor one who despised God or who had never examined his conscience to expose his sin! On the contrary, God had chosen him; he had anointed him through Samuel; he had made him one of the foremost prophets. His kingdom prefigured that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, God had so transformed him that he was now like an angel living amongst men. Yet, he confessed and acknowledged his sins, sorrowing and mourning over them, and was in a state of torment like that of hell itself. He remained thus tortured until God came and displayed his

mercy, knowing no joy or peace until God granted him forgiveness. We, too, can only be happy if God overlooks all our deeds and blots out all our sins. This joy is ours if God is gracious to us, no longer considering what we are by nature — poor, condemned sinners — and accepting us, not as we are in our own persons, but for the sake of his only Son. Indeed, David reiterates this teaching in another place (Psa. 143:2): ‘Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.’

Let us, therefore, learn the following lesson: the more a man fears God, the more he will be ashamed of his sin. Consciousness of sin is not something that should last for a mere three or four months — we ought to detest our sins for the rest of our lives. After all, let us remember that the mouth of hell is open, ready to swallow us up unless God supplies the grace we need so desperately and plucks us out of the pit of death. This is why it is written that ‘the just shall live by faith’ — not as a doctrine that applies for three or four months only; nor is it written for those whose lives are less holy than others. God addresses these words even to the very noblest amongst us.

Now before we end, we need to comment upon the word ‘live’. It does not refer to a fixed length of time, say a day or three months. It speaks, instead, of a life lived by God’s grace every moment, in which we seek his presence and grace day by day to the end of our earthly lives. Although our lives are hidden in this world, as Paul says (Col. 3:3), and we see nothing but death in front of us, we need to rest entirely upon the promise of God. He has assured us of eternal life and this life is his to give — he will reserve it for us! He has pledged it to us by sending the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for our sakes. Now we no longer need ask, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven?’ Or, ‘Who will descend into the depths?’ Or, ‘Who will go over the sea for us?’. ‘The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart’ (Deut. 30:12; Rom. 10:6-8). We know that our Lord Jesus Christ descended into the deep; that is, he became a curse for us (as we shall see, God willing, in the next sermon — let this suffice us for now). Also he ascended into heaven and opened the door for

us, since he entered on our behalf. Let us find great assurance in these truths and allow ourselves to be like poor, dead men in this world while we await the revelation of the life which has been promised us. There is no doubt but that God will reveal and manifest it to us in his time, and we will fully rejoice in that 'life' which his holy gospel has so long proclaimed.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would make us increasingly conscious of them. May we be so affected by them that we cast ourselves down before him, trembling and groaning under the burden of the weaknesses and sins which beset us, until he has fully purged us. Let us also pray that, during this mortal life, he would bear us up until he has utterly delivered us from slavery to sin and bondage to Satan; until, I say, he has granted us complete liberty. May he not only grant this grace to us, but to all peoples, etc.

The Law Renders Us Inexcusable and Drives Us Into Despair

by John Calvin

But, in order that our guilt may arouse us to seek pardon, it behooves us, briefly, to know how by our instruction in the moral law we are rendered more inexcusable. If it is true that in the law we are taught the perfection of righteousness, this also follows: the complete observance of the law is perfect righteousness before God. By it man would evidently be deemed and reckoned righteous before the heavenly judgment seat. Therefore Moses, after he had published the law, did not hesitate to call heaven and earth to witness that he had "set before Israel life and death, good and evil" [Deuteronomy 30:19 p.]. We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised. On the other hand, it behooves us to examine whether we fulfill that obedience, through whose merit we ought to derive assurance of that reward. What point is there to see in the observance of the law the proffered reward of eternal life if, furthermore, it is not clear whether by this path we may attain eternal life. At this point the feebleness of the law shows itself. Because observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life and fall back into the mere curse. I am telling not only what happens but what must happen. For since the teaching of the law is far above human capacity, a man may indeed view from afar the proffered promises, yet he cannot derive any benefit from them. Therefore this thing alone remains: that from the goodness of the promises he should the better judge his own misery, while with the hope of salvation cut off he thinks himself threatened with certain death. On the other hand, horrible threats hang over us, constraining and entangling not a few of us only, but all of us to a man. They hang over us, I say, and

pursue us with inexorable harshness, so that we discern in the law only the most immediate death.

NEVERTHELESS THE PROMISES IN THE LAW ARE NOT WITHOUT MEANING

Therefore if we look only upon the law, we can only be despondent, confused, and despairing in mind, since from it all of us are condemned and accursed [Galatians 3:10]. And it holds us far away from the blessedness that it promises to its keepers. Is the Lord, you will ask, mocking us in this way? How little different from mockery is it to show forth the hope of happiness, to invite and attract us to it, to assure us that it is available, when all the while it is shut off and inaccessible? I reply: even if the promises of the law, in so far as they are conditional, depend upon perfect obedience to the law — which can nowhere be found — they have not been given in vain. For when we have learned that they will be fruitless and ineffectual for us unless God, out of his free goodness, shall receive us without looking at our works, and we in faith embrace that same goodness held forth to us by the gospel, the promises do not lack effectiveness even with the condition attached. For the Lord then freely bestows all things upon us so as to add to the full measure of his kindness this gift also: that not rejecting our imperfect obedience, but rather supplying what is lacking to complete it, he causes us to receive the benefit of the promises of the law as if we had fulfilled their condition. But since we will have to discuss this question more fully under the heading of justification by faith, we will not pursue it farther for the present.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US

We have said that the observance of the law is impossible. Since this is commonly looked upon as a very absurd opinion — Jerome does not hesitate to anathematize it — we ought at once to explain and confirm it in a few words. I do not tarry over what Jerome thinks; let us rather inquire what is true. Here I shall not weave long circumlocutions of various kinds of possibilities. I call "impossible"

what has never been, and what God's ordination and decree prevents from ever being. If we search the remotest past, I say that none of the saints, clad in the body of death [cf. Romans 7:24], has attained to that goal of love so as to love God "with all his heart, all his mind, all his soul, and all his might"[Mark 12:30, and parallels]. I say furthermore, there was no one who was not plagued with concupiscence. Who will contradict this? Indeed, I see what sort of saints we imagine in our foolish superstition; the heavenly angels can scarcely compare with them in purity! But this goes against both Scripture and the evidence of experience. I further say that there will be no one hereafter who will reach the goal of true perfection without sloughing off the weight of the body. For this point there are enough manifest testimonies of Scripture. "There is no righteous man upon the earth who... does not sin," said Solomon [Ecclesiastes 7:21, Vg.; cf. 1 Kings 8:46 p.]. Moreover, David says: "Every man living will be unrighteous before thee" [Psalm 143:2]. Job affirms the same idea in many passages [cf. Job 9:2; 25:4]. Paul expresses it most clearly of all: "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusts against the flesh" [Galatians 5:17]. That all those under the law are accursed he proves by no other reason, except that "it is written, 'Cursed be every one who will not abide by all things written in the book of the law'" [Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26]. Here he is obviously intimating, in fact assuming, that no one can so abide. But whatever has been declared in Scripture it is fitting to take as perpetual, even as necessary. The Pelagians plagued Augustine with such subtleties as these. They claimed that it was doing an injustice to God to assume that he demanded more of believers than they were able to carry out through his grace. He, to escape their slander, admitted that the Lord could indeed, if he so willed, elevate mortal man to angelic purity; but that he had never done, nor ever would do anything contrary to what he had declared in the Scriptures.

And I do not deny this, but yet add that it is ill-advised to pit God's might against his truth. Therefore, if someone says that what the Scriptures declare will not be, cannot be, such a statement is not to be scoffed at. But suppose they dispute about the Word itself. The

Lord, when his disciples asked, "Who can be saved?" [Matthew 19:25], replied: "With men this is indeed impossible, but with God all things are possible" [Matthew 19:26]. Also, Augustine compeningly contends that in this flesh we never render to God the love we lawfully owe him. He says: "Love so follows knowledge that no one can love God perfectly who does not first fully know his goodness. While we wander upon the earth, 'we see in a mirror dimly' [1 Corinthians 13:12]. Therefore, it follows that our love is imperfect." Let us be quite agreed, then, that the law cannot be fulfilled in this life of the flesh, if we observe the weakness of our own nature; as will, moreover, be shown from another passage of Paul [Romans 8:3]. (The law shows the righteousness of God, and as a mirror discloses our sinfulness, leading us to implore divine help, 6-9)

THE SEVERITY OF THE LAW TAKES AWAY FROM US ALL SELF-DECEPTION

But to make the whole matter clearer, let us survey briefly the function and use of what is called the "moral law." Now, so far as I understand it, it consists of three parts. The first part is this: while it shows God's righteousness, that is, therighteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness. For man, blinded and drunk with self-love, must be compelled to know and to confess his own feebleness and impurity. If man is not clearly convinced of his own vanity, he is puffed up with insane confidence in his own mental powers, and can never be induced to recognize their slenderness as long as he measures them by a measure of his own choice. But as soon as he begins to compare his powers with the difficulty of the law, he has something to diminish his bravado. For, however remarkable an opinion of his powers he formerly held, he soon feels that they are panting under so heavy a weight as to stagger and totter, and finally even to fall down and faint away. Thus man, schooled in the law, sloughs off the arrogance that previously blinded him.

Likewise, he needs to be cured of another disease, that of pride, with which we have said that he is sick. So long as he is permitted to stand upon his own judgment, he passes off hypocrisy as righteousness; pleased with this, he is aroused against God's grace by I know not what counterfeit acts of righteousness. But after he is compelled to weigh his life in the scales of the law, laying aside all that presumption of fictitious righteousness, he discovers that he is a long way from holiness, and is in fact teeming with a multitude of vices, with which he previously thought himself undefiled. So deep and tortuous are the recesses in which the evils of covetousness lurk that they easily deceive man's sight. The apostle has good reason to say: "I should not have known covetousness, if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" [Romans 7:7]. For if by the law covetousness is not dragged from its lair, it destroys wretched man so secretly that he does not even feel its fatal stab.

THE PUNITIVE FUNCTION OF THE LAW DOES NOT DIMINISH ITS WORTH

The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both — just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face. For when the capacity to follow righteousness fails him, man must be mired in sins. After the sin forthwith comes the curse. Accordingly, the greater the transgression of which the law holds us guilty, the graver the judgment to which it makes us answerable. The apostle's statement is relevant here: "Through the law comes knowledge of sin" [Romans 3:20]. There he notes only its first function, which sinners as yet unregenerate experience. Related to this are these statements: "Law slipped in, to increase the trespass" [Romans 5:20], and thus it is "the dispensation of death" [2 Corinthians 3:7] that "brings wrath" [Romans 4:15], and slays. There is no doubt that the more clearly the conscience is struck with awareness of its sin, the more the iniquity grows. For stubborn disobedience against the Lawgiver is then added to transgression. It remains, then, to the law to arm God's wrath for the sinner's downfall, for of itself the law can only

accuse, condemn, and destroy. As Augustine writes: "If the Spirit of grace is absent, the law is present only to accuse and kill us." But when we say that, we neither dishonor the law, nor detract at all from its excellence. Surely if our will were completely conformed and composed to obedience to the law, its knowledge alone would suffice to gain salvation. Yet, since our carnal and corrupted nature contends violently against God's spiritual law and is in no way corrected by its discipline, it follows that the law which had been given for salvation, provided it met with suitable hearers, turns into an occasion for sin and death. For, since all of us are proved to be transgressors, the more clearly it reveals God's righteousness, conversely the more it uncovers our iniquity. The more surely it confirms the reward of life and salvation as dependent upon righteousness, the more certain it renders the destruction of the wicked. These maxims — far from abusing the law — are of the greatest value in more clearly commending God's beneficence. Thus it is clear that by our wickedness and depravity we are prevented from enjoying the blessed life set openly before us by the law. Thereby the grace of God, which nourishes us without the support of the law, becomes sweeter, and his mercy, which bestows that grace upon us, becomes more lovely. From this we learn that he never tires in repeatedly benefiting us and in heaping new gifts upon us.

THE PUNITIVE FUNCTION OF THE LAW IN ITS WORK UPON BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

The wickedness and condemnation of us all are sealed by the testimony of the law. Yet this is not done to cause us to fall down in despair or, completely discouraged, to rush headlong over the brink — provided we duly profit by the testimony of the law. It is true that in this way the wicked are terrified, but because of their obstinacy of heart. For the children of God the knowledge of the law should have another purpose. The apostle testifies that we are indeed condemned by the judgment of the law, "so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God" [Romans 3:19]. He teaches the same idea in yet another place: "For God has

shut up all men in unbelief," not that he may destroy all or suffer all to perish, but "that he may have mercy upon all" [Romans 11:32]. This means that, dismissing the stupid opinion of their own strength, they come to realize that they stand and are upheld by God's hand alone; that, naked and empty-handed, they flee to his mercy, repose entirely in it, hide deep within it, and seize upon it alone for righteousness and merit. For God's mercy is revealed in Christ to all who seek and wait upon it with true faith, In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder of perfect righteousness, which all of us lack, and conversely, the severe judge of evil deeds. But in Christ his face shines, full of grace and gentleness, even upon us poor and unworthy sinners.

THE LAW, AS AUGUSTINE STATES, BY ACCUSING MOVES US TO SEEK GRACE

Augustine often speaks of the value of calling upon the grace of His help. For example, he writes to Hilary: "The law bids us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace." He writes similarly to Asellius: "The usefulness of the law lies in convicting man of his infirmity and moving him to call upon the remedy of grace which is in Christ." Again, to Innocent of Rome: "The law commands; grace supplies the strength to act." Again, to Valentinus: "God commands what we cannot do that we may know what we ought to seek from him." Again: "The law was given to accuse you; that accused you might fear; that fearing you might beg forgiveness; and that you might not presume on your own strength." Again: "The law was given for this purpose: to make you, being great, little; to show that you do not have in yourself the strength to attain righteousness, and for you, thus helpless, unworthy, and destitute, to flee to grace." Afterward he addresses God: "So act, O Lord; so act, O merciful Lord. Command what cannot be fulfilled. Rather, command what can be fulfilled only through thy grace so that, since men are unable to fulfill it through their own strength, every mouth may be stopped, and no one may

seem great to himself. Let all be little ones, and let all the world be guilty before God."

But it is silly of me to amass so many testimonies, since that holy man has written a work specifically on this topic, entitled *On the Spirit and the Letter*. He does not as expressly describe the second value of the law, either because he knew that it depended upon the first, or because he did not grasp it thoroughly, or because he lacked words to express its correct meaning distinctly and plainly enough. Yet this first function of the law is exercised also in the reprobate. For, although they do not proceed so far with the children of God as to be renewed and bloom again in the inner man after the abasement of their flesh, but are struck dumb by the first terror and lie in despair, nevertheless, the fact that their consciences are buffeted by such waves serves to show forth the equity of the divine judgment. For the reprobate always freely desire to evade God's judgment. Now, although that judgment is not yet revealed, so routed are they by the testimony of the law and of conscience, that they betray in themselves what they have deserved.

THE LAW AS PROTECTION OF THE COMMUNITY FROM UNJUST MEN

The second function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law. But they are restrained, not because their inner mind is stirred or affected, but because, being bridled, so to speak, they keep their hands from outward activity, and hold inside the depravity that otherwise they would wantonly have indulged. Consequently, they are neither better nor more righteous before God. Hindered by fright or shame, they dare neither execute what they have conceived in their minds, nor openly breathe forth the rage of their lust. Still, they do not have hearts disposed to fear and obedience toward God. Indeed, the more they restrain themselves, the more strongly are they inflamed; they burn and boil within, and are ready to do

anything or burst forth anywhere — but for the fact that this dread of the law hinders them. Not only that — but so wickedly do they also hate the law itself, and curse God the Lawgiver, that if they could, they would most certainly abolish him, or they cannot bear him either when he commands them to do right, or when he takes vengeance on the despisers of his majesty, all who are still unregenerate feel — some more obscurely, some more openly — that they are not drawn to obey the law voluntarily, but impelled by a violent fear do so against their will and despite their opposition to it.

But this constrained and forced righteousness is necessary for the public community of men, for whose tranquillity the Lord herein provided when he took care that everything be not tumultuously confounded. This would happen if everything were permitted to all men. Nay, even for the children of God, before they are called and while they are destitute of the Spirit of sanctification [Romans 1:4, Vg. etc.], so long as they play the wanton in the folly of the flesh, it is profitable for them to undergo this tutelage. While by the dread of divine vengeance they are restrained at least from outward wantonness, with minds yet untamed they progress but slightly for the present, yet become partially broken in by bearing the yoke of righteousness. As a consequence, when they are called, they are not utterly untutored and uninitiated in discipline as if it were something unknown. The apostle seems specially to have alluded to this function of the law when he teaches "that the law is not laid down for the just but for the unjust and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of parents, for manslayers, fornicators, perverts, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else runs counter to sound doctrine" [1 Timothy 2:9-20]. He shows in this that the law is like a halter to check the ragtag and otherwise limitlessly ranging lusts of the flesh.

THE LAW A DETERRENT TO THOSE NOT YET REGENERATE

What Paul says elsewhere, that "the law was for the Jews a tutor unto Christ" [Galatians 3:24], may be applied to both functions of the law. There are two kinds of men whom the law leads by its tutelage to Christ.

Of the first kind we have already spoken: because they are too full of their own virtue or of the assurance of their own righteousness, they are not fit to receive Christ's grace unless they first be emptied. Therefore, through the recognition of their own misery, the law brings them down to humility in order thus to prepare them to seek what previously they did not realize they lacked.

Men of the second kind have need of a bridle to restrain them from so slackening the reins on the lust of the flesh as to fall clean away from all pursuit of righteousness. For where the Spirit of God does not yet rule, lusts sometimes so boil that there is danger lest they plunge the soul bound over to them into forgetfulness and contempt of God. And such would happen if God did not oppose it with this remedy. Therefore, if he does not immediately regenerate those whom he has destined to inherit his Kingdom, until the time of his visitation, he keeps them safe through the works of the law under fear [cf. 1 Peter 2:12]. This is not that chaste and pure fear such as ought to be in his sons, but a fear useful in teaching them true godliness according to their capacity. We have so many proofs of this matter that no example is needed. For all who have at any time groped about in ignorance of God will admit that it happened to them in such a way that the bridle of the law restrained them in some fear and reverence toward God until, regenerated by the Spirit, they began wholeheartedly to love him.

EVEN THE BELIEVERS HAVE NEED OF THE LAW

The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the

finger of God [Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16], that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways. Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it. It is as if some servant, already prepared with all earnestness of heart to commend himself to his master, must search out and observe his master's ways more carefully in order to conform and accommodate himself to them. And not one of us may escape from this necessity. For no man has heretofore attained to such wisdom as to be unable, from the daily instruction of the law, to make fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of the divine will.

Again, because we need not only teaching but also exhortation, the servant of God will also avail himself of this benefit of the law: by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression. In this way the saints must press on; for, however eagerly they may in accordance with the Spirit strive toward God's righteousness, the listless flesh always so burdens them that they do not proceed with due readiness. The law is to the flesh like a whip to an idle and balky ass, to arouse it to work. Even for a spiritual man not yet free of the weight of the flesh the law remains a constant sting that will not let him stand still. Doubtless David was referring to this use when he sang the praises of the law: "The law of the Lord is spotless, converting souls;... the righteous acts of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts; the precept of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes," etc. [Psalm 18:8-9, Vg.; 19:7-8, EV]. Likewise: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" [Psalm 119:105], and innumerable other sayings in the same psalm [e.g., Psalm 119:5]. These do not contradict Paul's statements, which show not what use the law serves for the regenerate, but what it can of itself confer upon man.

But here the prophet proclaims the great usefulness of the law: the Lord instructs by their reading of it those whom he inwardly instills

with a readiness to obey. He lays hold not only of the precepts, but the accompanying promise of grace, which alone sweetens what is bitter. For what would be less lovable than the law if, with importuning and threatening alone, it troubled souls through fear, and distressed them through fright? David especially shows that in the law he apprehended the Mediator, without whom there is no delight or sweetness. unable, from the daily instruction of the law, to make fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of the divine will.

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and distressed them through fright? David especially shows that in the law he apprehended the Mediator, without whom there is no delight or sweetness.

WHOEVER WANTS TO DO AWAY WITH THE LAW ENTIRELY FOR THE FAITHFUL, UNDERSTANDS IT FALSELY

Certain ignorant persons,^{f240} not understanding this distinction, rashly cast out the whole of Moses, and bid farewell to the two Tables of the Law. For they think it obviously alien to Christians to hold to a doctrine that contains the "dispensation of death" [cf. 2 Corinthians 3:7]. Banish this wicked thought from our minds! For Moses has admirably taught that the law, which among sinners can engender nothing but death, ought among the saints to have a better and more excellent use. When about to die, he decreed to the people as follows: "Lay to your hearts all the words which this day I enjoin upon you, that you may command them to your children, and teach them to keep, do, and fulfill all those things written in the book of this law. For they have not been commanded to you in vain, but for each to live in them" [Deuteronomy 32:46-47, cf. Vg.]. But if no one can deny that a perfect pattern of righteousness stands forth in the law, either we need no rule to live rightly and justly, or it is forbidden to depart from the law. There are not many rules, but one everlasting and unchangeable rule to live by. For this reason we are not to refer solely to one age David's statement that the life of a righteous man is a continual meditation upon the law [Psalm 1:2], for it is just as applicable to every age, even to the end of the world.

We ought not to be frightened away from the law or to shun its instruction merely because it requires a much stricter moral purity than we shall reach while we bear about with us the prison house of our body. For the law is not now acting toward us as a rigorous enforcement officer who is not satisfied unless the requirements are met. But in this perfection to which it exhorts us, the law points out the goal toward which throughout life we are to strive. In this the law

is no less profitable than consistent with our duty. If we fail not in this struggle, it is well. Indeed, this whole life is a race [cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24-26]; when its course has been run, the Lord will grant us to attain that goal to which our efforts now press forward from afar.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE LAW BEEN ABROGATED FOR BELIEVERS?

Now, the law has power to exhort believers. This is not a power to bind their consciences with a curse, but one to shake off their sluggishness, by repeatedly urging them, and to pinch them awake to their imperfection. Therefore, many persons, wishing to express such liberation from that curse, say that for believers the law — I am still speaking of the moral law — has been abrogated.^{f241} Not that the law no longer enjoins believers to do what is right, but only that it is not for them what it formerly was: it may no longer condemn and destroy their consciences by frightening and confounding them. Paul teaches clearly enough such an abrogation of the law [cf. Romans 7:6]. That the Lord also preached it appears from this: he would not have refuted the notion that he would abolish the law [Matthew 5:17] if this opinion had not been prevalent among the Jews. But since without some pretext the idea could not have arisen by chance, it may be supposed to have arisen from a false interpretation of his teaching, just as almost all errors have commonly taken their occasion from truth. But to avoid stumbling on the same stone, let us accurately distinguish what in the law has been abrogated from what still remains in force. When the Lord testifies that he "came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it" and that "until heaven and earth pass away... not a jot will pass away from the law until all is accomplished" [Matthew 5:17-18], he sufficiently confirms that by his coming nothing is going to be taken away from the observance of the law. And justly — inasmuch as he came rather to remedy transgressions of it. Therefore through Christ the teaching of the law remains inviolable; by teaching, admonishing, reproof, and

correcting, it forms us and prepares us for every good work [cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17]

THE LAW IS ABROGATED TO THE EXTENT THAT IT NO LONGER CONDEMNS US

What Paul says of the curse unquestionably applies not to the ordinance itself but solely to its force to bind the conscience. The law not only teaches but forthrightly enforces what it commands. If it be not obeyed — indeed, if one in any respect fail in his duty — the law unleashes the thunderbolt of its curse. For this reason the apostle says: "All who are of the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who does not fulfill all things'" [Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26 p.]. He describes as "under the works of the law" those who do not ground their righteousness in remission of sins, through which we are released from the rigor of the law. He therefore teaches that we must be released from the bonds of the law, unless we wish to perish miserably under them.

But from what bonds? The bonds of harsh and dangerous requirements, which remit nothing of the extreme penalty of the law, and suffer no transgression to go unpunished. To redeem us from this curse, I say, Christ was made a curse for us. "For it is written: 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree.'" [Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:23.] In the following chapter Paul teaches that Christ was made subject to the law [Galatians 4:4] "that he might redeem those under the law" [Galatians 4:5a, Vg.]. This means the same thing, for he continues: "So that we might receive by adoption the right of sons" [Galatians 4:5b]. What does this mean? That we should not be borne down by an unending bondage, which would agonize our consciences with the fear of death. Meanwhile this always remains an unassailable fact: no part of the authority of the law is withdrawn without our having always to receive it with the same veneration and obedience.

THE CEREMONIAL LAW

The ceremonies are a different matter: they have been abrogated not in effect but only in use. Christ by his coming has terminated them, but has not deprived them of anything of their sanctity; rather, he has approved and honored it. Just as the ceremonies would have provided the people of the Old Covenant with an empty show if the power of Christ's death and resurrection had not been displayed therein; so, if they had not ceased, we would be unable today to discern for what purpose they were established.

Consequently Paul, to prove their observance not only superfluous but also harmful, teaches that they are shadows whose substance exists for us in Christ [Colossians 2:17]. Thus we see that in their abolition the truth shines forth better than if they, still far off and as if veiled, figured the Christ, who has already plainly revealed himself. At Christ's death "the curtain of the temple was torn in two" [Matthew 27:51] because now the living and express image of heavenly blessings was manifested, which before had been begun in indistinct outline only, as the author of The Letter to the Hebrews states [Hebrews 10:1]. To this applies Christ's utterance: "The law and the prophets were until John since then the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached" [Luke 16:16]. Not that the holy patriarchs were without the preaching that contains the hope of salvation and of eternal life, but that they only glimpsed from afar and in shadowy outline what we see today in full daylight. John the Baptist explains why the church of God had to pass quite beyond these rudiments: "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" [John 1:17]. For even though atonement for sins had been truly promised in the ancient sacrifices, and the Ark of the Covenant was a sure pledge of God's fatherly favor, all this would have been but shadow²⁴² had it not been grounded in the grace of Christ, in whom one finds perfect and everlasting stability. Let it be regarded as a fact that, although the rites of the law have ceased to be observed, by their termination one may better recognize how useful they were before the coming of Christ, who in abrogating their use has by his death sealed their force and effect.

THE WRITTEN BOND "AGAINST US" IS BLOTTED OUT

Of slightly greater difficulty is the point noted by Paul: "And you, when you were dead through sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven you all your sins, having canceled the written bond which was against us in the decrees, which was contrary to us. And he bore it from our midst, fixing it to the cross," etc. [Colossians 2:13-14, cf. Vg.]. This statement seems to extend the abolition of the law to the point that we now have nothing to do with its decrees. They are mistaken who understand it simply of the moral law, whose inexorable severity rather than its teaching they interpret as abolished.^{f243} Others, more carefully weighing Paul's words, perceive that these apply properly speaking to the ceremonial law; and they point out that the word "decree" is used in Paul more than once. For he also addresses the Ephesians thus: "He is our peace, who has made us both one... abolishing... the law of commandments resting upon decrees, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two" [Ephesians 2:14-15, cf. Vg.].^{f244} There is no doubt that this statement concerns the ceremonies, for he speaks of them as a wall that divides the Jews from the Gentiles [Ephesians 2:14]. Hence, I admit that the second group of expositors rightly criticizes the first. But the second group also still does not seem to explain the meaning of the apostle very well. For I am not at all happy about comparing the two passages in every detail. When Paul would assure the Ephesians of their adoption into the fellowship of Israel, he teaches that the hindrance which once held them back has now been removed. That was in the ceremonies. For the ritual cleansings and sacrifices, whereby the Jews were consecrated to the Lord, separated them from the Gentiles. Now who cannot see that a loftier mystery is referred to in the letter to the Colossians? The question there concerns the Mosaic observances, to which the false apostles were trying to drive the Christian people. But as in the letter to the Galatians he carries that discussion deeper — reverting, so to speak, to its starting point — so he does in this passage. For if you consider nothing else in the rites than the necessity of performing them, what is the point in calling

them "the written bond against us" [Colossians 2:14]? Moreover, why lodge nearly the whole of our redemption in the fact that they are "blotted out"? Therefore, the thing itself cries out that we should consider it as something more inward.

But I am sure that I have come upon the true understanding of it — provided the truth be granted of what Augustine somewhere most truly writes, or rather takes from the apostle's clear words: in the Jewish ceremonies there was confession of sins rather than atonement for them [cf. Hebrews 10:1 ff.; also Leviticus 16:21]. What else did the Jews accomplish with their sacrifices than to confess themselves guilty of death, since they substituted purification in place of themselves? What else did they accomplish with their cleansings but confess themselves unclean? They thus repeatedly renewed the "written bond" of their sin and impurity. But in giving such proof there was no release from it. The apostle, for this reason, writes: "Since Christ's death has occurred, redemption from the transgressions which remained under the old covenant has been accomplished" [Hebrews 9:15 p.]. The apostle rightly, therefore, calls the ceremonies "written bonds against" [Colossians 2:14] those observing them, since through such rites they openly certify their own condemnation and uncleanness [cf. Hebrews 10:3]. There is no contradiction in the fact that they also were partakers in the same grace with us. For they attained that in Christ; not in the ceremonies that the apostle in that passage distinguishes from Christ, inasmuch as these, then in use, obscured Christ's glory. We hold that ceremonies, considered in themselves, are very appropriately called "written bonds against" the salvation of men. For they were, so to speak, binding legal documents, which attested men's obligation. When the false apostles wanted to bind the Christian church again to observe them, Paul with good reason, more profoundly restating their ultimate purpose, warned the Colossians into what danger they would slip back if they allowed themselves to be subjugated to the ceremonial law in this way [Colossians 2:16 ff.]. For at the same time they were deprived of the benefit of Christ, since, when once he had carried out the eternal atonement, he abolished those daily

observances, which were able only to attest sins but could do nothing to blot them out.

Freedom from the Bondage of the Law

John Calvin

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. - Gal. 4:21-26

Freedom is such a desirable thing to every one of us, that without it our lives would be little more than a living death, or at the very least, perpetual misery. Indeed, so far as we are able, we flee subjection and constraint, and covet liberty, which, according to the old proverb, is a priceless treasure. If this is true of our earthly lives, then it applies even more to the eternal salvation of our souls. Yet how many there are who are still in bondage, as if they have a noose tied around their necks! Although they claim to love freedom, they live as though they were bound in slavery. This freedom is particularly evident when people are able to rejoice in the liberty purchased for them by the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings rest to their souls. In the gospel, God declares that he delights to adopt us as his children, and in doing so, he frees us from Satan's snare and from the tyranny of sin. But there are very few who will accept this gift when it is presented to them, because of their cursed captivity to sin; they seem to prefer to be subject to their own carnal appetites, rather than to yield in obedience to God and walk in complete liberty. Paul,

therefore, has good reason to scold the Galatians for living under the law, because they are rejecting the freedom and liberty that they should have enjoyed as children of God.

Now Paul gives us a symbol, a vivid picture illustrating that the very law itself reveals the poverty and misery of the human heart; yet the Galatians prefer to remain under it! For the house of Abraham is a clear symbol of the church of God. It tells us much about the state of the church. It is written that Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac (Gen. 16:1ff). Ishmael was born to Hagar, Abraham's servant, who was given to him to be his wife. But there was a serious fault here, for it was not right for him to break faith with his lawful wife, Sarah. Now, what was the reason for this union between Abraham and Hagar? It was brought about because Sarah acted hastily and rashly, believing that God was too slow about fulfilling his promise to her to provide her with offspring. She thought that she was unable to conceive. But her understanding of God's Word was poor, and she did not have the patience and contentment that faith demands. In short, this was a relationship to be condemned, an immoral union, though Abraham did not originally intend this at all. He had not been driven by wicked lust, he had simply desired to have seed through which would spring the salvation of the world. But how foolish such acts are, when we attempt this or that without being told to do so by the Word of God. When we are driven by our own rash desires, many sins occur. Thus, Ishmael was born to Hagar, the 'bondmaid', from an illicit relationship with which God was not pleased. Isaac was born to Sarah a long time after Ishmael, for Ishmael may have been sixteen years old when Isaac was born. Paul (following Moses' account) tells us that Isaac was born according to promise and Ishmael according to the flesh. Now this does not mean that Abraham was not Isaac's father, but rather that he was born through divine power; for Abraham was declining; indeed, he was half-dead and had no strength left in him! He was a hundred years old, and his wife was almost the same; she had been infertile throughout her life of roughly ninety years. The idea that she could conceive and give birth was seen as laughable when the angels brought her this

message (Gen. 18:12). Therefore, Isaac was born according to promise, for God worked a miracle in order that he might send the Lord Jesus into this world; not following the laws of nature, but through the goodness of God alone and according to his perfect will.

Thus, in the house of Abraham, we have a figure of the church: two women, both of whom gave birth to a son. As for Hagar, Paul tells us that she represents Mount Sinai, where the law was given, and we are told that this was in Arabia, to show that it was not in the holy land chosen by God as an inheritance for his people. Sarah represents Jerusalem. Not, he says, the present city, for it has changed beyond recognition. Its inhabitants have separated themselves from the law and from pure doctrine. Now, when I say the law, I do not mean it in the way Paul refers to it in this letter — the law that engenders bondage — I mean the covenant that God made with his people through the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Jerusalem at the time of Paul had rejected Jesus Christ and, therefore, broken their covenant with God, Paul says that he must refer to it as Hagar and Sinai. For the Jews, he is saying, boast about their temple and sacrifices and the like, and that they are the chosen and elect people of God, yet they are banished and excluded from the holy land, as it were, and have a meaningless connection with the law. For if we were to see Jerusalem at the time of Paul, we would realise that it was comparable to Sinai. But there is another Jerusalem: 'Jerusalem which is above'. This corresponds to the church through which we receive regeneration in God's sight. The church, through the incorruptible seed of the gospel, engenders offspring who are freeborn. For she is 'the mother of us all'. Then Paul quotes the words of Isaiah, 'Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not' (Isa. 54:1). Now, Isaiah is not referring to a particular woman here, but the church of God, using this image as a simile. For a time the church had been very dissolute and, therefore, Isaiah tells us it was as if she had been cast away. A kind of divorce had occurred between God and his people. But the prophet assures the church that he will multiply her one day, and that she would have more children than if she had always prospered and flourished. This happened when the gospel

was proclaimed to the world. For the church not only comprises the children of Abraham, or one particular race; but through the holy seed of the gospel, she has brought forth an infinite number of children for God, of every nation and land, even those far-distant from our own. For God has displayed his might throughout the globe. This is the meaning of the passage that we have quoted.

Paul tells us that these things are ‘an allegory’. The first point we need to make here is that Paul did not wish to deny the literal meaning of Holy Scripture. There are some people who find a curious pleasure in seeking out strange interpretations of the Scriptures. By overlooking the literal interpretation, they undermine the whole. Hence, there are countless perversions and corruptions of the truth. False allegories abound today; they are adopted by multitudes, and yet are nothing more than Satanic inventions. Because such theories are accepted and applauded, the people remain bewitched by Satan. What fine expositors they make! Yet, how are they so successful? Well, if a doctrine is neither from heaven nor from earth, it is easy for poor ignorant souls to remain in suspension between the two! Paul does not intend us to interpret Moses’ story of Isaac and Ishmael as a fanciful speculation — no, he is demonstrating that this historical account reveals the state of the church, though, in those days, the only church that God presided over was that of the house of Abraham. (Of course, there was Salem, whose king was Melchisedec, but this was not clearly understood at that point. Therefore, God chose to adopt a people through Abraham, and to reveal that he wished to be called upon by a people whom he had separated from the rest of mankind.) However, we must not read Moses’ account coldly, without looking any further, that is, without considering what happened to this family and applying it to the church.

Now, let us come to the central theme — the law. When Paul compares Hagar, Abraham’s servant, to Mount Sinai and the law which was given on that mountain, he is not referring to the substance of the law. For the law contains many promises of

salvation which were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ; Paul himself declares this in several other passages, as we have already seen. If we take and apply the law in its proper and legitimate usage, we will see it as an incorruptible, life-giving seed, through which God becomes our Father and sets us free. The law only engenders servitude with relation to external issues, as we have discussed before. Our forefathers of old, though they were children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven just like ourselves, were under tutors and governors. They were like little children, incomplete until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their ceremonies were like bridles or cords preventing those who observed them from enjoying the liberty that we have today through the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, when Paul speaks of the law creating servitude, he is speaking here of the way in which the Galatians misapplied the law, for he continues by saying that those who are under such servitude will eventually be banished and excluded from the family and inheritance of God. Thus, although our forefathers lived in servitude with regard to external things, yet they were free; for the Spirit gave them a faith that overcame their bondage, as it says in the eighth chapter to the Romans. Without faith, they would have been cut off from any hope of salvation. To sum up, Paul refers to the law here in this negative way because of the particular interpretation these hypocrites had made of it, corrupting it by reducing it to the observance of petty rules, and by making their observation meritorious. In doing so, they were binding people's consciences so tightly that they were almost suffocated!

Now, Paul has adequately dealt with this subject on a previous occasion, but it would be helpful for us to remind ourselves of what he said. He drew a contrast between the law and the gospel; for those who seek justification through the law imagine that God is indebted to them if they fulfil their duty towards him. They have heard the promise that if a man keeps the law, he shall live (Lev. 18:5). They are rigorous in their law observance and even believe they have accomplished all that God requires and demands. Having such a promise before them, they await their reward, no longer believing that salvation is a free gift, but rather that they have deserved all that

God has promised. Thus, eternal life becomes the expected recompense for all their meritorious deeds. So much for the law. As for the gospel, God becomes our Father when we are released from the curse of sin and Satan and, indeed, from the condemnation due to us through the law. For it is written that those who have not kept the law perfectly are accursed, as we have said before (Deut. 27:26). Thus, all are guilty; the whole world is plunged into despair without remedy, unless God withdraws the condemnation of poor sinners, and quashes the sentence he has pronounced upon them. We have now understood what Paul means when he refers here to the law. He is not saying that Moses' teachings are insufficient for a person to become a child of God, or that there are no promises of eternal salvation for mankind in the law, but simply that before Christ came into this world there was not the full enjoyment of liberty that we have today. More than this, he is informing us of the abuses of the law by hypocrites who had misinterpreted its purpose. They imagined that they could please God and obtain his favour by its observance. But Paul tells us that we remain in slavery until we are delivered by another kind of seed, that is to say, the gospel.

Now, when Paul says that Hagar or Sinai corresponds to 'Jerusalem which now is', he means that city which had once been God's sanctuary, and which, therefore, ought to have been the fountainhead of heavenly and pure doctrine. For both Isaiah and Micah tell us that 'out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem' (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2). But the Jews became defiled and added their own inventions and interpretations to the purity of true doctrine. They even rejected Jesus Christ, the fountain of life. Thus, Paul tells us that this Jerusalem is like Hagar the bondmaid and Mount Sinai, which can only bring about condemnation. This is worthy of note, because it shows us that God has never favoured a place so much that he could not punish the ingratitude of its inhabitants for their misuse of his benefits; mercies which he placed at their disposal. This is Jerusalem, known as the holy city of God, his royal palace, his habitation, the place of his residence — all of these descriptions are to be found in Holy

Scripture, (Psa. 48:1-3, 132:13; Matt. 4:5, 27:53). Yet, Paul tells us that it has become like Sinai, an infertile mountain in a distant and desolate area outside the borders of the holy land, which God chose as the inheritance and resting place of his elect people.

Recognising that such a change had taken place in Jerusalem, the city once chosen by God and blessed with such excellent titles, what will happen to the people who reject the gospel today? Even if they have known great honour, God can easily bring them down to ignominy. Look what is said about the towns where Jesus preached the gospel, like Capernaum and the rest; they could boast of having been first to hear the message of salvation, or that Jesus Christ preached more there than in Jerusalem itself. But we are told that such towns would be 'brought down to hell' (Matt. 11:23). It was for their rebellion and stubborn persistence in evil; their refusal to accept the grace that was offered to them in the preaching of the gospel. We know what Jeremiah said about Shiloh (Jer. 7:12). You see, the Jews boasted that they had the city of Jerusalem with its temple and altar. But Jeremiah tells them to visit Shiloh — that place where the ark rested for so many years. People would come there from all parts to worship God and bring their sacrifices, but now what would they see there? A terrifying reminder of the vengeance of God because they had misused the good things that God had originally blessed them with.

Now, let us apply this for our own instruction, so that we learn to walk in fear and wisdom, for God has been gracious to us by dwelling amongst us and establishing his royal throne to reign over us. For our part, we ought to obey him, and shelter ourselves beneath his wings in sobriety and humility. If we were to think that he is under obligation to us, then we will be audacious, opinionated and proud towards him. We would abuse the gifts that he intended to be for our well-being, and such wickedness could not go unpunished. Thus, the example of Jerusalem warns us to yield peacefully in obedience to our God, and allow him to rule over us. We must be submissive in every way, and not puffed up with pride or presumption, now that he

has poured out his spiritual blessings upon us. Indeed, this ought to make us confess our dependence upon him and to humble ourselves.

Incidentally, we can see how foolish the Papists are to want to associate God with Rome; for they say it is the 'apostolic seat'. But their claims about Peter are nothing more than lies and fables. Whilst it is certain that Paul was held prisoner in Rome, and it may even be deduced that he died there, this is all that sets Rome apart. The gospel was attacked there, and that den of the devil was saturated with the blood of the martyrs, as if to provoke the wrath of God. It was here that men conspired to fight against the truth, and blot out, as far as they possibly could, the name and memory of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is all the dignity that Rome can claim! These people imagine that Rome has all the honourable titles that Jerusalem once had, though there is not a single syllable in the Scriptures to justify this. Nowhere do they tell us that God reigns there, or has chosen to dwell within its walls; nowhere is it referred to as 'mother', or as having a special honour — nothing like this at all! Paul does say that the faith of the Romans was known everywhere and that they had a good reputation (Rom. 1:8), but he is speaking of a mere handful of people. For those who ruled in Rome were certainly not Christians, yet there was a small group gathered together in hideouts, and these are the people that Paul praises and esteems. Therefore, we must never imagine that the whole of Rome belonged to the church of God! We saw what happened to Jerusalem — that she was compared to Hagar and Sinai, that is to say, that she had become a profane and polluted place. Her holiness had long been forgotten, because she had not continued in the pure doctrines of the gospel.

We can only conclude, therefore, that even those who are nearest to God, and who have enjoyed close communion with him, will be cast off like strangers if they do not persevere in holiness; for holiness is like a tie that keeps us closely bound to our God. We can see that the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is rejected, trodden under foot, held in contempt and disdain in Rome today. Furthermore, gospel

teachers are persecuted by fire and their blood is shed in that place. There is no true religion there at all now, for it is full of wickedness and corruption. If a man were to enter Rome and return with the fear of God, some good seed having been sown in his heart, it would be a miracle. It is clear that Rome is the very cavern of hell. May it please God that people would suffer broken necks rather than venture upon that city! For at this time, even the nation of France has been infected by her impiety. The majority of those in France have become nothing more than dogs and pigs, with no more true religion than brute beasts. All the more reason, therefore, for us to heed this warning and to walk in wisdom and the fear of God, being careful that we are not deprived of the privileges that we have received because of our ingratitude. May God never wreak his terrible vengeance upon us, and make us trophies of dishonour and shame. Such is Paul's description of Jerusalem, which had formerly known such great honour.

Notice, furthermore, that under the figure of Abraham, God proclaims that he is the Father of all his own people. We have, therefore, been born of God in that we belong to his church. Yet it is not enough simply to claim that God is our Father, unless we have been truly regenerated through the incorruptible seed, which is alone the guarantee of life and eternal salvation. We may ask the question, how is it possible to be members of God's family and yet be like illegitimate offspring? The answer is that, by our iniquity and wickedness, we have corrupted the Word of God, which is his seed. This is the way Peter describes it (1 Pet. 1:23). Yes, it is true that the Word, since it proceeds from God, is spotless in itself. It sparkles with purity, and contains all the treasures of the righteousness, goodness and mercy of God. This is the nature of the Word of God, but we have devalued it and altered it according to our own whims and fancies, and added our own impurity. So then, although we may regard ourselves as children of God, yet we are bastard children, as we shall see in greater detail this afternoon, by God's good pleasure. For Paul proceeds to show that Ishmael, though the eldest son, was finally expelled from his own family. This occurred because he was

illegitimate, being born to Hagar. Therefore, we are to learn that we must be born into God's family through faith in the Word of God in its purity; God then enlightens our minds through the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us the will of God. For if we alter the Word of God beyond recognition, according to our own perceptions, though it may still be called the seed of God, it will not be so in truth, for it has been corrupted.

Thus, there are so many people around today who call themselves Christians but live under false pretences. For example, the Papists say that they believe in God and seek to adhere to the Holy Scriptures, but it is evident that they have twisted them. Instead of accepting the Holy Scriptures with all due reverence, they wrest them according to their own convenience, and even mock them and joke about them! As we have said on a previous occasion, they blasphemously treat the Scriptures like a wax nose that they can mould to whatever shape they wish! They have turned everything into confusion by their contrivances! Indeed, whatever the Papists call serving God has been hatched in their own minds. There is no question of ordering one's life according to what God has commanded and decreed. No, he is dethroned, and they usurp his lawful sovereignty and attribute such authority to themselves that they subjugate consciences and create whatever laws seem good to them. This sin is too great and too evil for words. How, then, do the Papists formulate their articles of faith? It must be according to what they have determined themselves, for there is certainly nothing in them that has been drawn from the Scriptures! Never mind what is written in the Holy Scriptures; they have conclusions of their own, which they regard as the very oracles of heaven, for they are swiftly received as commonly accepted facts. When they seek our approval of such nonsense, they say that, first and foremost, these are received doctrines: we must bow to their antiquity as if it makes them prescriptive for us, and thereupon they may just cite a few passages of Scripture which they have pulled out of context for good measure. But this is a mockery, for they have wilfully defiled the Word of God.

Surely even little children, aware of such great and glaring ignorance, would spit in their faces!

Thus, the Papists are a good example of what Paul is illustrating here. In other words, there are many who boast that they are children of God, and servants of the church, who are really illegitimate. They are born of corrupt seed, for instead of adhering to pure doctrine which could bring the regeneration that leads to eternal life, they have added their own doctrines and thus violated the integrity of God's Word. We are not stretching the point too far when we say that Paul's argument is borne out by the Papists today. For what is our greatest quarrel with them at this point in time? It concerns free will, meritorious acts of service, satisfaction for sin, and the rest. The Papists say that we can obtain favour in the eyes of God by our own efforts, and that we do not need the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit. Yes, they admit that there is some collaboration, and that God works within us up to a point; but they say that we are his helpers, and we would be most weak and useless if our virtue did not help us to gain God's favour. They also say that the grace of God is of no effect unless we add to it something of our own doing. Thus, they are building a doctrine based upon merit; the only way you can reach the kingdom of heaven is by pleasing God. You need personal merit in order to pay for the sins you have committed. This is what the Papists spout forth! Furthermore, they conclude that it is a blasphemy to say that it is impossible to keep the law of God perfectly. They claim that anybody, if he applies himself, can fully observe its requirements. Yes, it is easy to brag in this way whilst still living in darkness, for those who say these things are themselves wicked fornicators, drunkards, blasphemers, people given to all kinds of gross and sinful behaviour. We know just how holy these monks, hypocrites, crooks and vermin are!

As for ourselves, we would say that we are born slaves of sin and under the tyrannical rule of Satan. We are held so tightly in his grip that we cannot even have one righteous thought about doing good. Our nature tends wholly towards evil, just like a donkey carrying its

yoke and burden, yet our sin proceeds entirely from our own wills. We are born in sin and, therefore, can do nothing else; we continually offend God until he sets us free by his Holy Spirit and grants us his liberty. Furthermore, we believe that it is impossible to keep the law of God, but that the law simply reveals our duty; it is for each one to read his condemnation therein. We must come before God in silence, as evildoers, in order to obtain grace for the offences that we have committed. We come clothed in shame, confessing that we are lost, that God might save us through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In short, we say that it is completely beyond our powers to acquit ourselves in the eyes of God. But he comes to our aid; he does not scrutinise us or enter into account with us. When we have offended him, there is no satisfaction for sin other than the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The only way we can be cleansed is to wash ourselves in his blood.

We see, therefore, the practical application of Paul's teaching when we consider the points of conflict between the Papists and ourselves. Though they associate with the name of God, and falsely claim to honour it, and though they say they are his children because they accept the Holy Scriptures, yet they demonstrate that their mother is Hagar and Sinai, and that they are still in bondage. They still have the yoke around their necks, and refuse to come to God to accept the liberty that he offers. They would rather usurp that which God has reserved for himself alone by justifying themselves through their own merits and by seeking to fulfil the law. They are children of the bondwoman, therefore, and must remain slaves; their end is to be cast out forever. As for us, we will see the implications of this teaching later on, but, briefly, it concerns the fact that our only means of deliverance is through the gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself declares in the eighth chapter of John's Gospel that it is his role to set us free, and that this privilege was given to him by God the Father, to deliver us from all condemnation. We must, therefore, come to the Lord Jesus Christ and find all that we need in him, for it is through him that we are freed from the yoke of the law. This yoke is too heavy for us to bear: not only does it weigh us down, it actually

plunges us into the pit of hell. Thus, we obtain this deliverance only through the seed which brings regeneration and complete liberty. We become children of God, and not only are we known as such in the eyes of the world, but before angels. We will finally reach the inheritance that has been obtained for us at so great a cost, and which we could never have possessed by our own merits. It can only be obtained through the One to whom it all belongs, having conferred the inheritance on us through the gospel which we hear each day.

Now, let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would help us to feel them more than ever before. Then we may grow and mature more and more through genuine repentance, so that, in coming to him, we may do so in all humility and without hypocrisy. We must be ashamed of our sin to the point that we seek no other remedy than the Lord Jesus Christ. Since our great God has received us and sealed us with the grace of his adoption in our hearts by his Holy Spirit, may we maintain the purity of the gospel, adding nothing of our own invention. May nothing be corrupted by our own notions, but may the Holy Spirit keep us obedient in the faith. In this way, as he has begun to show us his favour, we for our part will aim unswervingly for perfection. Thus, we all say, Almighty God and heavenly Father, etc.

The Spirituality of the Law

John Calvin

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. - Gal. 5:19-23

We saw this morning that men stand condemned in the sight of God because all that proceeds from man is contaminated and filthy. Now if God is the Author of all perfection, it follows that all that is contrary to his nature or to his Word is totally corrupt. Hence, there is a constant battle of the flesh against the spirit; for if men were left to pursue their own paths, they would be mortal enemies of God throughout their whole lives. For this reason, we can only conclude that men are full of evil and iniquity. When we hear this sentence pronounced, we ought to be utterly ashamed; for here is the decree of our heavenly judge, and it is not lawful to contest it, for God speaks with authority. When he declares that we are evil and perverse by nature, he fulfils his office; for we must give account to him. However, men are so blinded in their hypocrisy or pride that they do not care if they have provoked God's anger against themselves. This is because we all flatter ourselves and feed our sins. Therefore, the only way we can be made truly to acknowledge our sins is by force. Even then, we make use of evasive techniques and subterfuge. What is more, we brazenly seek out frivolous excuses, as if they would be pleasing to God! Therefore, it is not enough for us to hear God's

general sentence of condemnation pronounced against us; we need God to reveal our own vileness, to make us ashamed of ourselves. We need him to be specific and point his finger at the sins that are apparent and obvious to the people around us.

Hence, Paul, having said this morning that all the thoughts and feelings of men strive against God, now adds the declaration that we have just heard. He tells us that the appearance of fruit enables us to assess the condition of the tree, though the most important part, the root, is hidden. Just as the tree is known by its fruit, the sin that reigns in us and in our nature is seen by the works that we produce. Thus, we can see why Paul says here that ‘the works of the flesh are manifest’. It is as if he is saying that people deliberately close their eyes to obscure their own evil, and deceive themselves into thinking that they are full of nothing but virtue, although they are bursting at the seams with ever so many terrible vices. However much we may protest, seek out different excuses, wipe our mouths and disguise the way things really are, yet we have to return to the fact that our lives declare, loud and clear, the kind of people we are. Thus, the works of the flesh are indeed manifest. Now this is enough to rebuke those who seek to hide behind a layer of makeup, as it were, as if they were innocent in the eyes of God. It is true that Paul does not give a complete list here of the sins that God condemns in the law, but he recites examples by which we may easily judge the rest. Besides, it would have been a lengthy procedure if Paul had wanted to enumerate them in this way. As we shall see, however, this list is sufficient to convict all those who think they stand to gain by their hypocrisy.

In order to have a better understanding of all this, we need to be aware of what it is to walk in obedience to God. In the second chapter of Titus, verse eleven, it says that the grace of God has appeared that we might walk in the world here below in holiness, temperance, and righteousness while we hope for the life that God has promised us, and the coming of our great Saviour, who will gather us to himself in his heavenly kingdom. To this, Christians must apply themselves

above all else. They must be exercised in these things; namely, the knowledge that this is not the place of our eternal rest, nor our inheritance. This world is like a foreign land that we must travel through, whilst our eyes are lifted up to heaven. This is the most important thing. Yet this cannot be achieved unless believers call upon God and have recourse to him alone. As for our lives, Paul speaks of three specific things: there is holiness, which means that we serve God with a pure heart, with integrity and honesty, renouncing all the pollution of this world. This is the first point. Secondly, we must not become worldly or profane, but must lead an honest life. The third is that we harm no one, that we never practise deceit or cruelty, but that we seek, rather, to serve our neighbours. The life of a Christian should be like this.

Now, Paul says here that for those who do not acknowledge that they are wholly at enmity with God, and full of malice and rebellion, a simple test is needed. If we were to examine their lives, we would find that some are given over to fornication, some are drunkards, others are given up to all kinds of wickedness, some are murderers, others are witches, some stir up revolts, others are full of ambition, some still seek only to sow discord and trouble and to create sects that pervert the truth of God by their corruption. This is what we will find if we look into men's lives. Now, what will they gain by complaining against God and seeking to hide their baseness by quibbling? If they do not confess this with their mouths, then their lives will speak. Their lives, with all the works that we see them perform, will be a testimony to what we have said; thus, there can be no further debate.

Moreover, when Paul says that the works of the flesh are manifest, he does not mean that all whom God leaves to follow their natural course, and who are not led by the Holy Spirit, are guilty of each sin named here. It is more likely that a person will be corrupt to the extent that he will be given over first to one sin, then to two or three, as occasion arises. Thus, there are many pagans and unbelievers who have no fear of God, and have never been taught his Word, who yet

have some appearance of virtue and uprightness. However, this does not mean that they are therefore free from corruption, for if the infection is hidden and lurking inside them, then they have a tumour which will eventually rot every part of them. For man's nature knows no perimeters, no limits; all is unbounded confusion. This is what we are to retain from this passage; and, in order that none of us should be deceived by hypocrisy, we need to look well to ourselves and examine our lives diligently. Then we will have occasion to cast our eyes downwards, and close our mouths, knowing that we are utterly wretched, and worthy of condemnation. It is true that nothing that Paul lists here is apparent, and maybe we cannot be accused before men; but even if we outwardly appear to be like little angels, we are still evil and perverse, until God has transformed us. It is just that God does not wish us to be without testimony in our lives to cast us down and cause us to condemn ourselves voluntarily.

Now we will see how to apply this doctrine. If we think we are worthy in some way, and do not perceive our own poverty, let us examine our lives, and make a comparison between our own actions and all that God has proscribed and prohibited. It is then we will have a good picture of our wickedness and filth; instead of us thinking that we are full of purity and perfection as we did before, God will reveal to our eyes that we are full of iniquity. Yet, after we have recognised one sin, then two, then three, we must then conclude that this is not even a hundredth part of it. For we are always bedazzled when it comes to awareness of our own poverty. Even when we see our works clearly, we ought to be able to proceed to their source. Some people are so dense that they think they will be acceptable as long as they have not been guilty of fornication, or as long as their drunkenness remains undiscovered, or as long as their deception has been so secretly and carefully carried out that no one has noticed it. Paul's intention, however, in saying that the works of the flesh are manifest, is not to flatter men by telling them that a sin can remain uncondemned until it is detected. For, as I have said, one sin leads to another. Thus, if fornication, drunkenness, theft, murders, treachery, blasphemy against God, strife and rebellion, are detestable things in

themselves, we can only conclude that the same is true of impiety, ambition, pride, or an inordinate sense of self-esteem and self-worth which remain hidden in the heart. Covetousness, where we desire the things that belong to others and such-like, is another sin that we must condemn. In short, external actions give testimony to the fact that we are full of infection in the sight of God. Where is this seen? In our desires, in our advice, in our thoughts, and in all our undertakings; we can see that all these things spring from an evil source.

Thus, we are drawn to a knowledge of our sins which makes us utterly ashamed of ourselves before God. God uses the same method of instruction in the law. There God does not forbid fornication alone, but he prohibits adultery. At first sight, it looks as if God does not forbid cheating or plundering. Instead, what does he condemn? Stealing. He does not forbid lying, only bearing false witness. Thus, to those who know nothing of the power of the law, it seems as though they have fulfilled their duty if they have abstained from these specific crimes. For this reason, Paul says that for a time he thought he was most righteous, as if God could have discovered nothing for which to reproach him (Rom. 7:7). Thus, hypocrites become drunk with pride and become completely wild if God rebukes them, for they think he greatly wrongs them. Why? Because they do not understand the nature of the law. It is spiritual, says Paul, which means that we must be totally transformed before we can submit to it (Rom. 7:14). So long as we follow our carnal natures, all that we think, all that we do and say, can only be sin in the eyes of God.

Thus, we are not to look simply at the word that is used in the law. For when God gives the example of adultery, he was also seeking to make any fornication seem detestable to us, for if marriage vows are broken and violated, it is a perversion of all law and order amongst men. By this word 'adultery', therefore, God is showing that he detests all sexual impurity and immodesty. We are also told, 'Thou shalt not kill'. Is it not, therefore, lawful to fight? Not at all; not even to hate, according to John, who tells us that if anyone secretly hates

his neighbour, even if he never torments him, nor lifts a finger against him, he is a murderer in the eyes of God (1John 3:15). Thus, by the word ‘murder’, God is condemning any harm that we might do to our neighbours. Therefore, even though we may not lift a finger to hurt them, if we hate them or bear them ill-will, we are guilty of murder in the eyes of God. The same applies to stealing; thieves are not just the people we flog and hang, and whose ears we cut off. These, I tell you, are not the only thieves in the sight of God. Even those who seek reputation as good people, and are highly respected — if they deceive and cheat on their neighbours, though they cannot be accused of theft because of their high standing in the eyes of men, they are nevertheless thieves before God. The same applies to all other sins.

In this passage, where Paul says that the works of the flesh are manifest, his line of instruction moves from the grosser sins to the lesser ones. Once we have been convinced of our poverty and sin, and once we have discovered our own shameful condition, so that we are left speechless, we must then be convinced of another point: we need to realise that all of the appetites which lead us to do evil, be it theft and cruelty, deception and perjury, or hatred and enmity — all of these things are equally to be condemned. For the tree is still a bad one, even if we do not see its fruit at first sight; the tree has its own nature, but the only way we can judge the nature of the tree is by its fruit. Now, this is worthy of note because, as I have said, though God compels men to condemn themselves, they will only half do so. They want all that is not apparent to others to be forgotten, so that no mention is ever made of it. The person who is condemned for having done evil will doubtless never excuse his sin if he is forced to confess it. Yet, there is no question of him voluntarily examining himself to feel the judgment of God against him. He does not think about what he deserves, or consider the many temptations he went through before he committed this act, and the hundred or so times that he had offended God before his sin was apparent to all.

We must, therefore, pay all the more attention to this warning upon which I have commented; especially since the Popish doctors display their excessive stupidity by saying that it is not a sin to think evil, or to be tempted, as long as one does not consent to do it. A man could be tempted to wrong his neighbour in some way; he may have a grievance or frustration which makes him want to avenge himself upon the person who has offended him. If the occasion were to arise, he would be delighted. This is not sin, they tell us, unless he has consented to the temptation with resolve. They are only wiping their mouths like whores, or showing their snouts like sows, after they have wallowed in the mire and dirt. A man may murmur against God and be angry with him, and doubt whether God will look after him; he may be troubled by many mistrustful thoughts, so that he cannot find refuge in God; but none of these things are sin according to the Papists. I am not saying that the common herd are the only ones to be deceived in these matters, for all of their schools hold to the doctrine and belief that this is not sin. They do say that all is sin before baptism; but after baptism, all becomes virtuous, however much we may doubt God, or however many grievances we have against him. We may be very impatient with him, or agitated about this matter or that — but we cannot be accused if we have not been moved to practise evil outwardly! In short, if we are inclined to all that God condemns and reproves in his law — all that is unlawful — it is nothing. They are well suited to believe such stupid things! After all, they have made idols and grotesque statues to worship, and now their minds have become darkened as they make merry around their gods, scoffing at us, as at a little child holding forth about righteousness and integrity. We must not, therefore, be surprised if such people behave like this. Because they have falsified the glory of God and destroyed it, they must be completely brutish.

As for us, let us note the words which I have already quoted from the apostle Paul, namely, that the law is spiritual. If we are convicted as rebels against God because of external, visible acts, let us remember that God will find an infinite number, indeed, an abyss of evil desires writhing inside of us, though they are not regarded by men as

rendering us guilty. We must, therefore, conclude that in everything and in every way we are drowned in perdition, until God looks in pity upon us, and draws us out. The way to apply this text of Paul's to our instruction is as follows: inasmuch as we are unaware of the sins that lurk within us, it is necessary for God to come and examine our lives. After this, we will learn to humble ourselves. So then, once we see the sins that are known and evident to all, and which cannot be excused, even in the eyes of little children, may we be led even further to sound out the depths, and acknowledge that all our appetites and thoughts are like many rebellions against God. Yet if each of us were more careful to examine ourselves in this way, we would all surely have occasion to tremble and sigh; all haughtiness and pride would be cast down and we would be ashamed of every aspect of our lives. But we know that each of us turns away as much as we can from any knowledge of our sins; we throw them all behind our backs. God does not forget them; though we may want them to be forgotten, he has to keep them in remembrance. This is what Paul attracts our attention to in this passage.

Furthermore, we can see the foolishness and ignorance (or, rather, stupidity) of the doctors of the Papacy, in that they believe that the word 'flesh' refers only to man's sensual nature (as they call it); for this is how they divide it up. They admit that the appetites which they label 'inferior' are very corrupt, but believe that as long as we have free will, there remains some degree of reason and intelligence within us. According to the Papists, the sensuality of man exhibits itself when he is not guided by his own reason, but devotes himself excessively to sexual impurity, or drunkenness or gluttony or some such thing. Yet here, Paul puts ambition on the same plane. Why else is it that men envy one another, and compete for superiority over one another, desiring to be the wisest or most intelligent? Is it not because each one longs to be esteemed in the eyes of the world? Is this less worthy of condemnation than fornication or drunkenness? If a poor lout who loves eating and drinking becomes very drunk, well, he will continue along on his merry way; he does not ask to be a king or a great lord — he simply whiles away his time. Another who is

addicted to gambling will go and play with rascals like himself, without being tempted by ambition and the desire for great honour. Therefore, those who are considered to be most honourable, and who think highly of themselves, are the most carnal, says Paul. We saw in the First Epistle to the Corinthians that he accused them of being carnal, because they debated with one another over doctrinal matters, and had a foolish longing to be prized and noticed by men (1 Cor. 3:3). Indeed, he mentions 'strife and divisions' there too. If a man troubles the church of God by false doctrines, either out of disdain for others, or out of a desire for acclaim and reputation, the Papists would not say that he was carnal. They would say that he was too clever; but Paul says that heresies, ambition and emulations are works of the flesh. This proves what we said this morning, that the word 'flesh' includes all that pertains to man. We will be completely given over to evil unless we are changed and transformed.

As I have already said, it is true that pagans and unbelievers will always be considered virtuous, though God has let go of their reins and has not regenerated them by his Holy Spirit. Indeed, we will find some degree of decency present in their lives; at the very least, they will not all be fornicators, or drunkards or thieves. How can Paul say that they are carnal, therefore? Because the heart of man is a deep pit of iniquity, as Jeremiah says, without base or bank; the prophet exclaims, 'What an abyss the heart is! Who can fathom its depths? Only God' (Jer. 17:9).

For men flatter themselves, as we know, and commit wicked acts with impunity; they are so hardened in sin that they heap up evil upon evil and sin upon sin, considering their vices to be virtues. Nevertheless, their lives may have a glossy, attractive appearance. Thus, we cannot say that those who have not been taught the truth will be justified. Paul said in the first chapter to the Romans that the whole world is guilty of ungodliness and ungratefulness, since God has revealed himself to all without exception, enough to leave them without excuse (Rom. 1:20). He adds, 'when they knew God, they glorified him not as God'; therefore, he gave them up as reprobates,

and abandoned them to their own gross, wicked lusts. Paul continues by reciting all the detestable things they do. Amongst other things, he speaks of murder, fornication, and other evil and corrupt things which we ought not to mention. After that, he speaks of envy, as in this passage, and of those who invent evil things; of deceit, backbiting, malignity, contentions and debates. Of course, not all of these are in evidence in every unbeliever! However, Paul tells us that all unbelievers, from the greatest to the least, are ungrateful to God, and have robbed him of the honour that is his due. Hence, they are guilty of sacrilege, because they have removed all that belongs to him. Thus, he gives them the wages that they have deserved, owing to the fact that the seeds of all sin lie in man's nature.

Nevertheless, although men are stuffed full of as many vices as we can imagine, God still holds the reins and does not allow men complete abandonment to wickedness. Because of this, many unbelievers are not controlled by their natural senses, indeed, are chaste and modest; they do not steal another's goods, but are sober and upright. In short, they have many virtues according to the opinion of the world. Why, then, are they condemned along with fornicators, thieves and drunkards? It is because they do not have these virtues out of a desire to obey God, for there is no integrity in their hearts. They are held back out of shame, or for some other reason unknown to us. In this way, God spares the human race, so that things are not in a state of confusion, and men are not totally brutish. God is in control of these unbelievers to the end that all their virtues, whatever they may be, remain vices. Therefore, at the first opportunity, when God releases their reins, they devote themselves to all kinds of evil. We might say that believers could just as easily become debauched. Indeed, but God has promised to strengthen them to persevere. Also, there is a great difference between the children of God, who are led by his Holy Spirit, and unbelievers, who are still carnal. The children of God aim and intend to dedicate themselves to him and to be truly purified by his grace. The others walk aimlessly, and if they are good, they scarcely know why! They

will call it 'virtue', but they do not have God in mind because they are far from him. This is what we need to remember from this passage.

On the other hand, Paul says that 'the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, gentleness, kindness, patience', and suchlike things. It is as if he is saying that in view of our great perversity and the fact that we are full of evil and corruption, there is enough here to exercise us to ensure that we will not be idle for the rest of our lives! The battle against our sin is sufficient to occupy us day and night. Yet, we are also commanded to be kind and good-natured, to live sober and chaste lives, and to keep ourselves from being polluted. We are to dedicate ourselves as a sacrifice to God, and to abstain from all that would cause harm. Instead of seeking self-advancement, we are to do all that we possibly can to help and comfort those who need us. When we see that all this is expected of us, we ask, is it possible to achieve this? Not at all; in fact, we need to be transported up to heaven in order to approach God. The holiness that God requires in the law, and all the good works that he demands of us are because he is seeking a union between ourselves and him. But where are the wings to fly so high? For we can neither be chaste, nor benign, nor kind, nor temperate, nor sober, unless we renounce the world and ourselves, and discard all that we are by nature. However, this is beyond our faculties. Therefore, there is much here that could frighten us away.

Hence, Paul concludes by saying that 'against such there is no law'. In other words, if we are truly led by the Spirit of God, we are no longer under the law. Here, Paul encourages all believers, who will feel their own weakness until they leave their mortal bodies behind. God still supports them, and their service is acceptable to him, even though they are not completely renewed to the point of perfection. Therefore, they are to persevere; otherwise, they will be troubled and fall into despair. Paul, therefore, exhorts us to be constant here, telling us that if we are led by the Spirit of God, we will no longer be subject to the law.

However, at the same time, he is indirectly mocking those with whom he has a quarrel, as we saw this morning, for they advertised their virtues with great fanfares! It is so in the Papacy today, where to speak of holiness and the service of God is to speak of nothing more than good deeds and keeping many ceremonies. In other words, they are concerned with trivial nonsense. A Papist will dabble in this and that—he will bow to one statue, and then move on to the next. Bigots will light their candles, apply the holy water several times, make the sign of the cross repeatedly here, there and everywhere, and be sure to keep fast days. They weigh themselves down with all these things in order to redeem themselves, through Masses, or other abominations. This is how God is served and honoured! For the Papists, perfection consists in that which is nothing short of a lie; the candles must be attractive, the organs must sound good, there must be many parades, the statues must be well gilded, they must prepare fragrances and be appeased by all kinds of other follies. This is tomfoolery, indeed, abomination, though they may consider it to be highly virtuous.

As for us, we say that the service of God is spiritual, and that he does not regard that which is seen by men (John 4:23-24). God seeks an upright integrity and sincerity of heart, as it says in the fifth chapter of Jeremiah (verse three). However, on the contrary, men persuade themselves that they can satisfy God in their own way and as they please, and thus they transfigure him and imagine that he is absolutely the same as themselves, and will, therefore, agree with their ideas. This should not surprise us, for although they say that they have been taught the law, they never study it and do not really know what it contains. Let us learn, therefore, that if we want to devote ourselves to serving God, we are not to do whatever seems right to us, for our own ideas, as we call them, are simply the deceptions of Satan. We are to give heed to that which God has commanded, and occupy ourselves with the things that he has ordained. Let us make these our study, that we might render him obedience.

We must take good note of the passage that is set before us here, because however hard we strive to observe our own inventions, it does not mean that God will accept any of them. We are following our nature, which is corrupt. What, then, does God want us to do? What does he ask of us? In the first place, that we renounce all perversity, hatred, rancour; all dissensions, deceit, all that causes harm, blasphemies, idolatry, cruelty, violence, treachery, envy and enmity. Thus, we must be good soldiers if we wish to devote ourselves to serving God, fighting against the works of the flesh, rather than against the works that are visible, and which the world either condemns or approves. Our fight is against the hidden lusts. May we be cleansed of this filth, which is stagnating within our hearts. May we apply all our efforts to this end; not that we can achieve this ourselves, but we must be ready to pray to God, and to examine ourselves morning and night. Once we have recognised our sins, may we be moved to tremble and ask for help from the right source. We must ask that God would remedy the evil with which we are stricken. If, therefore, we increasingly strive to live a happy life, to be good-natured, to be patient in adversity, to suffer insults and injuries without seeking vengeance — if, I say, we are like this, we will have a lot to occupy us, and can never be idle.

Let us leave the Papists to get on with their fooling around with God. Why do they fret themselves so much? Because they have never known how God wishes to be served and honoured. According to them, his ordinances are nothing compared to their foolish inventions. Let me give you an example. A man works honestly in order to make a living; though he only has brown bread to his heart's content, he still calls upon God in the morning and praises him in the evening. If he has children, he denies himself as much as possible in order to feed and clothe them. If God sends afflictions to his household, he bears them patiently. If he practises some kind of handicraft, or some other trade, he will refrain from cheating on his neighbours. He would prefer to die rather than to wrong anyone. This man, who lives first and foremost an honest life, will not be arrogant enough to seek self-advancement without restraint. He will

not be given over to intemperate habits. He will be modest in his eating and drinking, patient in all adversities. What kind of man is this according to the Papists? 'Oh, he's a secular man; in other words, he is a man of the world.' This is how much they value the pure service of God. We know that the principal service that God requires of us is that we devote ourselves entirely to him; this means that we will glorify him in affliction as well as in prosperity, and that we will follow the vocation we have when we are called, without pride, ambition or envy. God takes delight in this, but according to the definition of the Papists, those who live in this way are worldly!

Where are the Papistical 'angels' then? Within cloisters! When these wicked hypocrites have stuffed themselves full, and gorged themselves with good fare, they do not know what to do with themselves except to gamble or pursue other evils. (For we know that all the convents of the Papacy are full-blown brothels, and would to God that they were only brothels — for they commit such gross and shocking acts there that our hair would stand on end to hear about them!) In other words, their lifestyle would horrify us, and yet these are angels compared to the poor folk who live as we described earlier. Why is this? Because they sing matins devoutly, they sing Mass and separate themselves from the rest of the world. They do not engage in digging earth, nor do they get involved with sewing or tailoring, or anything else. Theirs is a contemplative life, and they are in a state of perfection. Can you not see how the world has been deceived? Such people, who make God into little statues, well deserve the pit for devising such absurd errors.

As for ourselves, let us be aware that our God is Spirit, and that he wants to be served spiritually, as he tells us in his Word. At the same time, let us be wary of becoming trapped in the foolish notions which bewitch these wretches; let us, instead, realise that God speaks with us so that we might have recourse to him in all holiness, righteousness and uprightness. Let us measure our lives against the law and not against our own opinions or those of the world. Let us be concerned with what God commands and forbids, since we have to

give account to him, and knowing that we have no other judge than God himself. May we exercise ourselves in all these things, believing that if we do so, we will not be labouring in vain. Leave the Papists to break their legs and their necks, all the while unsure of what they are doing, yet vexing God and provoking him more and more. In order that we do not strive in vain, or wander about here and there following this or that opinion without a fixed destination, let us exercise ourselves in the things that Paul teaches us in this passage. Subsequently, we will not be condemned for occupying ourselves with meaningless things which God disapproves of, detests, and declares to be frivolous.

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would make us increasingly conscious of them, so that we cast ourselves down low. Having condemned ourselves, let us have recourse to him, knowing that he is always willing to help those who are starved of his grace, and who desire it in sincerity. Since he has given us to the Lord Jesus Christ, and views his conduct as if it were ours, may he pour out the treasures and the gifts of his Holy Spirit that we may partake of them. May he increase his grace in us, and may we be so well armed that we achieve the victory in all our combat with Satan, the world, and our own flesh. May he show this grace not only to us, but to all peoples and nations on earth, etc.

When Curse Becomes Blessing

John Calvin

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith . . . - Gal. 3:13-18

As we have seen, if our only hope of salvation rested upon the condition that we fulfil our duty, we would all be condemned; for we have all fallen short in many different ways and are, therefore, guilty in the eyes of God. Indeed, even the holiest amongst us can never claim to have reached a state of perfection, never again to fall, and free from all infirmity! We are, therefore, led to conclude that we will all be lost and condemned when God calls us to account. This is man's true condition, despite the high regard he may have for himself! Therefore, we need some means of escape from the curse we are under. Otherwise, what good will it do us to have our ears daily assailed by the Word of God? It will only push us closer towards eternal death. Thus, in order that the Word of God should profit and assist us to find salvation, we have to find a way of escape from the sentence of judgment pronounced upon the human race. Paul points out the way of escape to us here: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.' He shows us that it was not in vain that our Lord Jesus Christ hung on the tree, for he suffered to bear the curse of all those he would call to salvation.

As we have said, we are all under this curse, which means it was necessary for our Lord to take our burden of sin upon himself. In the law of Moses, it is written: 'Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree' (Deut. 21:23). Our Lord commanded that the bodies of the dead

should be removed from sight, because it was a disgrace to see a human body thus defiled and therefore he desired it to be taken away. Yet, when God pronounced this curse upon all who hung upon a tree, he knew only too well what was going to happen to his only Son. For the Lord Jesus Christ did not suffer such a death by accident, nor according to the whim of man. Whilst it is true that he was crucified by unbelievers, it had been ordained by the will of God (Acts 2:23; 4:28). As it is written, God so loved the world that he did not even spare his only Son, but delivered him up to death for us. Indeed, if his death had been determined by Judas alone, who had him wickedly and forcibly led away, this could not be the foundation for our salvation at all! We must remember that God had appointed it thus, as Peter expounds in greater depth in Acts chapter two, verse twenty-three, where he states that the wicked hands that crucified our Lord Jesus did no more than God had previously determined in his will. Thus, when we read that our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, we must remember that it was all for our salvation, because by this means God was seeking to reconcile us to himself. Therefore, when God said, ‘Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree’, he was not ignorant of what was going to occur, for all had been settled and predetermined.

These two facts must be carefully held together — that God has said that whoever hangs upon a tree is cursed, but that it was his will for his own Son to suffer thus. Why was this? He took our burden upon himself, as our substitute, and made himself, as it were, the chief of sinners on our behalf. Jesus Christ became a curse in order to deliver us from the curse of the law. It may seem harsh and strange at first sight that the Lord of Glory, he who has all sovereign authority, and before whom all the angels of heaven tremble and prostrate themselves, should be subject to a curse. But we must call to mind what Paul wrote in the first letter to the Corinthians, that is to say, that gospel teaching is foolishness to the human race, who regard themselves as wise (1 Cor. 1:18, 23). In deed, in this way, God humbles us for our folly. For there is enough wise and good instruction, if we care to heed it, in the heaven and earth around us;

yet we are blind and shut our eyes to God's wisdom displayed in nature. This is why he has opened up a new way to draw us to himself — through something which we deem foolish! Thus, we must not judge what we read here, concerning the curse to which the Son of God was subject, by our own human reasoning. Instead, we should delight in such a mystery and give glory to God that he loved our souls so much that he redeemed them at such inestimable cost to himself. Far from detracting from the majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ, or obscuring the glory which the Holy Scriptures attribute to him, this teaching provides occasion to glorify him even more. Indeed, may we all do so, for here is our Lord Jesus Christ refusing to consider it robbery (as Paul expresses it) to reveal himself in his infinite glory (Phil. 2:6). He willingly emptied himself; he not only took upon himself a human nature and became a man, but he also submitted to a most shameful death in the sight of both God and man. How precious to him we must have been for him to allow himself to experience such extreme suffering for our redemption! If we could but taste something of what this implies, we would forever magnify the unspeakable grace which surpasses all human understanding. However, although we cannot comprehend it fully, and can only fathom the hundredth part of it, it delights us to know that we can grasp something of its meaning, however small!

Yet, how this exposes the malice and perversity that is in man! For when Paul declares that our Lord Jesus Christ became a curse for us, it washes over us. There are even those who are so depraved that they will see this as an occasion to behave scandalously, abandoning the gospel altogether when they hear of the way in which Christ has redeemed us. Such people say, 'What! Can it be that the Son of God, the fountain of all that is good, and the one who sanctifies us, has been cursed?' To their way of thinking, God has acted in an unreasonable and disorderly fashion! But, (as I have been saying), God had to stoop to this 'folly' because we did not respond to his wisdom, though the way was clearly evident; thus he exposes our own ignorance! We can only wonder at the mysteries of God, for their significance may be obscure to us and seem strange; for in the

face of such wonders, our intellect fails and our powers of reasoning are confounded!

The fact that the Son of God became a curse for us demands a fuller examination of our sinful state. Indeed, we begin to realise that we are detestable in the eyes of God, that is, until our sins and iniquities have been cleansed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. For even if all the angels of heaven were to be made answerable for us, the price they would pay would be insufficient. The only one able to make satisfaction for our sins is the Lord Jesus Christ. But, when he came to this world, it was not by a display of divine and heavenly power that he paid our debt of eternal death. How, then, did he come? In weakness; indeed, not only so, but he was accursed. If this had not been the case, our burdens would have crushed us and all would have perished in the abyss. When we understand that the Son of God, the Lamb without blemish, the mirror and fountain of all righteousness, that this One was cursed for us, should we not be horrified at the thought of all our sins and engulfed in despair until God rescues us in his grace and infinite mercy? Therefore, let us be aware that when God says he has redeemed us from the curse of the law, it is to bring us to a state of complete humility. We can never be humble unless we are first stripped of self-confidence and become ashamed at what lies within us. Then we are frightened and lost, knowing that the wrath of God hangs over us until the remedy is applied to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, our whole life is detestable in God's sight and there is no means of reconciliation with him apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, who takes away the curse which is upon us and bears it himself. Now, each time that we read this passage, we should arise and present ourselves before the judgment seat of God, aware that there is a pit waiting to swallow us up if we remain as we are. Let us feel our lost condition and be ashamed before God. Furthermore, let us magnify the grace bought for us by the Son of God, and be careful not to detract from his worth in any way whatsoever, even though he became a curse. This ought, rather, to stir us to render all the praise that he deserves, for he has proved our salvation to be so precious to him.

Moreover, let us properly appreciate such a pledge of our salvation and display of the love God has for us, and let us not doubt that we are acceptable in God's sight when we approach him. For he has redeemed us at such a cost, as Peter shows in his first epistle — not with silver or corruptible things but with the Lord Jesus Christ who became a ransom for us (1 Pet. 1:18). Therefore, we must trust that whenever we come in his name to ask for mercy, it will be bestowed upon us. But if we come believing that we have a scrap of merit, what good is it? We know how much the Father loves the Son, and how precious his death was in his sight. For this reason, we can have full confidence that God will forgive us and be favourable and kind to us if we cleave to what Paul shows us here: namely, that our Lord Jesus Christ spared nothing for us, even to the point of bearing our curse.

However, let us turn our attention to what Paul continues to say: 'That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' By mentioning Abraham, he reveals that the promise belonged first to those who descended from him. For the gift of salvation was for the Jews until God opened the doors to everyone else, and spread his gospel abroad, that all might share in the redemption purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ. For although this promise originally belonged to the Jews and was peculiar to them, it was made applicable to the whole world. How is this possible? Because the promise originated in the Spirit and was not dependent upon observing the ceremonies. By referring us to the Spirit, Paul blots out all the false doctrines taught by seducers who sought to mix the law and the gospel together. He is revealing that now all these things are superfluous, that is to say, sacrifices, circumcision and suchlike. This is not to argue that we cannot profit by reading what is contained in the law: no, but the practice of it has been abolished. This is why we can say that the promise is a spiritual one for us today, because we no longer need the types and shadows of days gone by. Now we are simply called and invited to commune with our God. Now we are able to cry to him with complete confidence, because, having been adopted by him, we lean entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who is

the only foundation the gospel allows; we find all we need in him. This is, in effect, what Paul intends us to learn from this passage.

To reinforce the message, he adds another point which proves that the gospel is the perfect revelation of the way of salvation, and that we need no other teaching but the simple doctrine of justification through the free grace of our God. He tells us that the law was given four hundred and thirty years after the free promise of salvation. Now we know that a covenant made between men, if it is to be authentic, must stand, no matter what happens. It follows, therefore, that the law was not given to cancel what God had promised to Abraham and his descendants (and consequently to the rest of us). We may at first question this argument of Paul's, thinking that a second contract must annul the first. As soon as men have entered an agreement, they are liable to have second thoughts and change their minds, making the first contract null and void. The same applies to laws and statutes, for a first law can easily be broken and invalidated by a second. But Paul presupposes something which needs to be considered, which is that if a man has promised and solemnly obligated himself to do something, he cannot retrace his steps — the agreement must remain firm. Yet, if two parties were to agree together to change their previous resolutions by mutual consent, this is a different case. Indeed, such an example is almost irrelevant here if we bear in mind that men change their ideas so lightly at the slightest whim. Paul, however, presupposes that the 'person' in question has made a covenant which will endure, and which will not be disputed or contravened afterwards in any way whatsoever. If one of the parties were to break that original covenant, it would be counted terrible treachery which all men alike would judge intolerable, since the agreement was so solemnly and formally recorded that it must be upheld and maintained without the slightest contradiction. Now, is it possible that there could be less constancy in God than in a man, who is mere vanity by comparison? Therefore, I conclude that the gospel promise holds firm because the free promise was made before the arrival of the law.

All this could mystify us if it were not explained in greater detail. We have already dealt with the contrast Paul makes between the law and the gospel in previous studies. When God promised salvation, it was upon condition that we served him, completely fulfilling our duty to him. This, however, is not possible; thus, we are excluded from all hope of salvation by the law. It is not that God is unfaithful on his part: it is we who do not meet his requirements! It is like a man who says, 'I am willing to sell goods to you on condition that you have the money.' Thus, whoever does not have a penny cannot buy any of the goods, for this is the condition that was set down in the first place. Similarly, God promises that we will inherit salvation if we serve him, but this does not benefit us because we cannot fulfil what he demands. Indeed, we are so full of iniquity, so polluted and infected in his sight, that he quite justly regards us with detestation. Therefore, we all stand condemned under the law. However, God freely and graciously accepts us through the Lord Jesus Christ, who offers us the remission of our sins. In fact, he greatly desires us to accept the grace that we are offered and to lean completely on the Lord Jesus Christ, not upon ourselves.

Now Paul asks, 'Which is more ancient — the free promise of salvation or the law?' We are aware of the difference between them. Now, if the law were the more ancient, it must hold firm, because God never changes and is not subject to variation. However, if the free promise came first and was made before the law was decreed, then we must conclude that God has not changed his mind, nor withdrawn his original promise. He would not have desired the abolition of this covenant, for such would have been a withdrawal of his kindness and mercy. If, at one time, he bound himself out of his free bounty to give salvation to men on a basis other than merit, subsequently changing his mind as if he desired us to enrich him by our good works, it would be absurd! Paul tells us that the free promise was given before the law. It therefore follows that the law does not change anything about the promise; its nature and its force remain intact. Whilst it is true that the Lord Jesus Christ had not yet been born on earth when the promise was made to our father

Abraham, he had already been chosen as our Mediator because, through him we would be reconciled to God.

Now, in case we think that the law must have been unnecessary, or that there must have been a change of mind on the part of God, Paul next addresses this matter. We must not become confused; though it is not possible to explain everything in an hour, nor indeed in a day, it is enough for the moment for us to have this one fact clearly understood: that the promise to ordain us to be his children was made by God before the law. Indeed, it was not made with reference to our merit or personal worthiness; God did this out of his own goodness and mercy and expected nothing from us because he knew we were full of nothing but wretched sin. This promise had its foundation in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose office was already that of Mediator, granting access to God the Father. Having said this, we conclude that this promise will endure to the end of the world. The main reason this must be said is because the Jews tended to boast in their heritage. Paul seeks to tell them that their father Abraham did not have the law and yet was content, although he did, of course, offer sacrifices and the like. But, even though he was eventually circumcised, at the time he received the promise no written code as yet existed and not even any circumcision. For although Abraham was not circumcised when he received the promise, he was, nevertheless, justified apart from circumcision by faith alone. Therefore, Paul demonstrates to the Jews that it is very foolish indeed to count themselves in a category apart from the rest of humanity, and to base their hopes upon the types and shadows of the law, seeing that their father Abraham, the chief patriarch of the church, was justified in the same way as people today. In other words, he was justified by the mercy of God alone, having recognised that he was a poor sinner, lost and condemned in Adam, and that the only blessing he could hope for was to be included in the promise made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we are to remember.

Next, we must carefully consider the promise addressed directly to Abraham, which revealed to him that all nations on earth would be blessed through his seed (Gen. 12:3). Now, there are two main points made here. One is that the blessing is not only promised to the earthly descendants of Abraham (as we have seen), but to the whole world in general. Thus, we who descend from Gentile stock (that is, from those who are unclean and who were originally banished from the heavenly kingdom) can also share in this promise. Although we do not belong to that holy lineage that God chose at the beginning, yet now salvation extends even to us. How is this? Because it was promised that all the nations on earth would be blessed. This being the case, dare we speak as if God has withdrawn his liberal hand, and only seeks the descendants of Abraham, when he had already declared that he would reveal himself as the Saviour and Father of mankind when the time was right? Thus, the most important point here is this: though this promise was made to Abraham, it did not apply to his physical descendants alone, but to all men, even though this was not apparent at first because the fulness of time had not come, as we shall see in the following chapter.

The second point is that the blessing promised to Abraham was for his seed. Paul says that he does not refer to 'seeds' in the plural, but to one seed; we must, therefore, conclude that he is referring to Jesus Christ. We might perhaps have felt that Paul is making much of something which has little relevance; after all, the term 'seed' refers simply to descendants, not specifically to one man, nor to ten, nor to forty! Surely, it speaks of a whole race of people, the seed of Abraham being the race that descends from him. Indeed, this comprised such a great multitude that it was said to be like twelve peoples (Gen. 17:6); for when we refer to a people, we speak of about a hundred thousand men, and there were more than this in the tribe of Judah alone! Thus, it would seem that Paul had not properly considered what God intended by this word 'seed', when he says that it refers to just one man. But we must weigh up Paul's conclusions in order to realise that they are correct and firmly established; indeed, we shall see that his argument is utterly infallible.

Abraham did not have just one son; after Ishmael, he had Isaac. And what happened to his oldest son? He was cast out of his house, as we shall see when we come to consider the next chapter. Thus, here is Ishmael, who has all the privileges of being the first-born of Abraham's household, being cast out like a stranger, just as it is written, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac' (Gen. 21:10). After this, other children were born to him (Gen. 25:1ff). He gave each one their allotted portion and then sent them away. Only Isaac remained with Abraham. In time Isaac had two children, twins born of the same womb (Gen. 25:22-23). The first-born, Esau, who ought to have had the authority, was rejected and not counted as a descendant of Abraham; thus, he had no share in the promised blessings. That left only Jacob, for his father ignorantly and mistakenly blessed him, then declared that he could not withdraw that blessing, nor alter what he had said since he had been the instrument of the Holy Spirit (Gen. 27:37). If we take the term 'seed' to apply to those who descend from Abraham, then surely this will include such people as the Ishmaelites and Hagarenes (as they are called) and the like. If this were so, the Idumaeans, their servants, might also be counted as part of his household. But the inheritance was taken away from these people. Therefore, the phrase 'the seed of Abraham' must be understood in a rather different way.

Let us think through the issue for a moment. Without faith, what would unite the church? There would be no sure means of discerning the spiritual seed of Abraham. How would we distinguish them from the rest of mankind? The only way is by coming to the Head, in other words, to the Lord Jesus Christ. The unity of the body depends on its Head, on its Redeemer. This is why Paul says that the promise does not refer to seed in the plural, but to one man, to whom we must come if we are to discover his spiritual people. In other words, if we desire to locate the church of God, we must start with the Lord Jesus Christ, because his own will be gathered round him. All who belong to his body and cleave to him by faith are the children of God, and are his servants. These are truly the seed of Abraham. This is

discussed more fully in the Epistle to the Romans, chapter nine, verse six, where it says, 'They are not all Israel who are of Israel.' How is this? Well, there was really only one child of promise: Isaac. Therefore, we must come to the Lord Jesus Christ, for in him all the promises of God are 'yes and amen', being absolutely firm and sure (2 Cor. 1:20). Without him, we would all be lost. This is why it is written in the first chapter of Colossians, verse twenty, that the office of the Lord Jesus Christ was to gather together all that had been scattered in heaven and on earth; without him, we would all be confounded.

Now we can see much more clearly the line of Paul's argument. Before the law was imparted to the world, that is, before we were informed of our duty to obey all that is written therein, God had already revealed his good pleasure. Seeing the human race lost and condemned, he desired to bring his elect to himself in order to bestow mercy on them. This was not only for one race but for 'all nations' as the Scripture asserts. And the source of that mercy is the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, when Abraham was alive, our Lord Jesus Christ had already been appointed Mediator, that through him the wrath of God against us might be appeased. Thus, when we come in his name asking for grace, it will be supplied to us and our expectations will not be disappointed. This had already been established and, happily, nothing has changed; we can be sure that God accepts us today if we are fully rooted and grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the covenant made in his name shall not change — it is permanent and will always be in force. Thus, we may freely come before God and call upon him as our Father since he has adopted us as his children; not because there was anything worthy in us, but only because of his mercy are we united by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in order to receive the grace of God and have assurance of salvation, we need to renounce all opinions we might have of our own worth. We must give heed to what is declared in this passage concerning faith, for it is only through faith that we are enabled to

enjoy such blessing. Faith (as we have explained) means that we embrace the mercy of God. But we cannot have faith until we have been touched with a sense of our own poverty, for the Lord Jesus Christ, by becoming a curse for us, presents us with a picture of our cursed state. Faith, therefore, cannot exist without repentance, for it is not possible for us to come to God seeking salvation and asking him to pity our miserable condition, unless we have been convicted in our souls and led to deplore ourselves. Hypocrites who mock at God by wallowing, intoxicated, in their sins, must not expect Jesus Christ to receive them as his own; for such people may not even so much as approach him. Indeed, his invitation is intended for those who labour and are heavy laden (Matt. 11:28), who can bear no more and who stagger under the burden of their sins. This is how we must approach the Lord Jesus Christ, not with any merit of our own; for all the ceremonial law and all the sacrifices we could offer cannot contribute to our salvation. Rather, before God shows us mercy, we must come in a state of humility, fully aware of our miserable condition. We are first brought low in order that we might perceive the curse that we are under, before we can rejoice that we have been purchased at such inestimable cost. This has been our theme throughout our study.

Thus, it is by faith that we receive the promise of the Spirit and become united to the Lord Jesus Christ. We become part of the spiritual seed of Abraham. Although we do not physically descend from his family, it is enough that we are united together with him by faith. Indeed, we have been regenerated by incorruptible seed, as Peter says, in other words by the Word of God, the Scriptures (1 Pet. 1:23). Having been transformed, we understand that God accepts us as part of the body of his only Son. Though of Gentile descent, we can still be joined to his church, since faith is all that is required. Here, all pride in human virtues and merits must cease, and men must recognise that they shall be utterly confounded unless they seek God in the way that he has appointed. Having said this, let us learn not to be blown here and there, like unstable men, who will not be content with what God has declared but must always add something to it of

their devising. We need to guard against such an unholy mixture. I intend to expand upon this after lunch in the will of God. Let Jesus Christ be our sufficiency, since our salvation depends entirely upon him; we will lack nothing if we have an interest in him. This is the point to which Paul frequently returns in this book. Furthermore, he desires that we hold fast to God's truth, knowing that it does not allow for any additions. Were we to add to it, we would corrupt, pervert and falsify the covenant upon which our salvation depends. Having embraced our Lord Jesus Christ, we are expected to remain fully in him, because this one man has sufficient grace for us all. In him, we can call upon God boldly, knowing that, although we descend from the accursed race of Adam, we, nevertheless, receive blessing in Jesus Christ. He now accepts us as his children and freely adopts us. He desires that this message should be heard throughout the world — there is now an open door and free access by which we may draw near to him.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and asking that he would make us increasingly conscious of them, that we may detest them. May we spend our lives seeking and striving to honour and serve him in strict obedience. And since we cannot free ourselves owing to our great infirmity, may he bear us up until he has freed us from all the defilements of the flesh, and clothed us in his righteousness. Indeed, he has begun this work in us now and affords us solid ground of assurance that what he has begun, he will complete. Thus, we all say, Almighty God and our heavenly Father, etc.

The Word Our Only Rule

John Calvin

Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him: being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. - Titus 1:15-16

St. Paul hath shown us that we must be ruled by the Word of God, and hold the commandments of men as vain and foolish; for holiness and perfection of life belongeth not to them. He condemneth some of their commandments, as when they forbid certain meats, and will not suffer us to use that liberty which God giveth the faithful. Those who troubled the church in St. Paul's time, by setting forth such traditions, used the commandments of the law as a shield. These were but men's inventions: because the temple was to be abolished at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those in the church of Christ, who hold this superstition, to have certain meats forbidden, have not the authority of God, for it was against His mind and purpose that the Christian should be subject to such ceremonies.

To be short, St. Paul informs us in this place that in these days we have liberty to eat of all kinds of meat without exception. As for the health of the body, that is not here spoken of; but the matter here set forth is that men shall not set themselves up as masters, to make laws for us contrary to the Word of God. Seeing it is so, that God putteth no difference between meats, let us so use them; and never inquire what men like, or what they think good. Notwithstanding, we must use the benefits that God hath granted us, soberly and moderately. We must remember that God hath made meats for us, not that we should fill ourselves like swine, but that we should use

them for the sustenance of life: therefore, let us content ourselves with this measure, which God hath shown us by His Word.

If we have not such a store of nourishment as we would wish, let us bear our poverty patiently, and practise the doctrine of St. Paul; and know as well how to bear poverty as riches. If our Lord give us more than we could have wished for, yet must we bridle our appetites. On the other side, if it please Him to cut off our morsel, and feed us but poorly, we must be content with it, and pray Him to give us patience when we have not what our appetites crave. To be short, we must have recourse to what is said in Romans 13: "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Let us content ourselves to have what we need, and that which God knoweth to be proper for us; thus shall all things be clean to us, if we be thus cleansed.

Yet it is true that although we were ever so unclean, the meats which God hath made are good; but the matter we have to consider is the use of them. When St. Paul saith all things are clean., he meaneth not that they are so of themselves, but as relateth to those that receive them; as we have noticed before, where he saith to Timothy, all things are sanctified to us by faith and giving of thanks. God hath filled the world with such abundance that we may marvel to see what a fatherly care He hath over us: for to what end or purpose are all the riches here on earth, only to show how liberal He is toward man!

If we know not that He is our Father, and acteth the part of a nurse toward us, if we receive not at His hand that which He giveth us, insomuch that when we eat, we are convinced that it is God that nourisheth us, He cannot be glorified as He deserveth; neither can we eat one morsel of bread without committing sacrilege; for which we must give an account. That we may lawfully enjoy these benefits, which have been bestowed upon us, we must be resolved upon this point (as I said before), that it is God that nourisheth and feedeth us.

This is the cleanness spoken of here by the apostle; when he saith, all things are clean, especially when we have such an uprightness in us that we despise not the benefits bestowed upon another, but crave our daily bread at the hand of God, being persuaded that we have no right to it, only to receive it as the mercy of God. Now let us see from whence this cleanness cometh. We shall not find it in ourselves, for it is given us by faith. St. Peter saith, the hearts of the old fathers were cleansed by this means; to wit, when God gave them faith (Acts 15).

It is true that he here hath regard to the everlasting salvation; because we were utterly unclean until God made Himself known to us in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; who, being made our Redeemer, brought the price and ransom of our souls. But this doctrine may, and ought to be applied to what concerneth this present life; for until we know that, being adopted in Jesus Christ, we are God's children, and consequently that the inheritance of this world is ours, if we touch one morsel of meat, we are thieves; for we are deprived of, and banished from all the blessings that God made, by reason of Adam's sin until we get possession of them in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is faith that must cleanse us. Then will all meats be clean to us: that is, we may use them freely without wavering. If men enjoin spiritual laws upon us, we need not observe them, being assured that such obedience cannot please God, for in so doing, we set up rulers to govern us, making them equal with God, who reserveth all power to Himself. Thus, the government of the soul must be kept safe and sound in the hands of God. Therefore, if we allow so much superiority to men that we suffer them to inwrap our souls with their own bands, we so much lessen and diminish the power and empire that God hath over us.

And thus the humbleness that we might have in obeying the traditions of men would be worse than all the rebellion in the world; because it is robbing God of His honor, and giving it, as a spoil, to mortal men. St. Paul speaketh of the superstition of some of the

Jews, who would have men still observe the shadows and figures of the law; but the Holy Ghost hath pronounced a sentence which must be observed to the end of the world: that God hath not bound us at this day to such a burden as was borne by the old fathers; but hath cut off that part which He had commanded, relative to the abstaining from meats; for it was a law but for a season.

Seeing God hath thus set us at liberty, what rashness it is for worms of the earth to make new laws; as though God had not been wise enough. When we allege this to the papists, they answer that St. Paul spake of the Jews, and of meats that were forbidden by the law. This is true, but let us see whether this answer be to any purpose, or worth receiving. St. Paul not only saith that it is lawful for us to use that which was forbidden, but he speaketh in general terms, saying, all things are clean. Thus we see that God hath here given us liberty, concerning the use of meats; so that He will not hold us in subjection, as were the old fathers.

Therefore, seeing God hath abrogated that law which was made by Him, and will not have it in force any longer, what shall we think when we see men inventing traditions of their own; and not content themselves with what God hath shown them? In the first place, they still endeavor to hold the church of Christ under the restrictions of the Old Testament. But God will have us governed as men of years and discretion, which have no need of instruction suitable for children. They set up man's devices, and say we must keep them under pain of deadly sin; whereas God will not have His own law to be observed among us at this day, relative to types and shadows, because it was all ended at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Shall it then be lawful to observe what men have framed in their own wisdom? Do we not see that it is a matter which goeth directly against God? St. Paul setteth himself against such deceivers: against such as would bind Christians to abstain from meats as God had commanded in His law. If a man say, it is but a small matter to abstain from flesh on Friday, or in Lent, let us consider whether it be

a small matter to corrupt and bastardize the service of God! For surely those that go about to set forth and establish the tradition of men, set themselves against that which God hath appointed in His Word, and thus commit sacrilege.

Seeing God will be served with obedience, let us beware and keep ourselves within those bounds which God hath set; and not suffer men to add any thing to it of their own. There is something worse in it than all this: for they think it a service that deserveth something from God to abstain from eating flesh. They think it a great holiness: and thus the service of God, which should be spiritual, is banished, as it were, while men busy themselves about foolish trifles. As the common saying is, they leave the apple for the paring.

We must be faithful, and stand fast in our liberty; we must follow the rule which is given us in the Word of God, and not suffer our souls to be brought into slavery by new laws, forged by men. For it is a hellish tyranny, which lesseneth God's authority and mixeth the truth of the gospel with figures of the law; and perverteth and corrupteth the true service of God, which ought to be spiritual. Therefore, let us consider how precious a privilege it is to give thanks to God with quietness of conscience, being assured it is His will and pleasure that we should enjoy His blessings: and that we may do so, let us not entangle ourselves with the superstitions of men, but be content with what is contained in the pure simplicity of the gospel. Then, as we have shown concerning the first part of our text, unto them that are pure, all things will be pure.

When we have received the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that we shall be cleansed from our filthiness and blemishes; for by His grace we are made partakers of God's benefits, and are taken for His children, although there be nothing but vanity in us. "But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure." By this St. Paul meaneth that whatsoever proceedeth from those that are defiled and unbelieving is not acceptable to God but is full of infection. While they are unbelieving, they are foul and unclean; and while they have

such filthiness in them, whatsoever they touch becomes polluted with their infamy.

Therefore, all the rules and laws they can make shall be nothing but vanity: for God disliketh whatsoever they do; yea, He utterly abhorreth it. Although men may torment themselves with ceremonies and outward performances, yet all these things are vain until they become upright in heart: for in this the true service of God commenceth. So long then as we are faithless, we are filthy before God. These things ought to be evident to us; but hypocrisy is so rooted within us that we are apt to neglect them. It will readily be confessed that we cannot please God by serving Him until our hearts be rid of wickedness.

God strove with the people of old time about the same doctrine; as we see especially in the second chapter of the prophet Haggai: where he asketh the priests, if a man touch a holy thing, whether he shall be made holy or not, the priests answered, no. On the contrary, if an unclean man touch a thing, whether it shall become unclean or no, the priests answered and said, it shall be unclean: so is this nation, saith the Lord, and so are the works of their hands. Now let us notice what is contained in the figures and shadows of the law. If an unclean man had handled any thing, it became unclean, and therefore must be cleansed. Our Lord saith, consider what ye be: for ye have nothing but uncleanness and filth; yet notwithstanding, ye would content Me with your sacrifices, offerings, and such like things. But He saith, as long as your minds are entangled with wicked lusts, as long as some of ye are whoremongers, adulterers, blasphemers, and perjurers, as long as ye are full of guile, cruelty, and spitefulness, your lives are utterly lawless, and full of all uncleanness; I cannot abide it, how fair soever it may seem before men.

We see then that all the services we can perform, until we are truly reformed in our hearts, are but mockeries; and God condemneth and rejecteth every whit of them. But who believeth these things to be so?

When the wicked, who are taken in their wickedness, feel any remorse of conscience, they will endeavor by some means or other to compound with Cod by performing some ceremonies: they think it sufficient to satisfy the minds of men, believing that God ought likewise to be satisfied therewith. This is a custom which has prevailed in all ages.

It is not only in this text of the prophet Haggai that God rebuketh men for their hypocrisy, and for thinking that they may obtain His favor with trifles, but it was a continual strife which all the prophets had with the Jews. It is said in Isa. 1:13, 14, 15: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting, your new-moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."

And again it is said, "Though ye offer me burnt offerings, and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts" (Amos 5 :22). God here showeth us that the things which He Himself had commanded were filthy and unclean when they were observed and abused by hypocrites. Therefore, let us learn that when men serve God after their own fashion, they beguile and deceive themselves. It is said in another text of Isaiah, "Who hath required these things at your hands ?" Wherein it is made manifest that if we will have God approve our works, they must be according to His divine Word.

Thus we see what St. Paul's meaning is when he saith there is nothing clean to them that are unclean. And why? For even their mind and conscience are defiled. By this he showeth (as I before observed) that until such times as we have learned to serve God aright, in a proper manner, we shall do no good at all by our own

works; although we may flatter ourselves that they are of great importance, and by this means rock ourselves to sleep.

Let us now see what the traditions of popery are. The chief end of them are to make an agreement with God, by their works of supererogation, as they term them; that is, their surplus works; which are, when they do more than God commandeth them. According to their own notions, they discharge their duty towards Him and content Him with such payment as they render by their works, and thereof make their account. When they have fasted their saints evenings, when they have refrained from eating flesh upon Fridays, when they have attended mass devoutly, when they have taken holy water, they think that God ought not to demand any thing more of them and that there is nothing amiss in them.

But in the mean time, they cease not to indulge themselves in lewdness, whoredom, perjury, blasphemy, &c.: every one of them giving himself to those vices; yet notwithstanding, they think God ought to hold Himself well paid with the works they offer Him; as for example, when they have taken holy water, worshipped images, rambled from altar to altar, and other like things, they imagine that they have made sufficient payment and recompense for their sins. But we hear the doctrine of the Holy Ghost concerning such as are defiled; which is, there is nothing pure nor clean in all their doings.

But we will put 'the case, by supposing that all the abominations of the papists were not evil in their own nature; yet notwithstanding, according to this doctrine of St. Paul, there can be nothing but uncleanness in them, for they themselves are sinful and unclean. The holiness of these men consists in gewgaws and trifles. They endeavor to serve God in the things that He doth not require, and at the same time leave undone things that He hath commanded in His law.

It has been the case in all ages that men have despised God's law for the sake of their own traditions. Our Lord Jesus Christ upbraided the Pharisees, when He saith, "Why do ye also transgress the

commandment of God by your tradition" (Mat. 15:3). Thus it was in former times, in the days of the prophets. Isaiah crieth out, "Wherefore the Lord said, forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work and wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (chap. 25:13). While men occupy themselves about traditions, they pass over the things that God hath commanded in His Word.

This it is that caused Isaiah to cry out against such as set forth men's traditions; telling them plainly that God threatened to blind the wisest of them, because they turned away from the pure rule of His Word to follow their own foolish inventions. St. Paul likewise alludes to the same thing, when he saith they have no fear of God before their eyes. Let us not deceive ourselves; for we know that God requireth men to live uprightly, and to abstain from all violence, cruelty, malice, and deceit; that none of these things should appear in our life. But those that have no fear of God before their eyes, it is apparent that they are out of order, and that there is nothing but uncleanness in their whole life.

If we wish to know how our life should be regulated, let us examine the contents of the Word of God; for we cannot be sanctified by outward show and pomp, although they are so highly esteemed among men. We must call upon God in sincerity, and put our whole trust in Him; we must give up pride and presumption, and resort to Him with true lowliness of mind that we be not given to fleshly affections. We must endeavor to hold ourselves in awe, under subjection to God, and flee from gluttony, whoredom, excess, robbery, blasphemy, and other evils. Thus we see what God would have us do, in order to have our life well regulated.

When men would justify themselves by outward works, it is like covering a heap of filth with a clean linen cloth. Therefore, let us put

away the filthiness that is hidden in our hearts; I say, let us drive the evil from us, and then the Lord will accept of our life: thus we may see wherein consists the true knowledge of God! When we understand this aright, it will lead us to live in obedience to His will. Men have not become so beastly, as to have no understanding that there is a God who created them. But this knowledge, if they do not submit to His requirements, serves as a condemnation to them: because their eyes are blindfolded by Satan; insomuch, that although the gospel may be preached to them, they do not understand it; in this situation we see many at the present day. How many there are in the world that have been taught by the doctrine of the gospel, and yet continue in brutish ignorance!

This happeneth because Satan hath so prepossessed the minds of men with wicked affections that although the light may shine ever so bright, they still remain blind, and see nothing at all. Let us learn, then, that the true knowledge of God is of such a nature that it showeth itself, and yieldeth fruit through our whole life. Therefore to know God, as St. Paul said to the Corinthians, we must be transformed into His image. For if we pretend to know Him, and in the meantime our life be loose and wicked, it needeth no witness to prove us liars; our own life beareth sufficient record that we are mockers and falsifiers, and that we abuse the name of God.

St. Paul saith in another place, if ye know Jesus Christ, ye must put off the old man: as if he should say, we cannot declare that we know Jesus Christ, only by acknowledging Him for our head, and by His receiving us as His members; which cannot be done until we have cast off the old man, and become new creatures. The world hath at all times abused God's name wickedly, as it doth still at this day; therefore, let us have an eye to the true knowledge of the Word of God, whereof St. Paul speaketh.

Finally, let us not put our own works into the balance, and say they are good, and that we think well of them; but let us understand that the good works are those which God hath commanded in His law and

that all we can do beside these, are nothing. Therefore, let us learn to shape our lives according to what God hath commanded: to put our trust in Him, to call upon Him, to give Him thanks, to bear patiently whatsoever it pleaseth Him to send us; to deal uprightly with our neighbors, and to live honestly before all men. These are the works which God requireth at our hands.

If we were not so perverse in our nature, there would be none of us but what might discern these things: even children would have skill enough to discern them. The works which God hath not commanded are but foolishness and an abomination: whereby God's pure service is marred. If we wish to know what constitutes the good works spoken of by St. Paul, we must lay aside all the inventions of men, and simply follow the instructions contained in the Word of God; for we have no other rule than that which is given by Him; which is such as He will accept, when we yield up our accounts at the last day, when He alone shall be the judge of all mankind.

Now let us fall down before the face of our good God, acknowledging our faults, praying Him to make us perceive them more clearly: and to give us such trust in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that we may come to Him and be assured of the forgiveness of our sins; and that He will make us partakers of sound faith, whereby all our filthiness may be washed away.

EXPOSITION OF THE MORAL LAW.

EXPOSITION OF THE MORAL LAW.

This chapter consists of four parts. I. Some general observations necessary for the understanding of the subject are made by way of preface, sec.1-5. II. Three things always to be attended to in

ascertaining and expounding the meaning of the Moral Law, sec.6-12. III. Exposition of the Moral Law, or the Ten Commandments, sec.13-15. IV. The end for which the whole Law is intended—viz. to teach not only elementary principles, but perfection, sec.51, to the end of the chapter.

Sections.

1. The Law was committed to writing, in order that it might teach more fully and perfectly that knowledge, both of God and of ourselves, which the law of nature teaches meagrely and obscurely. Proof of this, from an enumeration of the principal parts of the Moral Law; and also from the dictate of natural law, written on the hearts of all, and, in a manner, effaced by sin.
2. Certain general maxims.1. From the knowledge of God, furnished by the Law, we learn that God is our Father and Ruler. Righteousness is pleasing, iniquity is an abomination in his sight. Hence, how weak soever we may be, our duty is to cultivate the one, and shun the other.
3. From the knowledge of ourselves, furnished by the Law, we learn to discern our own utter powerlessness, we are ashamed; and seeing it is in vain to seek for righteousness in ourselves, are induced to seek it elsewhere.
4. Hence, God has annexed promises and threatening to his promises. These not limited to the present life, but embrace things heavenly and eternal. They, moreover, attest the spotless purity of God, his love of righteousness, and also his kindness towards us.
5. The Law shows, moreover, that there is nothing more acceptable to God than obedience. Hence, all superstitious and hypocritical modes of worship are condemned. A remedy against superstitious worship and human presumption.

6. The second part of the chapter, containing three observations or rules. First rule, Our life must be formed by the Law, not only to external honesty, but to inward and spiritual righteousness. In this respect, the Law of God differs from civil laws, he being a spiritual Lawgiver, man not. This rule of great extent, and not sufficiently attended to.

7. This first rule confirmed by the authority of Christ, and vindicated from the false dogma of Sophists, who say that Christ is only another Moses.

8. Second observation or rule to be carefully attended to—viz. that the end of the command must be inquired into, until it is ascertained what the Lawgiver approves or disapproves. Example. Where the Law approves, its opposite is condemned, and vice versa.

9. Full explanation of this latter point. Example.

10. The Law states what is most impious in each transgression, in order to show how heinous the transgression is. Example.

11. Third observation or rule regards the division of the Law into Two Tables: the former comprehending our duty to God; the latter, our duty to our neighbour. The connection between these necessary and inseparable. Their invariable order. Sum of the Law.

12. Division of the Law into Ten Commandments. Various distinctions made with regard to them, but the best distinction that which divides them into Two Tables. Four commandments belong to the First, and six to the Second Table.

13. The third part of the chapter, containing an exposition of the Decalogue. The preface vindicates the authority of the Law. This it does in three ways. First, by a declaration of its majesty.

14. The preface to the Law vindicates its authority. Secondly, by calling to mind God's paternal kindness.

15. Thirdly, by calling to mind the deliverance out of the land of Egypt. Why God distinguishes himself by certain epithets. Why mention is made of the deliverance from Egypt. In what way, and how far, the remembrance of this deliverance should still affect us.

16. Exposition of the First Commandment. Its end. What it is to have God, and to have strange gods. Adoration due to God, trust, invocation, thanksgiving, and also true religion, required by the Commandment. Superstition, Polytheism, and Atheism, forbidden. What meant by the words, "before me."

17. Exposition of the Second Commandment. The end and sum of it. Two parts. Short enumeration of forbidden shapes.

18. Why a threatening is added. Four titles applied to God, to make a deeper impression. He is called Mighty, Jealous, an Avenger, Merciful. Why said to be jealous. Reason drawn from analogy.

19. Exposition of the threatening which is added. First, as to visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. A misinterpretation on this head refuted, and the genuine meaning of the threatening explained.

20. Whether this visiting of the sins of parents inconsistent with the divine justice. Apparently conflicting passages reconciled.

21. Exposition of the latter part—viz. the showing mercy to thousands. The use of this promise. Consideration of an exception of frequent occurrence. The extent of this blessing.

22. Exposition of the Third Commandment. The end and sum of it. Three parts. These considered. What it is to use the name of God in vain. Swearing. Distinction between this commandment and the Ninth.

23. An oath defined. It is a species of divine worship. This explained.

24. Many modes in which this commandment is violated.1. By taking God to witness what we know is false. The insult thus offered.

25. Modes of violation continued.2. Taking God to witness in trivial matters. Contempt thus shown. When and how an oath should be used.3. Substituting the servants of God instead of himself when taking an oath.

26. The Anabaptists, who condemn all oaths, refuted.1. By the authority of Christ, who cannot be opposed in anything to the Father. A passage perverted by the Anabaptists explained. The design of our Saviour in the passage. What meant by his there prohibiting oaths.

27. The lawfulness of oaths confirmed by Christ and the apostles. Some approve of public, but not of private oaths. The lawfulness of the latter proved both by reason and example. Instances from Scripture.

28. Exposition of the Fourth Commandment. Its end. Three purposes.

29. Explanation of the first purpose—viz. a shadowing forth of spiritual rest. This the primary object of the precept. God is therein set forth as our sanctifier; and hence we must abstain from work, that the work of God in us may not be hindered.

30. The number seven denoting perfection in Scripture, this commandment may, in that respect, denote the perpetuity of the Sabbath, and its completion at the last day.

31. Taking a simpler view of the commandment, the number is of no consequence, provided we maintain the doctrine of a perpetual rest from all our works, and, at the same time, avoid a superstitious observance of days. The ceremonial part of the commandment abolished by the advent of Christ.

32. The second and third purposes of the Commandment explained. These twofold and perpetual. This confirmed. Of religious assemblies.

33. Of the observance of the Lord's day, in answer to those who complain that the Christian people are thus trained to Judaism. Objection.

34. Ground of this institution. There is no kind of superstitious necessity. The sum of the Commandment.

35. The Fifth Commandment (the first of the Second Table), expounded. Its end and substance. How far honour due to parents. To whom the term father applies.

36. It makes no difference whether those to whom this honour is required are worthy or unworthy. The honour is claimed especially for parents. It consists of three parts.1. Reverence.

37. Honour due to parents continued.2. Obedience.3. Gratitude. Why a promise added. In what sense it is to be taken. The present life a testimony of divine blessing. The reservation considered and explained.

38. Conversely a curse denounced on disobedient children. How far obedience due to parents, and those in the place of parents.

39. Sixth Commandment expounded. Its end and substance. God, as a spiritual Lawgiver, forbids the murder of the heart, and requires a sincere desire to preserve the life of our neighbour.

40. A twofold ground for this Commandment.1. Man is the image of God.2. He is our flesh.

41. Exposition of the Seventh Command. The end and substance of it. Remedy against fornication.

42. Continnence an excellent gift, when under the control of God only. Altogether denied to some; granted only for a time to others. Argument in favour of celibacy refuted.

43. Each individual may refrain from marriage so long as he is fit to observe celibacy. True celibacy, and the proper use of it. Any man not gifted with continence wars with God and with nature, as constituted by him, in remaining unmarried. Chastity defined.

44. Precautions to be observed in married life. Everything repugnant to chastity here condemned.

45. Exposition of the Eighth Commandment. Its end and substance. Four kinds of theft. The bad acts condemned by this Commandment. Other peculiar kinds of theft.

46. Proper observance of this Commandment. Four heads. Application.1. To the people and the magistrate.2. To the pastors of the Church and their flocks.3. To parents and children.4. To the old and the young.5. To servants and masters.6. To individuals.

47. Exposition of the ninth Commandment. Its end and substance. The essence of the Commandment—detestation of falsehood, and the pursuit of truth. Two kinds of falsehood. Public and private testimony. The equity of this Commandment.

48. How numerous the violations of this Commandment.1. By detraction.2. By evil speaking—a thing contrary to the offices of Christian charity.3. By scurrility or irony.4. By prying curiosity, and proneness to harsh judgments.

49. Exposition of the Tenth Commandment. Its end and substance. What meant by the term Covetousness. Distinction between counsel and the covetousness here condemned.

50. Why God requires so much purity. Objection. Answer. Charity toward our neighbour here principally commended. Why house,

wife, man-servant, maid-servant, ox, and ass, &c., are mentioned. Improper division of this Commandment into two.

51. The last part of the chapter. The end of the Law. Proof. A summary of the Ten Commandments. The Law delivers not merely rudiments and first principles, but a perfect standard of righteousness, modelled on the divine purity.

52. Why, in the Gospels and Epistles, the latter table only mentioned, and not the first. The same thing occurs in the Prophets.

53. An objection to what is said in the former section removed.

54. A conduct duly regulated by the divine Law, characterised by charity toward our neighbour. This subverted by those who give the first place to self-love. Refutation of their opinion.

55. Who our neighbour. Double error of the Schoolmen on this point.

56. This error consists, I. In converting precepts into counsels to be observed by monks.

57. Refutation of this error from Scripture and the ancient Theologians. Sophistical objection obviated.

58. Error of the Schoolmen consists, II. In calling hidden impiety and covetousness venial sins. Refutation drawn, 1. From a consideration of the whole Decalogue. 2. The testimony of an Apostle. 3. The authority of Christ. 4. The nature and majesty of God. 5. The sentence pronounced against sin. Conclusion.

59. Refutation drawn, 1. From a consideration of the whole Decalogue. 2. The testimony of an Apostle. 3. The authority of Christ. 4. The nature and majesty of God. 5. The sentence pronounced against sin. Conclusion.

1. I believe it will not be out of place here to introduce the Ten Commandments of the Law, and give a brief exposition of them. In this way it will be made more clear, that the worship which God originally prescribed is still in force (a point to which I have already adverted); and then a second point will be confirmed—viz. that the Jews not only learned from the law wherein true piety consisted, but from feeling their inability to observe it were overawed by the fear of judgments and so drawn, even against their will, towards the Mediator. In giving a summary of what constitutes the true knowledge of God, [190] we showed that we cannot form any just conception of the character of God, without feeling overawed by his majesty, and bound to do him service. In regard to the knowledge of ourselves, we showed that it principally consists in renouncing all idea of our own strength, and divesting ourselves of all confidence in our own righteousness, while, on the other hand, under a full consciousness of our wants, we learn true humility and self-abasement. Both of these the Lord accomplishes by his Law, first, when, in assertion of the right which he has to our obedience, he calls us to reverence his majesty, and prescribes the conduct by which this reverence is manifested; and, secondly, when, by promulgating the rule of his justice (a rule, to the rectitude of which our nature, from being depraved and perverted, is continually opposed, and to the perfection of which our ability, from its infirmity and nervelessness for good, is far from being able to attain), he charges us both with impotence and unrighteousness. Moreover, the very things contained in the two tables are, in a manner, dictated to us by that internal law, which, as has been already said, is in a manner written and stamped on every heart. For conscience, instead of allowing us to stifle our perceptions, and sleep on without interruption, acts as an inward witness and monitor, reminds us of what we owe to God, points out the distinction between good and evil, and thereby convicts us of departure from duty. But man, being immured in the darkness of error, is scarcely able, by means of that natural law, to form any tolerable idea of the worship which is acceptable to God. At all events, he is very far from forming any correct knowledge of it. In addition to this, he is so swollen with arrogance and ambition, and so

blinded with self-love, that he is unable to survey, and, as it were, descend into himself, that he may so learn to humble and abase himself, and confess his misery. Therefore, as a necessary remedy, both for our dullness and our contumacy, the Lord has given us his written Law, which, by its sure attestations, removes the obscurity of the law of nature, and also, by shaking off our lethargy, makes a more lively and permanent impression on our minds.

2. It is now easy to understand the doctrine of the law—viz. that God, as our Creator, is entitled to be regarded by us as a Father and Master, and should, accordingly, receive from us fear, love, reverence, and glory; nay, that we are not our own, to follow whatever course passion dictates, but are bound to obey him implicitly, and to acquiesce entirely in his good pleasure. Again, the Law teaches, that justice and rectitude are a delight, injustice an abomination to him, and, therefore, as we would not with impious ingratitude revolt from our Maker, our whole life must be spent in the cultivation of righteousness. For if we manifest becoming reverence only when we prefer his will to our own, it follows, that the only legitimate service to him is the practice of justice, purity, and holiness. Nor can we plead as an excuse, that we want the power, and, like debtors, whose means are exhausted, are unable to pay. We cannot be permitted to measure the glory of God by our ability; whatever we may be, he ever remains like himself, the friend of righteousness, the enemy of unrighteousness, and whatever his demands from us may be, as he can only require what is right, we are necessarily under a natural obligation to obey. Our inability to do so is our own fault. If lust, in which sin has its dominion, so enthrals us, that we are not free to obey our Father, there is no ground for pleading necessity as a defence, since this evil necessity is within, and must be imputed to ourselves.

3. When, under the guidance of the Law, we have advanced thus far, we must, under the same guidance, proceed to descend into ourselves. In this way, we at length arrive at two results: First, contrasting our conduct with the righteousness of the Law, we see

how very far it is from being in accordance with the will of God, and, therefore, how unworthy we are of holding our place among his creatures, far less of being accounted his sons; and, secondly, taking a survey of our powers, we see that they are not only unequal to fulfil the Law, but are altogether null. The necessary consequence must be, to produce distrust of our own ability, and also anxiety and trepidation of mind. Conscience cannot feel the burden of its guilt, without forthwith turning to the judgment of God, while the view of this judgment cannot fail to excite a dread of death. In like manner, the proofs of our utter powerlessness must instantly beget despair of our own strength. Both feelings are productive of humility and abasement, and hence the sinner, terrified at the prospect of eternal death (which he sees justly impending over him for his iniquities), turns to the mercy of God as the only haven of safety. Feeling his utter inability to pay what he owes to the Law, and thus despairing of himself, he rethinks him of applying and looking to some other quarter for help.

4. But the Lord does not count it enough to inspire a reverence for his justice. To imbue our hearts with love to himself, and, at the same time, with hatred to iniquity, he has added promises and threatening. The eye of our mind being too dim to be attracted by the mere beauty of goodness, our most merciful Father has been pleased, in his great indulgence, to allure us to love and long after it by the hope of reward. He accordingly declares that rewards for virtue are treasured up with him, that none who yield obedience to his commands will labour in vain. On the other hand, he proclaims not only that iniquity is hateful in his sight, but that it will not escape with impunity, because he will be the avenger of his insulted majesty. That he may encourage us in every way, he promises present blessings, as well as eternal felicity, to the obedience of those who shall have kept his commands, while he threatens transgressors with present suffering, as well as the punishment of eternal death. The promise, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them," (Lev.18:5), and corresponding to this the threatening, "The souls that sinneth, it

shall die," (Ezek.18:4, 20); doubtless point to a future life and death, both without end. But though in every passage where the favour or anger of God is mentioned, the former comprehends eternity of life and the latter eternal destruction, the Law, at the same time, enumerates a long catalogue of present blessings and curses (Lev.26:4; Deut.28:1). The threatening attest the spotless purity of God, which cannot bear iniquity, while the promises attest at once his infinite love of righteousness (which he cannot leave unrewarded), and his wondrous kindness. Being bound to do him homage with all that we have, he is perfectly entitled to demand everything which he requires of us as a debt; and as a debt, the payment is unworthy of reward. He therefore foregoes his right, when he holds forth reward for services which are not offered spontaneously, as if they were not due. The amount of these services, in themselves, has been partly described and will appear more clearly in its own place. For the present, it is enough to remember that the promises of the Law are no mean commendation of righteousness as they show how much God is pleased with the observance of them, while the threatening denounced are intended to produce a greater abhorrence of unrighteousness, lest the sinner should indulge in the blandishments of vice, and forget the judgment which the divine Lawgiver has prepared for him.

5. The Lord, in delivering a perfect rule of righteousness, has reduced it in all its parts to his mere will, and in this way has shown that there is nothing more acceptable to him than obedience. There is the more necessity for attending to this, because the human mind, in its wantonness, is ever and anon inventing different modes of worship as a means of gaining his favour. This irreligious affectation of religion being innate in the human mind, has betrayed itself in every age, and is still doing so, men always longing to devise some method of procuring righteousness without any sanction from the Word of God. [191] Hence in those observances which are generally regarded as good works, the precepts of the Law occupy a narrow space, almost the whole being usurped by this endless host of human inventions. But was not this the very license which Moses meant to

curb, when, after the promulgation of the Law, he thus addressed the people: "Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou does that which is good and right in the sight of the Lord thy God." "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it," ([Deuteronomy 12:28-32](#)). Previously, after asking "what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" he had added, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life," (Deut.4:8, 9). God foreseeing that the Israelites would not rest, but after receiving the Law, would, unless sternly prohibited give birth to new kinds of righteousness, declares that the Law comprehended a perfect righteousness. This ought to have been a most powerful restraint, and yet they desisted not from the presumptuous course so strongly prohibited. How do we act? We are certainly under the same obligation as they were; for there cannot be a doubt that the claim of absolute perfection which God made for his Law is perpetually in force. Not contented with it, however, we labour prodigiously in feigning and coining an endless variety of good works, one after another. The best cure for this vice would be a constant and deep-seated conviction that the Law was given from heaven to teach us a perfect righteousness; that the only righteousness so taught is that which the divine will expressly enjoins; and that it is, therefore, vain to attempt, by new forms of worship, to gain the favour of God, whose true worship consists in obedience alone; or rather, that to go a wandering after good works which are not prescribed by the Law of God, is an intolerable violation of true and divine righteousness. Most truly does Augustine say in one place, that the obedience which is rendered to God is the parent and guardian; in another, that it is the source of all the virtues. [\[192\]](#)

6. After we shall have expounded the Divine Law, what has been previously said of its office and use will be understood more easily,

and with greater benefit. But before we proceed to the consideration of each separate commandment, it will be proper to take a general survey of the whole. At the outset, it was proved that in the Law human life is instructed not merely in outward decency but in inward spiritual righteousness. Though none can deny this, yet very few duly attend to it, because they do not consider the Lawgiver, by whose character that of the Law must also be determined. Should a king issue an edict prohibiting murder, adultery, and theft, the penalty, I admit, will not be incurred by the man who has only felt a longing in his mind after these vices, but has not actually committed them. The reason is, that a human lawgiver does not extend his care beyond outward order, and, therefore, his injunctions are not violated without outward acts. But God, whose eye nothing escapes, and who regards not the outward appearance so much as purity of heart, under the prohibition of murder, adultery, and thefts includes wrath, hatred, lust, covetousness, and all other things of a similar nature. Being a spiritual Lawgiver, he speaks to the soul not less than the body. The murder which the soul commits is wrath and hatred; the theft, covetousness and avarice; and the adultery, lust. It may be alleged that human laws have respect to intentions and wishes, and not fortuitous events. I admit this but then these must manifest themselves externally. They consider the animus with which the act was done, but do not scrutinise the secret thoughts. Accordingly, their demand is satisfied when the hand merely refrains from transgression. On the contrary, the law of heaven being enacted for our minds, the first thing necessary to a due observance of the Law is to put them under restraint. But the generality of men, even while they are most anxious to conceal their disregard of the Law, only frame their hands and feet and other parts of their body to some kind of observance, but in the meanwhile keep the heart utterly estranged from everything like obedience. They think it enough to have carefully concealed from man what they are doing in the sight of God. Hearing the commandments, "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," "Thou shalt not steal," they do not unsheathe their sword for slaughter, nor defile their bodies with harlots, nor put forth their hands to other men's goods. So far well; but with their

whole soul they breathe out slaughter, boil with lust, cast a greedy eye at their neighbour's property, and in wish devour it. Here the principal thing which the Law requires is wanting. Whence then, this gross stupidity, but just because they lose sight of the Lawgiver, and form an idea of righteousness in accordance with their own disposition? Against this Paul strenuously protests, when he declares that the "law is spiritual" (Rom.7:14); intimating that it not only demands the homage of the soul, and mind, and will, but requires an angelic purity, which, purified from all filthiness of the flesh, savours only of the Spirit.

7. In saying that this is the meaning of the Law, we are not introducing a new interpretation of our own; we are following Christ, the best interpreter of the Law (Mt.5:22, 28, 44). The Pharisees having instilled into the people the erroneous idea that the Law was fulfilled by every one who did not in external act do anything against the Law, he pronounces this a most dangerous delusion, and declares that an immodest look is adultery, and that hatred of a brother is murder. "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment;" whosoever by whispering or murmuring gives indication of being offended, "shall be in danger of the council;" whosoever by reproaches and evil-speaking gives way to open anger, "shall be in danger of hell-fire." Those who have not perceived this, have pretended that Christ was only a second Moses, the giver of an evangelical, to supply the deficiency of the Mosaic Law. Hence the common axiom as to the perfection of the Evangelical Law, and its great superiority to that of Moses. This idea is in many ways most pernicious. For it will appear from Moses himself, when we come to give a summary of his precepts, that great indignity is thus done to the Divine Law. It certainly insinuates, that the holiness of the fathers under the Law was little else than hypocrisy, and leads us away from that one unvarying rule of righteousness. It is very easy, however, to confute this error, which proceeds on the supposition that Christ added to the Law, whereas he only restored it to its integrity by maintaining and purifying it

when obscured by the falsehood, and defiled by the leaven of the Pharisees.

8. The next observation we would make is, that there is always more in the requirements and prohibitions of the Law than is expressed in words. This, however, must be understood so as not to convert it into a kind of Lesbian code; [193] and thus, by licentiously wresting the Scriptures, make them assume any meaning that we please. By taking this excessive liberty with Scripture, its authority is lowered with some, and all hope of understanding it abandoned by others. We must, therefore, if possible, discover some path which may conduct us with direct and firm step to the will of God. We must consider, I say, how far interpretation can be permitted to go beyond the literal meaning of the words, still making it apparent that no appending of human glosses is added to the Divine Law, but that the pure and genuine meaning of the Lawgiver is faithfully exhibited. It is true that, in almost all the commandments, there are elliptical expressions, and that, therefore, any man would make himself ridiculous by attempting to restrict the spirit of the Law to the strict letter of the words. It is plain that a sober interpretation of the Law must go beyond these, but how far is doubtful, unless some rule be adopted. The best rule, in my opinion, would be, to be guided by the principle of the commandment—viz. to consider in the case of each what the purpose is for which it was given. For example, every commandment either requires or prohibits; and the nature of each is instantly discerned when we look to the principle of the commandment as its end. Thus, the end of the Fifth Commandment is to render honour to those on whom God bestows it. The sum of the commandment, therefore, is, that it is right in itself, and pleasing to God, to honour those on whom he has conferred some distinction; that to despise and rebel against such persons is offensive to Him. The principle of the First Commandment is, that God only is to be worshipped. The sum of the commandment, therefore is that true piety, in other words, the worship of the Deity, is acceptable, and impiety is an abomination, to him. So in each of the commandments we must first look to the matter of which it treats, and then consider

its end, until we discover what it properly is that the Lawgiver declares to be pleasing or displeasing to him. Only, we must reason from the precept to its contrary in this way: If this pleases God, its opposite displeases; if that displeases, its opposite pleases: if God commands this, he forbids the opposite; if he forbids that, he commands the opposite.

9. What is now touched on somewhat obscurely will become perfectly clear as we proceed and get accustomed to the exposition of the Commandments. It is sufficient thus to have adverted to the subject; but perhaps our concluding statement will require to be briefly confirmed, as it might otherwise not be understood, or, though understood might perhaps, at the outset appear unsound. There is no need of proving, that when good is ordered the evil which is opposed to it is forbidden. This every one admits. It will also be admitted, without much difficulty, that when evil is forbidden, its opposite is enjoined. Indeed, it is a common saying, that censure of vice is commendation of virtue. We, however, demand somewhat more than is commonly understood by these expressions. When the particular virtue opposed to a particular vice is spoken of, all that is usually meant is abstinence from that vice. We maintain that it goes farther, and means opposite duties and positive acts. Hence the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," the generality of men will merely consider as an injunction to abstain from all injury and all wish to inflict injury. I hold that it moreover means, that we are to aid our neighbour's life by every means in our power. And not to assert without giving my reasons I prove it thus: God forbids us to injure or hurt a brother, because he would have his life to be dear and precious to us; and, therefore, when he so forbids, he, at the same time, demands all the offices of charity which can contribute to his preservation.

10. But why did God thus deliver his commandments, as it were, by halves, using elliptical expressions with a larger meaning than that actually expressed? Other reasons are given, but the following seems to me the best:—As the flesh is always on the alert to extenuate the

heinousness of sin (unless it is made, as it were, perceptible to the touch), and to cover it with specious pretexts, the Lord sets forth, by way of example, whatever is foulest and most iniquitous in each species of transgression, that the delivery of it might produce a shudder in the hearer, and impress his mind with a deeper abhorrence of sin. In forming an estimate of sins, we are often imposed upon by imagining that the more hidden the less heinous they are. This delusion the Lord dispels by accustoming us to refer the whole multitude of sins to particular heads, which admirably show how great a degree of heinousness there is in each. For example, wrath and hatred do not seem so very bad when they are designated by their own names; but when they are prohibited under the name of murder, we understand better how abominable they are in the sight of God, who puts them in the same class with that horrid crime. Influenced by his judgment, we accustom ourselves to judge more accurately of the heinousness of offences which previously seemed trivial.

11. It will now be proper to consider what is meant by the division of the divine Law into Two Tables. It will be judged by all men of sense from the formal manner in which these are sometimes mentioned, that it has not been done at random, or without reason. Indeed, the reason is so obvious as not to allow us to remain in doubt with regard to it. God thus divided his Law into two parts, containing a complete rule of righteousness, that he might assign the first place to the duties of religion which relate especially to His worship, and the second to the duties of charity which have respect to man. The first foundation of righteousness undoubtedly is the worship of God. When it is subverted, all the other parts of righteousness, like a building rent asunder, and in ruins, are racked and scattered. What kind of righteousness do you call it, not to commit theft and rapine, if you, in the meantime, with impious sacrilege, rob God of his glory? or not to defile your body with fornication, if you profane his holy name with blasphemy? or not to take away the life of man, if you strive to cut off and destroy the remembrance of God? It is vain, therefore, to talk of righteousness apart from religion. Such

righteousness has no more beauty than the trunk of a body deprived of its head. [194] Nor is religion the principal part merely: it is the very soul by which the whole lives and breathes. Without the fear of God, men do not even observe justice and charity among themselves. We say, then, that the worship of God is the beginning and foundation of righteousness; and that wherever it is wanting, any degree of equity, or continence, or temperance, existing among men themselves, is empty and frivolous in the sight of God. We call it the source and soul of righteousness, in as much as men learn to live together temperately, and without injury, when they revere God as the judge of right and wrong. In the First Table, accordingly, he teaches us how to cultivate piety, and the proper duties of religion in which his worship consists; in the second, he shows how, in the fear of his name, we are to conduct ourselves towards our fellow-men. Hence, as related by the Evangelists (Mt.22:37; [Luke 10:27](#)), our Saviour summed up the whole Law in two heads—viz. to love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. You see how, of the two parts under which he comprehends the whole Law, he devotes the one to God, and assigns the other to mankind.

12. But although the whole Law is contained in two heads, yet, in order to remove every pretext for excuse, the Lord has been pleased to deliver more fully and explicitly in Ten Commandments, every thing relating to his own honour, fear, and love, as well as every thing relating to the charity which, for his sake, he enjoins us to have towards our fellowmen. Nor is it an unprofitable study to consider the division of the commandments, provided we remember that it is one of those matters in which every man should have full freedom of judgment, and on account of which, difference of opinion should not lead to contention. We are, indeed, under the necessity of making this observation, lest the division which we are to adopt should excite the surprise or derision of the reader, as novel or of recent invention.

There is no room for controversy as to the fact, that the Law is divided into ten heads since this is repeatedly sanctioned by divine

authority. The question, therefore, is not as to the number of the parts, but the method of dividing them. Those who adopt a division which gives three commandments to the First Table, and throws the remaining seven into the Second Table, expunge the commandment concerning images from the list, or at least conceal it under the first, though there cannot be a doubt that it was distinctly set down by the Lord as a separate commandment; whereas the tenth, which prohibits the coveting of what belongs to our neighbour, they absurdly break down into two. Moreover, it will soon appear, that this method of dividing was unknown in a purer age. Others count four commandments in the First Table as we do, but for the first set down the introductory promise, without adding the precept. But because I must hold, unless I am convinced by clear evidence to the contrary, that the "ten words" mentioned by Moses are Ten Commandments and because I see that number arranged in most admirable order, I must, while I leave them to hold their own opinion, follow what appears to me better established—viz. that what they make to be the first commandment is of the nature of a preface to the whole Law, that thereafter follow four commandments in the First Table, and six in the Second, in the order in which they will here be reviewed. This division Origin adopts without discussion, as if it had been every where received in his day. [195] It is also adopted by Augustine, in his book addressed to Boniface, where, in enumerating the commandments, he follows this order, Let one God be religiously obeyed, let no idol be worshipped, let the name of God be not used in vain; while previously he had made separate mention of the typical commandment of the Sabbath. Elsewhere, indeed, he expresses approbation of the first division, but on too slight grounds, because, by the number three (making the First Table consist of three commandments), the mystery of the Trinity would be better manifested. Even here, however, he does not disguise his opinion, that in other respects, our division is more to his mind. Besides these, we are supported by the author of an unfinished work on Matthew. [196] Josephus, no doubt with the general consent of his age, assigns five commandments to each table. This, while repugnant to reason, inasmuch as it confounds the distinction between piety

and charity, is also refuted by the authority of our Saviour, who in Matthew places the command to honour parents in the list of those belonging to the Second Table (Mt.19:19). Let us now hear God speaking in his own words.

First Commandment.

I AM THE LORD THY GOD, WHICH BROUGHT THEE OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE. THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.

13. Whether you take the former sentence as a part of the commandment, or read it separately is to me a matter of indifference, provided you grant that it is a kind of preface to the whole Law. In enacting laws, the first thing to be guarded against is their being forthwith abrogated by contempt. The Lord, therefore, takes care, in the first place, that this shall not happen to the Law about to be delivered, by introducing it with a triple sanction. He claims to himself power and authority to command, that he may impress the chosen people with the necessity of obedience; he holds forth a promise of favour, as a means of alluring them to the study of holiness; and he reminds them of his kindness, that he may convict them of ingratitude, if they fail to make a suitable return. By the name, Lord, are denoted power and lawful dominion. If all things are from him, and by him consist, they ought in justice to bear reference to him, as Paul says (Rom.11:36). This name, therefore, is in itself sufficient to bring us under the authority of the divine majesty: for it were monstrous for us to wish to withdraw from the dominion of him, out of whom we cannot even exist.

14. After showing that he has a right to command, and to be obeyed, he next, in order not to seem to drag men by mere necessity, but to allure them, graciously declares, that he is the God of the Church. For the mode of expression implies, that there is a mutual relation included in the promise, "I will be their God, and they shall be my

people," (Jer.31:33). Hence Christ infers the immortality of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the fact that God had declared himself to be their God (Mt.22:32). It is, therefore, the same as if he had said, I have chosen you to myself, as a people to whom I shall not only do good in the present life, but also bestow felicity in the life to come. The end contemplated in this is adverted to in the Law, in various passages. For when the Lord condescends in mercy to honour us so far as to admit us to partnership with his chosen people, he chooses us, as Moses says, "to be a holy people," "a peculiar people unto himself," to "keep all his commandments," (Deut.7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Hence the exhortation, "Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy," (Lev.19:2). These two considerations form the ground of the remonstrance, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts," (Mal.1:6).

15. Next follows a commemoration of his kindness, which ought to produce upon us an impression strong in proportion to the detestation in which ingratitude is held even among men. It is true, indeed, he was reminding Israel of a deliverance then recent, but one which, on account of its wondrous magnitude, was to be for ever memorable to the remotest posterity. Moreover, it is most appropriate to the matter in hand. [197] For the Lord intimates that they were delivered from miserable bondage, that they might learn to yield prompt submission and obedience to him as the author of their freedom. In like manners to keep us to his true worship, he often describes himself by certain epithets which distinguish his sacred Deity from all idols and fictitious gods. For, as I formerly observed, such is our proneness to vanity and presumption, that as soon as God is named, our minds, unable to guard against error, immediately fly off to some empty delusion. In applying a remedy to this disease, God distinguishes his divinity by certain titles, and thus confines us, as it were, within distinct boundaries, that we may not wander hither and thither, and feign some new deity for ourselves, abandoning the living God, and setting up an idol. For this reason, whenever the

Prophets would bring him properly before us, they invest, and, as it were, surround him with those characters under which he had manifested himself to the people of Israel. When he is called the God of Abraham, or the God of Israel, when he is stationed in the temple of Jerusalem, between the Cherubim, these, and similar modes of expression, [198] do not confine him to one place or one people, but are used merely for the purpose of fixing our thoughts on that God who so manifested himself in the covenant which he made with Israel, as to make it unlawful on any account to deviate from the strict view there given of his character. Let it be understood, then, that mention is made of deliverance, in order to make the Jews submit with greater readiness to that God who justly claims them as his own. We again, instead of supposing that the matter has no reference to us, should reflect that the bondage of Israel in Egypt was a type of that spiritual bondage, in the fetters of which we are all bound, until the heavenly avenger delivers us by the power of his own arm, and transports us into his free kingdom. Therefore, as in old times, when he would gather together the scattered Israelites to the worship of his name, he rescued them from the intolerable tyranny of Pharaoh, so all who profess him now are delivered from the fatal tyranny of the devil, of which that of Egypt was only a type. There is no man, therefore, whose mind ought not to be aroused to give heed to the Law, which, as he is told, proceeded from the supreme King, from him who, as he gave all their being, justly destines and directs them to himself as their proper end. There is no man, I say, who should not hasten to embrace the Lawgiver, whose commands, he knows, he has been specially appointed to obey, from whose kindness he anticipates an abundance of all good, and even a blessed immortality, and to whose wondrous power and mercy he is indebted for deliverance from the jaws of death. [199]

16. The authority of the Law being founded and established, God delivers his First Commandment—

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.

The purport of this commandment is, that the Lord will have himself alone to be exalted in his people, and claims the entire possession of them as his own. That it may be so, he orders us to abstain from ungodliness and superstition of every kind, by which the glory of his divinity is diminished or obscured; and, for the same reason, he requires us to worship and adore him with truly pious zeal. The simple terms used obviously amount to this. For seeing we cannot have God without embracing everything which belongs to him, the prohibition against having strange gods means, that nothing which belongs to him is to be transferred to any other. The duties which we owe to God are innumerable, but they seem to admit of being not improperly reduced to four heads: Adoration, with its accessory spiritual submission of conscience, Trust, Invocation, Thanksgiving. [200] By Adoration, I mean the veneration and worship which we render to him when we do homage to his majesty; and hence I make part of it to consist in bringing our consciences into subjection to his Law. [201] Trust, is secure resting in him under a recognition of his perfections, when, ascribing to him all power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, we consider ourselves happy in having been brought into intercourse with him. Invocation, may be defined the retaking of ourselves to his promised aid as the only resource in every case of need. Thanksgiving, is the gratitude which ascribes to him the praise of all our blessings. As the Lord does not allow these to be derived from any other quarter, so he demands that they shall be referred entirely to himself. It is not enough to refrain from other gods. We must, at the same time, devote ourselves wholly to him, not acting like certain impious despisers, who regard it as the shortest method, to hold all religious observance in derision. But here precedence must be given to true religion, which will direct our minds to the living God. When duly imbued with the knowledge of him, the whole aim of our lives will be to revere, fear, and worship his majesty, to enjoy a share in his blessings, to have recourse to him in every difficulty, to acknowledge, laud, and celebrate the magnificence of his works, to make him, as it were, the sole aim of all our actions. Next, we must beware of superstition, by which our minds are turned aside from the true God, and carried to and fro

after a multiplicity of gods. Therefore, if we are contented with one God, let us call to mind what was formerly observed, that all fictitious gods are to be driven far away, and that the worship which he claims for himself is not to be mutilated. Not a particle of his glory is to be withheld: everything belonging to him must be reserved to him entire. The words, "before me," go to increase the indignity, God being provoked to jealousy whenever we substitute our fictions in his stead; just as an unfaithful wife stings her husband's heart more deeply when her adultery is committed openly before his eyes. Therefore, God having by his present power and grace declared that he had respect to the people whom he had chosen, now, in order to deter them from the wickedness of revolt, warns them that they cannot adopt strange gods without his being witness and spectator of the sacrilege. To the audacity of so doing is added the very great impiety of supposing that they can mock the eye of God with their evasions. Far from this the Lord proclaims that everything which we design, plan, or execute, lies open to his sight. Our conscience must, therefore, keep aloof from the most distant thought of revolt, if we would have our worship approved by the Lord. The glory of his Godhead must be maintained entire and incorrupt, not merely by external profession, but as under his eye, which penetrates the inmost recesses of his heart.

Second Commandment

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO THEE ANY GRAVEN 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: THOU SHALT NOT BOW DOWN THYSELF TO THEM, NOR SERVE THEM.

17. As in the first commandment the Lord declares that he is one, and that besides him no gods must be either worshipped or imagined, so he here more plainly declares what his nature is, and what the kind of worship with which he is to be honoured, in order

that we may not presume to form any carnal idea of him. The purport of the commandment, therefore, is, that he will not have his legitimate worship profaned by superstitious rites. Wherefore, in general, he calls us entirely away from the carnal frivolous observances which our stupid minds are wont to devise after forming some gross idea of the divine nature, while, at the same time, he instructs us in the worship which is legitimate, namely, spiritual worship of his own appointment. The grossest vice here prohibited is external idolatry. This commandment consists of two parts. The former curbs the licentious daring which would subject the incomprehensible God to our senses, or represent him under any visible shape. The latter forbids the worship of images on any religious ground. There is, moreover, a brief enumeration of all the forms by which the Deity was usually represented by heathen and superstitious nations. By "any thing which is in heaven above" is meant the sun, the moon, and the stars, perhaps also birds, as in Deuteronomy, where the meaning is explained, there is mention of birds as well as stars (Deut.4:15). I would not have made this observation, had I not seen that some absurdly apply it to the angels. The other particulars I pass, as requiring no explanation. We have already shown clearly enough (Book 1. chap.11, 12) that every visible shape of Deity which man devises is diametrically opposed to the divine nature; and, therefore, that the moment idols appear, true religion is corrupted and adulterated.

18. The threatening subjoined ought to have no little effect in shaking off our lethargy. It is in the following terms:—

I THE LORD THY GOD AM A JEALOUS [\[202\]](#) GOD, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION OF THEM THAT HATE ME; AND SHEWING MERCY UNTO THOUSANDS OF THEM THAT LOVE ME, AND KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS.

The meaning here is the same as if he had said, that our duty is to cleave to him alone. To induce us to this, he proclaims his authority

which he will not permit to be impaired or despised with impunity. It is true, the word used is El, which means God; but as it is derived from a word meaning strength, I have had no hesitations in order to express the sense more fully, so to render it as inserted on the margin. Secondly, he calls himself jealous, because he cannot bear a partner. Thirdly, he declares that he will vindicate his majesty and glory, if any transfer it either to the creatures or to graven images; and that not by a simple punishment of brief duration, but one extending to the third and fourth generation of such as imitate the impiety of their progenitors. In like manner, he declares his constant mercy and kindness to the remote posterity of those who love him, and keep his Law. The Lord very frequently addresses us in the character of a husband; [203] the union by which he connects us with himself, when he receives us into the bosom of the Church, having some resemblance to that of holy wedlock, because founded on mutual faith. As he performs all the offices of a true and faithful husband, so he stipulates for love and conjugal chastity from us; that is, that we do not prostitute our souls to Satan, to be defiled with foul carnal lusts. Hence, when he rebukes the Jews for their apostasy, he complains that they have cast off chastity, and polluted themselves with adultery. Therefore, as the purer and chaster the husband is, the more grievously is he offended when he sees his wife inclining to a rival; so the Lord, who has betrothed us to himself in truth, declares that he burns with the hottest jealousy whenever, neglecting the purity of his holy marriage, we defile ourselves with abominable lusts, and especially when the worship of his Deity, which ought to have been most carefully kept unimpaired, is transferred to another, or adulterated with some superstition; since, in this way, we not only violate our plighted troth, but defile the nuptial couch, by giving access to adulterers.

19. In the threatening we must attend to what is meant when God declares that he will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. It seems inconsistent with the equity of the divine procedure to punish the innocent for another's fault; and the Lord himself declares, that "the son shall not bear the

iniquity of the father," (Ezek.18:20). But still we meet more than once with a declaration as to the postponing of the punishment of the sins of fathers to future generations. Thus Moses repeatedly addresses the Lord as "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation," (Num.14:18). In like manner, Jeremiah, "Thou showest loving-kindness unto thousands, and recompenses the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them," (Jer.32:18). Some feeling sadly perplexed how to solve this difficulty, think it is to be understood of temporal punishments only, which it is said sons may properly bear for the sins of their parents, because they are often inflicted for their own safety. This is indeed true; for Isaiah declared to Hezekiah, that his children should be stript of the kingdom, and carried away into captivity, for a sin which he had committed (Isa.39:7); and the households of Pharaoh and Abimelech were made to suffer for an injury done to Abraham (Gen.12:17; 20:3-18). But the attempt to solve the question in this way is an evasion rather than a true interpretation. For the punishment denounced here and in similar passages is too great to be confined within the limits of the present life. We must therefore understand it to mean, that a curse from the Lord righteously falls not only on the head of the guilty individual, but also on all his lineage. When it has fallen, what can be anticipated but that the father, being deprived of the Spirit of God, will live most flagitiously; that the son, being in like manner forsaken of the Lord, because of his father's iniquity, will follow the same road to destruction; and be followed in his turn by succeeding generations, forming a seed of evil-doers?

20. First, let us examine whether such punishment is inconsistent with the divine justice. If human nature is universally condemned, those on whom the Lord does not bestow the communication of his grace must be doomed to destruction; nevertheless, they perish by their own iniquity, not by unjust hatred on the part of God. There is no room to expostulate, and ask why the grace of God does not forward their salvation as it does that of others. Therefore, when God punishes the wicked and flagitious for their crimes, by depriving

their families of his grace for many generations, who will dare to bring a charge against him for this most righteous vengeance? But it will be said, the Lord, on the contrary, declares, that the son shall not suffer for the father's sin (Ezek.18:20). Observe the scope of that passage. The Israelites, after being subjected to a long period of uninterrupted calamities, had begun to say, as a proverb, that their fathers had eaten the sour grape, and thus set the children's teeth on edge; meaning that they, though in themselves righteous and innocent, were paying the penalty of sins committed by their parents, and this more from the implacable anger than the duly tempered severity of God. The prophet declares it was not so: that they were punished for their own wickedness; that it was not in accordance with the justice of God that a righteous son should suffer for the iniquity of a wicked father; and that nothing of the kind was exemplified in what they suffered. For, if the visitation of which we now speak is accomplished when God withdraws from the children of the wicked the light of his truth and the other helps to salvation, the only way in which they are accursed for their fathers' wickedness is in being blinded and abandoned by God, and so left to walk in their parents' steps. The misery which they suffer in time, and the destruction to which they are finally doomed, are thus punishments inflicted by divine justice, not for the sins of others, but for their own iniquity.

21. On the other hand, there is a promise of mercy to thousands—a promise which is frequently mentioned in Scripture, and forms an article in the solemn covenant made with the Church—I will be "a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee," (Gen.17:7). With reference to this, Solomon says, "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him," (Prov.20:7); not only in consequence of a religious education (though this certainly is by no means unimportant), but in consequence of the blessing promised in the covenant—viz. that the divine favour will dwell for ever in the families of the righteous. Herein is excellent consolation to believers, and great ground of terror to the wicked; for if, after death, the mere remembrance of righteousness and iniquity have such an influence

on the divine procedure, that his blessing rests on the posterity of the righteous, and his curse on the posterity of the wicked, much more must it rest on the heads of the individuals themselves. Notwithstanding of this, however, the offspring of the wicked sometimes amends, while that of believers degenerates; because the Almighty has not here laid down an inflexible rule which might derogate from his free election. For the consolation of the righteous, and the dismay of the sinner, it is enough that the threatening itself is not vain or nugatory, although it does not always take effect. For, as the temporal punishments inflicted on a few of the wicked are proofs of the divine wrath against sin, and of the future judgment that will ultimately overtake all sinners, though many escape with impunity even to the end of their lives, so, when the Lord gives one example of blessing a son for his father's sake, by visiting him in mercy and kindness, it is a proof of constant and unfailing favour to his worshipers. On the other hand, when, in any single instance, he visits the iniquity of the father on the son, he gives intimation of the judgment which awaits all the reprobate for their own iniquities. The certainty of this is the principal thing here taught. Moreover, the Lord, as it were by the way, commends the riches of his mercy by extending it to thousands, while he limits his vengeance to four generations.

Third Commandment.

THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN.

22. The purport of this Commandment is, that the majesty of the name of God is to be held sacred. In sum, therefore, it means, that we must not profane it by using it irreverently or contemptuously. This prohibition implies a corresponding precept—viz. that it be our study and care to treat his name with religious veneration. Wherefore it becomes us to regulate our minds and our tongues, so as never to think or speak of God and his mysteries without reverence and great

soberness, and never, in estimating his works, to have any feeling towards him but one of deep veneration. We must, I say, steadily observe the three following things:—First, Whatever our mind conceives of him, whatever our tongue utters, must bespeak his excellence, and correspond to the sublimity of his sacred name; in short, must be fitted to extol its greatness. Secondly, We must not rashly and preposterously pervert his sacred word and adorable mysteries to purposes of ambition, or avarice, or amusement, but, according as they bear the impress of his dignity, must always maintain them in due honour and esteem. Lastly, We must not detract from or throw obloquy upon his works, as miserable men are wont insultingly to do, but must laud every action which we attribute to him as wise, and just, and good. This is to sanctify the name of God. When we act otherwise, his name is profaned with vain and wicked abuse, because it is applied to a purpose foreign to that to which it is consecrated. Were there nothing worse, in being deprived of its dignity it is gradually brought into contempt. But if there is so much evil in the rash and unseasonable employment of the divine name, there is still more evil in its being employed for nefarious purposes, as is done by those who use it in necromancy, cursing, illicit exorcisms, and other impious incantations. But the Commandment refers especially to the case of oaths, in which a perverse employment of the divine name is particularly detestable; and this it does the more effectually to deter us from every species of profanation. That the thing here commanded relates to the worship of God, and the reverence due to his name, and not to the equity which men are to cultivate towards each other, is apparent from this, that afterwards, in the Second Table, there is a condemnation of the perjury and false testimony by which human society is injured, and that the repetition would be superfluous, if, in this Commandment, the duty of charity were handled. Moreover, this is necessary even for distinction, because, as was observed, God has, for good reason, divided his Law into two tables. The inference then is, that God here vindicates his own right, and defends his sacred name, but does not teach the duties which men owe to men.

23. In the first place, we must consider what an oath is. An oath, then, is calling God to witness that what we say is true. Execrations being manifestly insulting to God, are unworthy of being classed among oaths. That an oath, when duly taken, is a species of divine worship, appears from many passages of Scripture, as when Isaiah prophesies of the admission of the Assyrians and Egyptians to a participation in the covenant, he says, "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts," ([Isaiah 19:18](#)). Swearing by the name of the Lord here means, that they will make a profession of religion. In like manner, speaking of the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, it is said, "He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth: and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth," ([Isaiah 65:16](#)). In Jeremiah it is said, "If they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The Lord liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people," (Jer.12:16). By appealing to the name of the Lord, and calling him to witness, we are justly said to declare our own religious veneration of him. For we thus acknowledge that he is eternal and unchangeable truth, inasmuch as we not only call upon him, in preference to others, as a fit witness to the truth, but as its only assertor, able to bring hidden things to light, a discerner of the hearts. When human testimony fails, we appeal to God as witness, especially when the matter to be proved lies hid in the conscience. For which reason, the Lord is grievously offended with those who swear by strange gods, and construes such swearing as a proof of open revolt, "Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods," (Jer.5:7). The heinousness of the offence is declared by the punishment denounced against it, "I will cut off them that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham," (Zeph.1:4, 5).

24. Understanding that the Lord would have our oaths to be a species of divine worship, we must be the more careful that they do not, instead of worship, contain insult, or contempt, and vilification. It is no slight insult to swear by him and do it falsely: hence in the Law this is termed profanation (Lev.19:12). For if God is robbed of

his truth, what is it that remains? Without truth he could not be God. But assuredly he is robbed of his truth, when he is made the approver and attester of what is false. Hence, when Joshua is endeavouring to make Achan confess the truth, he says, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel," ([Joshua 7:19](#)); intimating, that grievous dishonour is done to God when men swear by him falsely. And no wonder; for, as far as in them lies, his sacred name is in a manner branded with falsehood. That this mode of expression was common among the Jews whenever any one was called upon to take an oath, is evident from a similar obtestation used by the Pharisees, as given in John ([John 9:24](#)); Scripture reminds us of the caution which we ought to use by employing such expressions as the following:—"As the Lord liveth;" "God do so and more also;" "I call God for a record upon my soul." [[204](#)] Such expressions intimate, that we cannot call God to witness our statement, without imprecating his vengeance for perjury if it is false.

25. The name of God is vulgarised and vilified when used in oaths, which, though true, are superfluous. This, too, is to take his name in vain. Wherefore, it is not sufficient to abstain from perjury, unless we, at the same time, remember that an oath is not appointed or allowed for passion or pleasure, but for necessity; and that, therefore, a licentious use is made of it by him who uses it on any other than necessary occasions. Moreover, no case of necessity can be pretended, unless where some purpose of religion or charity is to be served. In this matter, great sin is committed in the present day—sin the more intolerable in this, that its frequency has made it cease to be regarded as a fault, though it certainly is not accounted trivial before the judgment-seat of God. The name of God is everywhere profaned by introducing it indiscriminately in frivolous discourse; and the evil is disregarded, because it has been long and audaciously persisted in with impunity. The commandment of the Lord, however, stands; the penalty also stands, and will one day receive effect. Special vengeance will be executed on those who have taken the name of God in vain. Another form of violation is exhibited, when, with manifest impiety, we, in our oaths, substitute the holy servants

of God for God himself, [205] thus conferring upon them the glory of his Godhead. It is not without cause the Lord has, by a special commandment, required us to swear by his name, and, by a special prohibition, forbidden us to swear by other gods. [206] The Apostle gives a clear attestation to the same effect, when he says, that "men verily swear by the greater;" but that "when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself;" (Heb.6:16, 13).

26. The Anabaptists, not content with this moderate use of oaths, condemn all, without exception, on the ground of our Saviour's general prohibition, "I say unto you, Swear not at all:" "Let your speech be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil," (Mt.5:34; [James 5:12](#)). In this way, they inconsiderately make a stumbling-stone of Christ, setting him in opposition to the Father, as if he had descended into the world to annul his decrees. In the Law, the Almighty not only permits an oath as a thing that is lawful (this were amply sufficient), but, in a case of necessity, actually commands it (Exod.22:11). Christ again declares, that he and his Father are one; that he only delivers what was commanded of his Father; that his doctrine is not his own, but his that sent him ([John 10:18,30](#); 7:16). What then? Will they make God contradict himself, by approving and commanding at one time, what he afterwards prohibits and condemns? But as there is some difficulty in what our Saviour says on the subject of swearing, it may be proper to consider it a little. Here, however, we shall never arrive at the true meaning, unless we attend to the design of Christ, and the subject of which he is treating. His purpose was, neither to relax nor to curtail the Law, but to restore the true and genuine meaning, which had been greatly corrupted by the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees. If we attend to this we shall not suppose that Christ condemned all oaths but those only which transgressed the rule of the Law. It is evident, from the oaths themselves, that the people were accustomed to think it enough if they avoided perjury, whereas the Law prohibits not perjury merely, but also vain and superfluous oaths. Therefore our Lord, who is the best interpreter of the Law,

reminds them that there is a sin not only in perjury, but in swearing. How in swearing? Namely, by swearing vainly. Those oaths, however, which are authorised by the Law, he leaves safe and free. Those who condemn oaths think their argument invincible when they fasten on the expression, not at all. The expression applies not to the word swear, but to the subjoined forms of oaths. For part of the error consisted in their supposing, that when they swore by the heaven and the earth, they did not touch the name of God. The Lord, therefore, after cutting off the principal source of prevarication, deprives them of all subterfuges, warning them against supposing that they escape guilt by suppressing the name of God, and appealing to heaven and earth. For it ought here to be observed in passing, that although the name of God is not expressed, yet men swear by him in using indirect forms, as when they swear by the light of life, by the bread they eat, by their baptism, or any other pledges of the divine liberality towards them. Some erroneously suppose that our Saviour, in that passage, rebukes superstition, by forbidding men to swear by heaven and earth, and Jerusalem. He rather refutes the sophistical subtilty of those who thought it nothing vainly to utter indirect oaths, imagining that they thus spared the holy name of God, whereas that name is inscribed on each of his mercies. The case is different, when any mortal living or dead, or an angel, is substituted in the place of God, as in the vile form devised by flattery in heathen nations, "By the life or genius of the king"; for, in this case, the false apotheosis obscures and impairs the glory of the one God. But when nothing else is intended than to confirm what is said by an appeal to the holy name of God, although it is done indirectly, yet his majesty is insulted by all frivolous oaths. Christ strips this abuse of every vain pretext when he says "Swear not at all". To the same effect is the passage in which James uses the words of our Saviour above quoted ([James 5:12](#)). For this rash swearing has always prevailed in the world, notwithstanding that it is a profanation of the name of God. If you refer the words, "not at all", to the act itself, as if every oath, without exception, were unlawful, what will be the use of the explanation which immediately follows—Neither by heaven, neither by the earth, &c.? These words make it clear, that the object in view

was to meet the cavils by which the Jews thought they could extenuate their fault.

27. Every person of sound judgment must now see that in that passage our Lord merely condemned those oaths which were forbidden by the Law. For he who in his life exhibited a model of the perfection which he taught, did not object to oaths whenever the occasion required them; and the disciples, who doubtless in all things obeyed their Master, followed the same rule. Who will dare to say that Paul would have sworn (Rom.1:9; 2:Cor.1:23) if an oath had been altogether forbidden? But when the occasion calls for it, he adjures without any scruple, and sometimes even imprecates. The question, however, is not yet disposed of. For some think that the only oaths exempted from the prohibition are public oaths, such as those which are administered to us by the magistrate, or independent states employ in ratifying treaties, or the people take when they swear allegiance to their sovereign, or the soldier in the case of the military oath, and others of a similar description. To this class they refer (and justly) those protestations in the writings of Paul, which assert the dignity of the Gospel; since the Apostles, in discharging their office, were not private individuals, but the public servants of God. I certainly deny not that such oaths are the safest because they are most strongly supported by passages of Scripture. The magistrate is enjoined, in a doubtful matter, to put the witness upon oath; and he in his turn to answer upon oath; and an Apostle says, that in this way there is an end of all strife (Heb.6:16). In this commandment, both parties are fully approved. Nay, we may observe, that among the ancient heathens a public and solemn oath was held in great reverence, while those common oaths which were indiscriminately used were in little or no estimation, as if they thought that, in regard to them, the Deity did not interpose. Private oaths used soberly, sacredly, and reverently, on necessary occasions, it were perilous to condemn, supported as they are by reason and example. For if private individuals are permitted, in a grave and serious matter, to appeal to God as a judge, much more may they appeal to him as a witness. Your brother charges you with perfidy.

You, as bound by the duties of charity, labour to clear yourself from the charge. He will on no account be satisfied. If, through his obstinate malice, your good name is brought into jeopardy, you can appeal, without offence, to the judgment of God, that he may in time manifest your innocence. If the terms are weighed, it will be found that it is a less matter to call upon him to be witness; and I therefore see not how it can be called unlawful to do so. And there is no want of examples. If it is pretended that the oath which Abraham and Isaac made with Abimelech was of a public nature, that by which Jacob and Laban bound themselves in mutual league was private. Boaz, though a private man, confirmed his promise of marriage to Ruth in the same way. Obadiah, too, a just man, and one that feared God, though a private individual, in seeking to persuade Elijah, asseverates with an oath. [207] I hold, therefore, that there is no better rule than so to regulate our oaths that they shall neither be rash, frivolous, promiscuous, nor passionate, but be made to serve a just necessity; in other words, to vindicate the glory of God, or promote the edification of a brother. This is the end of the Commandment.

Fourth Commandment.

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY. SIX DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR AND DO ALL THY WORK: BUT THE SEVENTH DAY IS THE SABBATH OF THE LORD THY GOD. IN IT THOU SHALT NOT DO ANY WORK, &C.

28. The purport of the commandment is, that being dead to our own affections and works, we meditate on the kingdom of God, and in order to such meditation, have recourse to the means which he has appointed. But as this commandment stands in peculiar circumstances apart from the others, the mode of exposition must be somewhat different. Early Christian writers are wont to call it typical, as containing the external observance of a day which was abolished with the other types on the advent of Christ. This is indeed true; but

it leaves the half of the matter untouched. Wherefore, we must look deeper for our exposition, and attend to three cases in which it appears to me that the observance of this commandment consists. First, under the rest of the seventh days the divine Lawgiver meant to furnish the people of Israel with a type of the spiritual rest by which believers were to cease from their own works, and allow God to work in them. Secondly he meant that there should be a stated day on which they should assemble to hear the Law, and perform religious rites, or which, at least, they should specially employ in meditating on his works, and be thereby trained to piety. Thirdly, he meant that servants, and those who lived under the authority of others, should be indulged with a day of rest, and thus have some intermission from labour.

29. We are taught in many passages [\[208\]](#) that this adumbration of spiritual rest held a primary place in the Sabbath. Indeed, there is no commandment the observance of which the Almighty more strictly enforces. When he would intimate by the Prophets that religion was entirely subverted, he complains that his sabbaths were polluted, violated, not kept, not hallowed; as if, after it was neglected, there remained nothing in which he could be honoured. The observance of it he eulogises in the highest terms, and hence, among other divine privileges, the faithful set an extraordinary value on the revelation of the Sabbath. In Nehemiah, the Levites, in the public assembly, thus speak: "Thou madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant." You see the singular honour which it holds among all the precepts of the Law. All this tends to celebrate the dignity of the mystery, which is most admirably expressed by Moses and Ezekiel. Thus in Exodus: "Verily my sabbaths shall ye keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that does sanctify you. Ye shall keep my sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever does any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord:

whosoever does any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever," ([Exodus 31:13-17](#)). Ezekiel is still more full, but the sum of what he says amounts to this: that the sabbath is a sign by which Israel might know that God is their sanctifier. If our sanctification consists in the mortification of our own will, the analogy between the external sign and the thing signified is most appropriate. We must rest entirely, in order that God may work in us; we must resign our own will, yield up our heart, and abandon all the lusts of the flesh. In short, we must desist from all the acts of our own mind, that God working in us, we may rest in him, as the Apostle also teaches ([Heb.3:13](#); [4:3](#), 9).

30. This complete cessation was represented to the Jews by the observance of one day in seven, which, that it might be more religiously attended to, the Lord recommended by his own example. For it is no small incitement to the zeal of man to know that he is engaged in imitating his Creator. Should any one expect some secret meaning in the number seven, this being in Scripture the number for perfection, it may have been selected, not without cause, to denote perpetuity. In accordance with this, Moses concludes his description of the succession of day and night on the same day on which he relates that the Lord rested from his works. Another probable reason for the number may be, that the Lord intended that the Sabbath never should be completed before the arrival of the last day. We here begin our blessed rest in him, and daily make new progress in it; but because we must still wage an incessant warfare with the flesh, it shall not be consummated until the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah: "From one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord," ([Isaiah 66:23](#)); in other words, when God shall be "all in all," ([I:Cor.15:28](#)). It may seem, therefore, that by the seventh day the Lord delineated to his people the future perfection of his sabbath on the last day, that by continual meditation on the sabbath, they might throughout their whole lives aspire to this perfection.

31. Should these remarks on the number seem to any somewhat far-fetched, I have no objection to their taking it more simply: that the Lord appointed a certain day on which his people might be trained, under the tutelage of the Law, to meditate constantly on the spiritual rest, and fixed upon the seventh, either because he foresaw it would be sufficient, or in order that his own example might operate as a stronger stimulus; or, at least to remind men that the Sabbath was appointed for no other purpose than to render them conformable to their Creator. It is of little consequence which of these be adopted, provided we lose not sight of the principal thing delineated—viz. the mystery of perpetual resting from our works. To the contemplation of this, the Jews were every now and then called by the prophets, lest they should think a carnal cessation from labour sufficient. Beside the passages already quoted, there is the following: "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord," ([Isaiah 58:13, 14](#)). Still there can be no doubt, that, on the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished. He is the truth, at whose presence all the emblems vanish; the body, at the sight of which the shadows disappear. He, I say, is the true completion of the sabbath: "We are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life," (Rom.6:4). Hence, as the Apostle elsewhere says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ," (Col.2:16, 17); meaning by body the whole essence of the truth, as is well explained in that passage. This is not contented with one day, but requires the whole course of our lives, until being completely dead to ourselves, we are filled with the life of God. Christians, therefore, should have nothing to do with a superstitious observance of days.

32. The two other cases ought not to be classed with ancient shadows, but are adapted to every age. The sabbath being abrogated, there is still room among us, first, to assemble on stated days for the hearing of the Word, the breaking of the mystical bread, and public prayer; and, secondly, to give our servants and labourers relaxation from labour. It cannot be doubted that the Lord provided for both in the commandment of the Sabbath. The former is abundantly evinced by the mere practice of the Jews. The latter Moses has expressed in Deuteronomy in the following terms: "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant;—that thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest as well as thou," (Deut.5:14). Likewise in Exodus, "That thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed," (Exod.23:12). Who can deny that both are equally applicable to us as to the Jews? Religious meetings are enjoined us by the word of God; their necessity, experience itself sufficiently demonstrates. But unless these meetings are stated, and have fixed days allotted to them, how can they be held? We must, as the apostle expresses it, do all things decently and in orders (1:Cor.14:40). So impossible, however, would it be to preserve decency and order without this politic arrangements that the dissolution of it would instantly lead to the disturbance and ruin of the Church. But if the reason for which the Lord appointed a sabbath to the Jews is equally applicable to us, no man can assert that it is a matter with which we have nothing to do. Our most provident and indulgent Parent has been pleased to provide for our wants not less than for the wants of the Jews. Why, it may be asked, do we not hold daily meetings, and thus avoid the distinction of days? Would that we were privileged to do so! Spiritual wisdom undoubtedly deserves to have some portion of every day devoted to it. But if, owing to the weakness of many, daily meetings cannot be held, and charity will not allow us to exact more of them, why should we not adopt the rule which the will of God has obviously imposed upon us?

33. I am obliged to dwell a little longer on this because some restless spirits are now making an outcry about the observance of the Lord's day. They complain that Christian people are trained in Judaism, because some observance of days is retained. My reply is, That those days are observed by us without Judaism, because in this matter we differ widely from the Jews. We do not celebrate it with most minute formality, as a ceremony by which we imagine that a spiritual mystery is typified, but we adopt it as a necessary remedy for preserving order in the Church. Paul informs us that Christians are not to be judged in respect of its observance, because it is a shadow of something to come (Col.2:16); and, accordingly, he expresses a fear lest his labour among the Galatians should prove in vain, because they still observed days (Gal.4:10, 11). And he tells the Romans that it is superstitious to make one day differ from another (Rom.14:5). But who, except those restless men, does not see what the observance is to which the Apostle refers? Those persons had no regard to that politic and ecclesiastical arrangement, [209] but by retaining the days as types of spiritual things, they in so far obscured the glory of Christ, and the light of the Gospel. They did not desist from manual labour on the ground of its interfering with sacred study and meditation, but as a kind of religious observance; because they dreamed that by their cessation from labour, they were cultivating the mysteries which had of old been committed to them. It was, I say, against this preposterous observance of days that the Apostle inveighs, and not against that legitimate selection which is subservient to the peace of Christian society. For in the churches established by him, this was the use for which the Sabbath was retained. He tells the Corinthians to set the first day apart for collecting contributions for the relief of their brethren at Jerusalem (1:Cor.16:2). If superstition is dreaded, there was more danger in keeping the Jewish sabbath than the Lord's day as Christians now do. It being expedient to overthrow superstition, the Jewish holy day was abolished; and as a thing necessary to retain decency, orders and peace, in the Church, another day was appointed for that purpose.

34. It was not, however, without a reason that the early Christians substituted what we call the Lord's day for the Sabbath. The resurrection of our Lord being the end and accomplishment of that true rest which the ancient sabbath typified, this day, by which types were abolished serves to warn Christians against adhering to a shadowy ceremony. I do not cling so to the number seven as to bring the Church under bondage to it, nor do I condemn churches for holding their meetings on other solemn days, provided they guard against superstition. This they will do if they employ those days merely for the observance of discipline and regular order. The whole may be thus summed up: As the truth was delivered typically to the Jews, so it is imparted to us without figure; first, that during our whole lives we may aim at a constant rest from our own works, in order that the Lord may work in us by his Spirit; secondly that every individual, as he has opportunity, may diligently exercise himself in private, in pious meditation on the works of God, and, at the same time, that all may observe the legitimate order appointed by the Church, for the hearing of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and public prayer: And, thirdly, that we may avoid oppressing those who are subject to us. In this way, we get quit of the trifling of the false prophets, who in later times instilled Jewish ideas into the people, alleging that nothing was abrogated but what was ceremonial in the commandment, [210] (this they term in their language the taxation of the seventh day), while the moral part remains—viz. the observance of one day in seven. [211] But this is nothing else than to insult the Jews, by changing the day, and yet mentally attributing to it the same sanctity; thus retaining the same typical distinction of days as had place among the Jews. And of a truth, we see what profit they have made by such a doctrine. Those who cling to their constitutions go thrice as far as the Jews in the gross and carnal superstition of sabbatism; so that the rebukes which we read in Isaiah (Isa.1:13; 58:13) apply as much to those of the present day, [212] as to those to whom the Prophet addressed them. We must be careful, however, to observe the general doctrine—viz. in order that religion may neither be lost nor languish among us, we must diligently attend on our religious assemblies, and duly avail

ourselves of those external aids which tend to promote the worship of God.

Fifth Commandment.

HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER: THAT THY DAYS MAY BE LONG UPON THE LAND WHICH THE LORD THY GOD GIVETH THEE.

35. The end of this commandment is, that since the Lord takes pleasure in the preservation of his own ordinance, the degrees of dignity appointed by him must be held inviolable. The sum of the commandment, therefore, will be, that we are to look up to those whom the Lord has set over us, yielding them honour, gratitude, and obedience. Hence it follows, that every thing in the way of contempt, ingratitude, or disobedience, is forbidden. For the term honour has this extent of meaning in Scripture. Thus when the Apostle says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour," (1:Tim.5:17), he refers not only to the reverence which is due to them, but to the recompense to which their services are entitled. But as this command to submit is very repugnant to the perversity of the human mind (which, puffed up with ambitious longings will scarcely allow itself to be subject), that superiority which is most attractive and least invidious is set forth as an example calculated to soften and bend our minds to habits of submission. From that subjection which is most easily endured, the Lord gradually accustoms us to every kind of legitimate subjection, the same principle regulating all. For to those whom he raises to eminences he communicates his authority, in so far as necessary to maintain their station. The titles of Father, God, and Lord, all meet in him alone and hence whenever any one of them is mentioned, our mind should be impressed with the same feeling of reverence. Those, therefore, to whom he imparts such titles, he distinguishes by some small spark of his refulgence, so as to entitle them to honour, each in his own place. In this way, we must consider that our earthly father possesses something of a divine

nature in him, because there is some reason for his bearing a divine title, and that he who is our prince and ruler is admitted to some communion of honour with God.

36. Wherefore, we ought to have no doubt that the Lord here lays down this universal rule—viz. that knowing how every individual is set over us by his appointment, we should pay him reverence, gratitude, obedience, and every duty in our power. And it makes no difference whether those on whom the honour is conferred are deserving or not. Be they what they may, the Almighty, by conferring their station upon them, shows that he would have them honoured. The commandment specifies the reverence due to those to whom we owe our being. This Nature herself should in some measure teach us. For they are monsters, and not men, who petulantly and contumeliously violate the paternal authority. Hence, the Lord orders all who rebel against their parents to be put to death, they being, as it were, unworthy of the light in paying no deference to those to whom they are indebted for beholding it. And it is evident, from the various appendices to the Law, that we were correct in stating, that the honour here referred to consists of three parts, reverence, obedience, and gratitude. The first of these the Lord enforces, when he commands that whose curseth his father or his mother shall be put to death. In this way he avenges insult and contempt. The second he enforces, when he denounces the punishment of death on disobedient and rebellious children. To the third belongs our Saviour's declaration, that God requires us to do good to our parents (Mt.15). And whenever Paul mentions this commandment, he interprets it as enjoining obedience. [213]

37. A promise is added by way of recommendation, the better to remind us how pleasing to God is the submission which is here required. Paul applies that stimulus to rouse us from our lethargy, when he calls this the first commandment with promise; the promise contained in the First Table not being specially appropriated to any one commandment, but extended to the whole law. Moreover, the sense in which the promise is to be taken is as follows:—The Lord

spoke to the Israelites specially of the land which he had promised them for an inheritance. If, then, the possession of the land was an earnest of the divine favour, we cannot wonder if the Lord was pleased to testify his favour, by bestowing long life, as in this way they were able long to enjoy his kindness. The meaning therefore is: Honour thy father and thy mother, that thou may be able, during the course of a long life, to enjoy the possession of the land which is to be given thee in testimony of my favour. But, as the whole earth is blessed to believers, we justly class the present life among the number of divine blessings. Whence this promise has, in like manner, reference to us also, inasmuch as the duration of the present life is a proof of the divine benevolence toward us. It is not promised to us, nor was it promised to the Jews, as if in itself it constituted happiness, but because it is an ordinary symbol of the divine favour to the pious. Wherefore, if any one who is obedient to parents happens to be cut off before mature age (a thing which not infrequently happens), the Lord nevertheless adheres to his promise as steadily as when he bestows a hundred acres of land where he had promised only one. The whole lies in this: We must consider that long life is promised only in so far as it is a blessing from God, and that it is a blessing only in so far as it is a manifestation of divine favour. This, however, he testifies and truly manifests to his servants more richly and substantially by death.

38. Moreover, while the Lord promises the blessing of present life to children who show proper respect to their parents, he, at the same time, intimates that an inevitable curse is impending over the rebellious and disobedient; and, that it may not fail of execution, he, in his Law, pronounces sentence of death upon them and orders it to be inflicted. If they escape the judgment, he, in some way or other, will execute vengeance. For we see how great a number of this description of individuals fall either in battle or in brawls; others of them are overtaken by unwonted disasters, and almost all are a proof that the threatening is not used in vain. But if any do escape till extreme old age, yet, because deprived of the blessing of God in this life, they only languish on in wickedness, and are reserved for severer

punishment in the world to come, they are far from participating in the blessing promised to obedient children. It ought to be observed by the way, that we are ordered to obey parents only in the Lord. This is clear from the principle already laid down: for the place which they occupy is one to which the Lord has exalted them, by communicating to them a portion of his own honour. Therefore the submission yielded to them should be a step in our ascent to the Supreme Parent, and hence, if they instigate us to transgress the law, they deserve not to be regarded as parents, but as strangers attempting to seduce us from obedience to our true Father. The same holds in the case of rulers, masters, and superiors of every description. For it were unbecoming and absurd that the honour of God should be impaired by their exaltation—an exaltation which, being derived from him, ought to lead us up to him. [214]

Sixth Commandment.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

39. The purport of this commandment is that since the Lord has bound the whole human race by a kind of unity, the safety of all ought to be considered as entrusted to each. In general, therefore, all violence and injustice, and every kind of harm from which our neighbour's body suffers, is prohibited. Accordingly, we are required faithfully to do what in us lies to defend the life of our neighbour; to promote whatever tends to his tranquillity, to be vigilant in warding off harm, and, when danger comes, to assist in removing it. Remembering that the Divine Lawgiver thus speaks, consider, moreover, that he requires you to apply the same rule in regulating your mind. It were ridiculous, that he, who sees the thoughts of the heart, and has special regard to them, should train the body only to rectitude. This commandment, therefore, prohibits the murder of the heart, and requires a sincere desire to preserve our brother's life. The hand, indeed, commits the murder, but the mind, under the influence of wrath and hatred, conceives it. How can you be angry

with your brother, without passionately longing to do him harm? If you must not be angry with him, neither must you hate him, hatred being nothing but inveterate anger. However you may disguise the fact, or endeavour to escape from it by vain pretexts. Where either wrath or hatred is, there is an inclination to do mischief. If you still persist in tergiversation, the mouth of the Spirit has declared, that "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer," ([1 John 3:15](#)); and the mouth of our Saviour has declared, that "whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire," (Mt.5:22).

40. Scripture notes a twofold equity on which this commandment is founded. Man is both the image of God and our flesh. Wherefore, if we would not violate the image of God, we must hold the person of man sacred—if we would not divest ourselves of humanity we must cherish our own flesh. The practical inference to be drawn from the redemption and gift of Christ will be elsewhere considered. [\[215\]](#) The Lord has been pleased to direct our attention to these two natural considerations as inducements to watch over our neighbour's preservation—viz. to revere the divine image impressed upon him, and embrace our own flesh. To be clear of the crime of murder, it is not enough to refrain from shedding man's blood. If in act you perpetrate, if in endeavour you plot, if in wish and design you conceive what is adverse to another's safety, you have the guilt of murder. On the other hand, if you do not according to your means and opportunity study to defend his safety, by that inhumanity you violate the law. But if the safety of the body is so carefully provided for, we may hence infer how much care and exertion is due to the safety of the soul, which is of immeasurably higher value in the sight of God.

Seventh Commandment.

THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

41. The purport of this commandment is, that as God loves chastity and purity, we ought to guard against all uncleanness. The substance of the commandment therefore is, that we must not defile ourselves with any impurity or libidinous excess. To this corresponds the affirmative, that we must regulate every part of our conduct chastely and continently. The thing expressly forbidden is adultery, to which lust naturally tends, that its filthiness (being of a grosser and more palpable form, in as much as it casts a stain even on the body) may dispose us to abominate every form of lust. As the law under which man was created was not to lead a life of solitude, but enjoy a help meet for him, and ever since he fell under the curse the necessity for this mode of life is increased; the Lord made the requisite provision for us in this respect by the institution of marriage, which, entered into under his authority, he has also sanctified with his blessing. Hence, it is evident, that any mode of cohabitation different from marriage is cursed in his sight, and that the conjugal relation was ordained as a necessary means of preventing us from giving way to unbridled lust. Let us beware, therefore, of yielding to indulgence, seeing we are assured that the curse of God lies on every man and woman cohabiting without marriage.

42. Now, since natural feeling and the passions unnamed by the fall make the marriage tie doubly necessary, save in the case of those whom God has by special grace exempted, let every individual consider how the case stands with himself. Virginitie, I admit, is a virtue not to be despised; but since it is denied to some, and to others granted only for a season, those who are assailed by incontinence, and unable successfully to war against it, should retake themselves to the remedy of marriage, and thus cultivate chastity in the way of their calling. Those incapable of self-restraint, if they apply not to the remedy allowed and provided for intemperance, war with God and resist his ordinance. And let no man tell me (as many in the present day do) that he can do all things, God helping! The help of God is present with those only who walk in his ways (Ps.91:14), that is, in

his callings from which all withdraw themselves who, omitting the remedies provided by God, vainly and presumptuously strive to struggle with and surmount their natural feelings. That continence is a special gift from God, and of the class of those which are not bestowed indiscriminately on the whole body of the Church, but only on a few of its members, our Lord affirms (Mt.19:12). He first describes a certain class of individuals who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heavenly sake; that is, in order that they may be able to devote themselves with more liberty and less restraint to the things of heaven. But lest any one should suppose that such a sacrifice was in every man's power, he had shown a little before that all are not capable, but those only to whom it is specially given from above. Hence he concludes, "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." Paul asserts the same thing still more plainly when he says, "Every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that," (1:Cor.7:7).

43. Since we are reminded by an express declaration, that it is not in every man's power to live chaste in celibacy although it may be his most strenuous study and aim to do so—that it is a special grace which the Lord bestows only on certain individuals, in order that they may be less encumbered in his service, do we not oppose God, and nature as constituted by him, if we do not accommodate our mode of life to the measure of our ability? The Lord prohibits fornication, therefore he requires purity and chastity. The only method which each has of preserving it is to measure himself by his capacity. Let no man rashly despise matrimony as a thing useless or superfluous to him; let no man long for celibacy unless he is able to dispense with the married state. Nor even here let him consult the tranquillity or convenience of the flesh, save only that, freed from this tie, he may be the readier and more prepared for all the offices of piety. And since there are many on whom this blessing is conferred only for a time, let every one, in abstaining from marriage, do it so long as he is fit to endure celibacy. If he has not the power of subduing his passion, let him understand that the Lord has made it obligatory on him to marry. The Apostle shows this when he enjoins:

"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband." "If they cannot contain, let them marry." He first intimates that the greater part of men are liable to incontinence; and then of those so liable, he orders all, without exception, to have recourse to the only remedy by which unchastity may be obviated. The incontinent, therefore, neglecting to cure their infirmity by this means, sin by the very circumstance of disobeying the Apostle's command. And let not a man flatter himself, that because he abstains from the outward act he cannot be accused of unchastity. His mind may in the meantime be inwardly inflamed with lust. For Paul's definition of chastity is purity of mind, combined with purity of body. "The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit," (1:Cor.7:34). Therefore when he gives a reason for the former precept, he not only says that it is better to marry than to live in fornication, but that it is better to marry than to burn.

44. Moreover, when spouses are made aware that their union is blessed by the Lord, they are thereby reminded that they must not give way to intemperate and unrestrained indulgence. For though honourable wedlock veils the turpitude of incontinence, it does not follow that it ought forthwith to become a stimulus to it. Wherefore, let spouses consider that all things are not lawful for them. Let there be sobriety in the behaviour of the husband toward the wife, and of the wife in her turn toward the husband; each so acting as not to do any thing unbecoming the dignity and temperance of married life. Marriage contracted in the Lord ought to exhibit measure and modesty—not run to the extreme of wantonness. This excess Ambrose censured gravely, but not undeservedly, when he described the man who shows no modesty or comeliness in conjugal intercourse, as committing adultery with his wife. [216] Lastly let us consider who the Lawgiver is that thus condemns fornication: even He who, as he is entitled to possess us entirely, requires integrity of body, soul, and spirit. Therefore, while he forbids fornication, he at the same time forbids us to lay snares for our neighbour's chastity by lascivious attire, obscene gestures, and impure conversation. There

was reason in the remark made by Archelaus to a youth clothed effeminately and over-luxuriously, that it mattered not in what part his wantonness appeared. We must have respect to God, who abhors all contaminations whatever be the part of soul or body in which it appears. And that there may be no doubt about it, let us remember, that what the Lord here commends is chastity. If he requires chastity, he condemns every thing which is opposed to it. Therefore, if you aspire to obedience, let not your mind burn within with evil concupiscence, your eyes wanton after corrupting objects, nor your body be decked for allurement; let neither your tongue by filthy speeches, nor your appetite by intemperance, entice the mind to corresponding thoughts. All vices of this description are a kind of stains which despoil chastity of its purity.

Eighth Commandment.

THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.

45. The purport is, that injustice being an abomination to God, we must render to every man his due. In substance, then, the commandment forbids us to long after other men's goods, and, accordingly, requires every man to exert himself honestly in preserving his own. For we must consider, that what each individual possesses has not fallen to him by chance, but by the distribution of the sovereign Lord of all, that no one can pervert his means to bad purposes without committing a fraud on a divine dispensation. There are very many kinds of theft. One consists in violence, as when a man's goods are forcibly plundered and carried off; another in malicious imposture, as when they are fraudulently intercepted; a third in the more hidden craft which takes possession of them with a semblance of justice; and a fourth in sycophancy, which wiles them away under the pretence of donation. But not to dwell too long in enumerating the different classes, we know that all the arts by which we obtain possession of the goods and money of our neighbours, for sincere affection substituting an eagerness to deceive or injure them

in any way, are to be regarded as thefts. Though they may be obtained by an action at law, a different decision is given by God. He sees the long train of deception by which the man of craft begins to lay nets for his more simple neighbour, until he entangles him in its meshes—sees the harsh and cruel laws by which the more powerful oppresses and crushes the feeble—sees the enticements by which the more wily baits the hook for the less wary, though all these escape the judgment of man, and no cognisance is taken of them. Nor is the violation of this commandment confined to money, or merchandise, or lands, but extends to every kind of right; for we defraud our neighbours to their hurt if we decline any of the duties which we are bound to perform towards them. If an agent or an indolent steward wastes the substance of his employer, or does not give due heed to the management of his property; if he unjustly squanders or luxuriously wastes the means entrusted to him; if a servant holds his master in derision, divulges his secrets, or in any way is treacherous to his life or his goods; if, on the other hand, a master cruelly torments his household, he is guilty of theft before God; since every one who, in the exercise of his calling, performs not what he owes to others, keeps back, or makes away with what does not belong to him.

46. This commandment, therefore, we shall duly obey, if, contented with our own lot, we study to acquire nothing but honest and lawful gain; if we long not to grow rich by injustice, nor to plunder our neighbour of his goods, that our own may thereby be increased; if we hasten not to heap up wealth cruelly wrung from the blood of others; if we do not, by means lawful and unlawful, with excessive eagerness scrape together whatever may glut our avarice or meet our prodigality. On the other hand, let it be our constant aim faithfully to lend our counsel and aid to all so as to assist them in retaining their property; or if we have to do with the perfidious or crafty, let us rather be prepared to yield somewhat of our right than to contend with them. And not only so, but let us contribute to the relief of those whom we see under the pressure of difficulties, assisting their want out of our abundance. Lastly, let each of us consider how far he is bound in duty to others, and in good faith pay what we owe. In the

same way, let the people pay all due honour to their rulers, submit patiently to their authority, obey their laws and orders, and decline nothing which they can bear without sacrificing the favour of God. Let rulers, again, take due charge of their people, preserve the public peace, protect the good, curb the bad, and conduct themselves throughout as those who must render an account of their office to God, the Judge of all. Let the ministers of churches faithfully give heed to the ministry of the word, and not corrupt the doctrine of salvation, but deliver it purely and sincerely to the people of God. Let them teach not merely by doctrine, but by example; in short, let them act the part of good shepherds towards their flocks. Let the people, in their turn, receive them as the messengers and apostles of God, render them the honour which their Supreme Master has bestowed on them, and supply them with such things as are necessary for their livelihood. Let parents be careful to bring up, guide, and teach their children as a trust committed to them by God. Let them not exasperate or alienate them by cruelty, but cherish and embrace them with the levity and indulgence which becomes their character. The regard due to parents from their children has already been adverted to. Let the young respect those advanced in years as the Lord has been pleased to make that age honourable. Let the aged also, by their prudence and their experience (in which they are far superior), guide the feebleness of youth, not assailing them with harsh and clamorous invectives but tempering strictness with ease and affability. Let servants show themselves diligent and respectful in obeying their masters, and this not with eye-service, but from the heart, as the servants of God. Let masters also not be stern and disobliging to their servants, nor harass them with excessive asperity, nor treat them with insult, but rather let them acknowledge them as brethren and fellow-servants of our heavenly Master, whom, therefore, they are bound to treat with mutual love and kindness. Let every one, I say, thus consider what in his own place and order he owes to his neighbours, and pay what he owes. Moreover, we must always have a reference to the Lawgiver, and so remember that the law requiring us to promote and defend the interest and convenience of our fellow-men, applies equally to our minds and our hands.

Ninth Commandment.

THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR.

47. The purport of the commandment is, since God, who is truth, abhors falsehood, we must cultivate unfeigned truth towards each other. The sum, therefore, will be, that we must not by calumnies and false accusations injure our neighbour's name, or by falsehood impair his fortunes; in fine, that we must not injure any one from petulance, or a love of evil-speaking. To this prohibition corresponds the command, that we must faithfully assist every one, as far as in us lies, in asserting the truth, for the maintenance of his good name and his estate. The Lord seems to have intended to explain the commandment in these words: "Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness." "Keep thee far from a false matter," (Exod.23:1, 7). In another passage, he not only prohibits that species of falsehood which consists in acting the part of tale-bearers among the people, but says, "Neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour," (Lev.19:16). Both transgressions are distinctly prohibited. Indeed, there can be no doubt, that as in the previous commandment he prohibited cruelty unchastity, and avarice, so here he prohibits falsehood, which consists of the two parts to which we have adverted. By malignant or vicious detraction, we sin against our neighbour's good name: by lying, sometimes even by casting a slur upon him, we injure him in his estate. It makes no difference whether you suppose that formal and judicial testimony is here intended, or the ordinary testimony which is given in private conversation. For we must always recur to the consideration, that for each kind of transgression one species is set forth by way of example, that to it the others may be referred, and that the species chiefly selected, is that in which the turpitude of the transgression is most apparent. It seems proper, however, to extend it more generally to calumny and sinister insinuations by which our neighbours are unjustly aggrieved. For

falsehood in a court of justice is always accompanied with perjury. But against perjury, in so far as it profanes and violates the name of God, there is a sufficient provision in the third commandment. Hence the legitimate observance of this precept consists in employing the tongue in the maintenance of truth, so as to promote both the good name and the prosperity of our neighbour. The equity of this is perfectly clear. For if a good name is more precious than riches, a man, in being robbed of his good name, is no less injured than if he were robbed of his goods; while, in the latter case, false testimony is sometimes not less injurious than rapine committed by the hand.

48. And yet it is strange, with what supine security men everywhere sin in this respect. Indeed, very few are found who do not notoriously labour under this disease: such is the envenomed delight we take both in prying into and exposing our neighbour's faults. Let us not imagine it is a sufficient excuse to say that on many occasions our statements are not false. He who forbids us to defame our neighbour's reputation by falsehood, desires us to keep it untarnished in so far as truth will permit. Though the commandment is only directed against falsehood, it intimates that the preservation of our neighbour's good name is recommended. It ought to be a sufficient inducement to us to guard our neighbour's good name, that God takes an interest in it. Wherefore, evil-speaking in general is undoubtedly condemned. Moreover, by evil-speaking, we understand not the rebuke which is administered with a view of correcting; not accusation or judicial decision, by which evil is sought to be remedied; not public censure, which tends to strike terror into other offenders; not the disclosure made to those whose safety depends on being forewarned, lest unawares they should be brought into danger, but the odious crimination which springs from a malicious and petulant love of slander. Nay, the commandment extends so far as to include that scurrilous affected urbanity, instinct with invective, by which the failings of others, under an appearance of sportiveness, are bitterly assailed, as some are wont to do, who court the praise of wit, though it should call forth a blush, or inflict a bitter pang. By

petulance of this description, our brethren are sometimes grievously wounded. [217] But if we turn our eye to the Lawgiver, whose just authority extends over the ears and the mind, as well as the tongue, we cannot fail to perceive that eagerness to listen to slander, and an unbecoming proneness to censorious judgments are here forbidden. It were absurd to suppose that God hates the disease of evil-speaking in the tongue, and yet disapproves not of its malignity in the mind. Wherefore, if the true fear and love of God dwell in us, we must endeavour, as far as is lawful and expedient, and as far as charity admits, neither to listen nor give utterance to bitter and acrimonious charges, nor rashly entertain sinister suspicions. As just interpreters of the words and the actions of other men, let us candidly maintain the honour due to them by our judgment, our ear, and our tongue.

Tenth Commandment.

THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOUR'S HOUSE, THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE NOR HIS MAN-SERVANT, NOR HIS MAID-SERVANT, NOR HIS OX NOR HIS ASS, NOR ANYTHING THAT IS THY NEIGHBOUR'S.

49. The purport is: Since the Lord would have the whole soul pervaded with love, any feeling of an adverse nature must be banished from our minds. The sum, therefore, will be, that no thought be permitted to insinuate itself into our minds, and inhale them with a noxious concupiscence tending to our neighbour's loss. To this corresponds the contrary precept, that every thing which we conceive, deliberate, will, or design, be conjoined with the good and advantage of our neighbour. But here it seems we are met with a great and perplexing difficulty. For if it was correctly said above, that under the words adultery and theft, lust and an intention to injure and deceive are prohibited, it may seem superfluous afterwards to employ a separate commandment to prohibit a covetous desire of our neighbour's goods. The difficulty will easily be removed by distinguishing between design and covetousness. [218] Design, such

as we have spoken of in the previous commandments, is a deliberate consent of the will, after passion has taken possession of the mind. Covetousness may exist without such deliberation and assent, when the mind is only stimulated and tickled by vain and perverse objects. As, therefore, the Lord previously ordered that charity should regulate our wishes, studies, and actions, so he now orders us to regulate the thoughts of the mind in the same way, that none of them may be depraved and distorted, so as to give the mind a contrary bent. Having forbidden us to turn and incline our mind to wrath, hatred, adultery, theft, and falsehood, he now forbids us to give our thoughts the same direction.

50. Nor is such rectitude demanded without reason. For who can deny the propriety of occupying all the powers of the mind with charity? If it ceases to have charity for its aim, who can question that it is diseased? How comes it that so many desires of a nature hurtful to your brother enter your mind, but just because, disregarding him, you think only of yourself? Were your mind wholly imbued with charity, no portion of it would remain for the entrance of such thoughts. In so far, therefore, as the mind is devoid of charity, it must be under the influence of concupiscence. Some one will object that those fancies which casually rise up in the mind, and forthwith vanish away, cannot properly be condemned as concupiscences, which have their seat in the heart. I answer, That the question here relates to a description of fancies which while they present themselves to our thoughts, at the same time impress and stimulate the mind with cupidity, since the mind never thinks of making some choice, but the heart is excited and tends towards it. God therefore commands a strong and ardent affection, an affection not to be impeded by any portion, however minute, of concupiscence. He requires a mind so admirably arranged as not to be prompted in the slightest degree contrary to the law of love. Lest you should imagine that this view is not supported by any grave authority, I may mention that it was first suggested to me by Augustine. [219] But although it was the intention of God to prohibit every kind of perverse desire, he, by way of example, sets before us those objects which are generally

regarded as most attractive: thus leaving no room for cupidity of any kind, by the interdiction of those things in which it especially delights and loves to revel.

Such, then, is the Second Table of the Law, in which we are sufficiently instructed in the duties which we owe to man for the sake of God, on a consideration of whose nature the whole system of love is founded. It were vain, therefore, to inculcate the various duties taught in this table, without placing your instructions on the fear and reverence to God as their proper foundation. I need not tell the considerate reader, that those who make two precepts out of the prohibition of covetousness, perversely split one thing into two. There is nothing in the repetition of the words, "Thou shalt not covet." The "house" being first put down, its different parts are afterwards enumerated, beginning with the "wife;" and hence it is clear, that the whole ought to be read consecutively, as is properly done by the Jews. The sum of the whole commandment, therefore, is, that whatever each individual possesses remain entire and secure, not only from injury, or the wish to injure, but also from the slightest feeling of covetousness which can spring up in the mind.

51. It will not now be difficult to ascertain the general end contemplated by the whole Law—viz. the fulfilment of righteousness, that man may form his life on the model of the divine purity. For therein God has so delineated his own character, that any one exhibiting in action what is commanded, would in some measure exhibit a living image of God. Wherefore Moses, when he wished to fix a summary of the whole in the memory of the Israelites, thus addressed them, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord and his statutes which I command thee this day for thy good?" (Deut.10:12, 13). And he ceased not to reiterate the same thing, whenever he had occasion to mention the end of the Law. To this the doctrine of the Law pays so much regard, that it connects man, by holiness of life,

with his God; and, as Moses elsewhere expresses it (Deut.6:5; 11:13), and makes him cleave to him. Moreover, this holiness of life is comprehended under the two heads above mentioned. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." First, our mind must be completely filled with love to God, and then this love must forthwith flow out toward our neighbour. This the Apostle shows when he says, "The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned," (1:Tim.1:5). You see that conscience and faith unfeigned are placed at the head, in other words, true piety; and that from this charity is derived. It is a mistake then to suppose, that merely the rudiments and first principles of righteousness are delivered in the Law, to form, as it were, a kind of introduction to good works, and not to guide to the perfect performance of them. For complete perfection, nothing more can be required than is expressed in these passages of Moses and Paul. How far, pray, would he wish to go, who is not satisfied with the instruction which directs man to the fear of God, to spiritual worship, practical obedience; in fine, purity of conscience, faith unfeigned, and charity? This confirms that interpretation of the Law which searches out, and finds in its precepts, all the duties of piety and charity. Those who merely search for dry and meagre elements, as if it taught the will of God only by halves, by no means understand its end, the Apostle being witness.

52. As, in giving a summary of the Law, Christ and the Apostles sometimes omit the First Table, very many fall into the mistake of supposing that their words apply to both tables. In Matthew, Christ calls "judgment, mercy, and faith," the "weightier matters of the Law." I think it clear, that by faith is here meant veracity towards men. But in order to extend the words to the whole Law, some take it for piety towards God. This is surely to no purpose. For Christ is speaking of those works by which a man ought to approve himself as just. If we attend to this, we will cease to wonder why, elsewhere, when asked by the young man, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" he simply answers, that he must keep the

commandments, "Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," (Mt.19:16, 18). For the obedience of the First Table consisted almost entirely either in the internal affection of the heart, or in ceremonies. The affection of the heart was not visible, and hypocrites were diligent in the observance of ceremonies; but the works of charity were of such a nature as to be a solid attestation of righteousness. The same thing occurs so frequently in the Prophets, that it must be familiar to every one who has any tolerable acquaintance with them. [220] For, almost on every occasion, when they exhort men to repentance, omitting the First Table, they insist on faith, judgment, mercy, and equity. Nor do they, in this way, omit the fear of God. They only require a serious proof of it from its signs. It is well known, indeed, that when they treat of the Law, they generally insist on the Second Table, because therein the cultivation of righteousness and integrity is best manifested. There is no occasion to quote passages. Every one can easily for himself perceive the truth of my observation.

53. Is it then true, you will ask, that it is a more complete summary of righteousness to live innocently with men, than piously towards God? By no means; but because no man, as a matter of course, observes charity in all respects, unless he seriously fear God, such observance is a proof of piety also. To this we may add, that the Lord, well knowing that none of our good deeds can reach him (as the Psalmist declares, [Psalm 16:2](#)), does not demand from us duties towards himself, but exercises us in good works towards our neighbour. Hence the Apostle, not without cause, makes the whole perfection of the saints to consist in charity (Eph.3:19; Col.3:14). And in another passage, he not improperly calls it the "fulfilling of the law," adding, that "he that loveth another has fulfilled the law," (Rom.13:8). And again, "All the law is fulfilled in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," (Gal.5:14). For this is the very thing which Christ himself teaches when he says, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is

the law and the prophets," (Mt.7:12). It is certain that, in the law and the prophets, faith, and whatever pertains to the due worship of God, holds the first place, and that to this charity is made subordinate; but our Lord means, that in the Law the observance of justice and equity towards men is prescribed as the means which we are to employ in testifying a pious fear of God, if we truly possess it.

54. Let us therefore hold, that our life will be framed in best accordance with the will of God, and the requirements of his Law, when it is, in every respect, most advantageous to our brethren. But in the whole Law, there is not one syllable which lays down a rule as to what man is to do or avoid for the advantage of his own carnal nature. And, indeed, since men are naturally prone to excessive self-love, which they always retain, how great soever their departure from the truth may be, there was no need of a law to inflame a love already existing in excess. Hence it is perfectly plain, [221] that the observance of the Commandments consists not in the love of ourselves, but in the love of God and our neighbour; and that he leads the best and holiest life who as little as may be studies and lives for himself; and that none lives worse and more unrighteously than he who studies and lives only for himself, and seeks and thinks only of his own. Nay, the better to express how strongly we should be inclined to love our neighbour, the Lord has made self-love as it were the standard, there being no feeling in our nature of greater strength and vehemence. The force of the expression ought to be carefully weighed. For he does not (as some sophists have stupidly dreamed) assign the first place to self-love, and the second to charity. He rather transfers to others the love which we naturally feel for ourselves. Hence the Apostle declares, that charity "seeketh not her own," (1:Cor.13:5). Nor is the argument worth a straw, That the thing regulated must always be inferior to the rule. The Lord did not make self-love the rule, as if love towards others was subordinate to it; but whereas, through natural pravity, the feeling of love usually rests on ourselves, he shows that it ought to diffuse itself in another direction—that we should be prepared to do good to our neighbour with no less alacrity, ardour, and solicitude, than to ourselves.

55. Our Saviour having shown, in the parable of the Samaritan ([Luke 10:36](#)), that the term neighbour comprehends the most remote stranger, there is no reason for limiting the precept of love to our own connections. I deny not that the closer the relation the more frequent our offices of kindness should be. For the condition of humanity requires that there be more duties in common between those who are more nearly connected by the ties of relationship, or friendship, or neighbourhood. And this is done without any offence to God, by whose providence we are in a manner impelled to do it. But I say that the whole human race, without exception, are to be embraced with one feeling of charity: that here there is no distinction of Greek or Barbarian, worthy or unworthy, friend or foe, since all are to be viewed not in themselves, but in God. If we turn aside from this view, there is no wonder that we entangle ourselves in error. Wherefore, if we would hold the true course in love, our first step must be to turn our eyes not to man, the sight of whom might oftener produce hatred than love, but to God, who requires that the love which we bear to him be diffused among all mankind, so that our fundamental principle must ever be, Let a man be what he may, he is still to be loved, because God is loved.

56. Wherefore, nothing could be more pestilential than the ignorance or wickedness of the Schoolmen in converting the precepts respecting revenge and the love of enemies (precepts which had formerly been delivered to all the Jews, and were then delivered universally to all Christians) into counsels which it was free to obey or disobey, confining the necessary observance of them to the monks, who were made more righteous than ordinary Christians, by the simple circumstance of voluntarily binding themselves to obey counsels. The reason they assign for not receiving them as laws is, that they seem too heavy and burdensome, especially to Christians, who are under the law of grace. Have they, indeed, the hardihood to remodel the eternal law of God concerning the love of our neighbour? Is there a page of the Law in which any such distinction exists; or rather do we not meet in every page with commands which, in the strictest terms, require us to love our enemies? What is meant

by commanding us to feed our enemy if he is hungry, to bring back his ox or his ass if we meet it going astray, or help it up if we see it lying under its burden? (Prov.25:21; Exod.23:4). Shall we show kindness to cattle for man's sake, and have no feeling of good will to himself? What? Is not the word of the Lord eternally true: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay?" (Deut.32:35). This is elsewhere more explicitly stated: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people," (Lev.19:18). Let them either erase these passages from the Law, or let them acknowledge the Lord as a Lawgiver, not falsely feign him to be merely a counsellor.

57. And what, pray, is meant by the following passage, which they have dared to insult with this absurd gloss? "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven," (Mt.5:44, 45). Who does not here concur in the reasoning of Chrysostom (*lib. de Compunctione Cordis, et ad Rom.7*), that the nature of the motive makes it plain that these are not exhortations, but precepts? For what is left to us if we are excluded from the number of the children of God? According to the Schoolmen, monks alone will be the children of our Father in heaven—monks alone will dare to invoke God as their Father. And in the meantime, how will it fare with the Church? By the same rule, she will be confined to heathens and publicans. For our Saviour says, "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" It will truly be well with us if we are left only the name of Christians, while we are deprived of the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven! Nor is the argument of Augustine less forcible: "When the Lord forbids adultery, he forbids it in regard to the wife of a foe not less than the wife of a friend; when he forbids theft, he does not allow stealing of any description, whether from a friend or an enemy," (*August. Lib. de Doctr. Christ*). Now, these two commandments, "Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not commit adultery," Paul brings under the rule of love; nay, he says that they are briefly comprehended in this saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," (*Rom.13:9*). Therefore,

Paul must either be a false interpreter of the Law, or we must necessarily conclude, that under this precept we are bound to love our enemies just as our friends. Those, then, show themselves to be in truth the children of Satan who thus licentiously shake off a yoke common to the children of God. It may be doubted whether, in promulgating this dogma, they have displayed greater stupidity or impudence. There is no ancient writer who does not hold it as certain that these are pure precepts. It was not even doubted in the age of Gregory, as is plain from his decided assertion; for he holds it to be incontrovertible that they are precepts. And how stupidly they argue! The burden, say they, were too difficult for Christians to hear! As if any thing could be imagined more difficult than to love the Lord with all the heart, and soul, and strength. Compared with this Law, there is none which may not seem easy, whether it be to love our enemy, or to banish every feeling of revenge from our minds. To our weakness, indeed, every thing, even to the minutest tittle of the Law, is arduous and difficult. In the Lord we have strength. It is his to give what he orders, and to order what he wills. That Christians are under the law of grace, means not that they are to wander unrestrained without law, but that they are engrafted into Christ, by whose grace they are freed from the curse of the Law, and by whose Spirit they have the Law written in their hearts. This grace Paul has termed, but not in the proper sense of the term, a law, alluding to the Law of God, with which he was contrasting it. The Schoolmen, laying hold of the term Law, make it the ground-work of their vain speculations. [222]

58. The same must be said of their application of the term, venial sin, both to the hidden impiety which violates the First Table, and the direct transgression of the last commandment of the Second Table. [223] They define venial sin to be, desire unaccompanied with deliberate assent, and not remaining long in the heart. But I maintain that it cannot even enter the heart unless through a want of those things which are required in the Law. We are forbidden to have strange gods. When the mind, under the influence of distrust, looks elsewhere or is seized with some sudden desire to transfer its blessedness to some other quarter, whence are these movements,

however evanescent, but just because there is some empty corner in the soul to receive such temptations? And, not to lengthen out the discussion, there is a precept to love God with the whole heart, and mind, and soul; and, therefore, if all the powers of the soul are not directed to the love of God, there is a departure from the obedience of the Law; because those internal enemies which rise up against the dominion of God, and countermand his edicts prove that his throne is not well established in our consciences. It has been shown that the last commandment goes to this extent. Has some undue longing sprung up in our mind? Then we are chargeable with covetousness, and stand convicted as transgressors of the Law. For the Law forbids us not only to meditate and plan our neighbour's loss, but to be stimulated and inflamed with covetousness. But every transgression of the Law lays us under the curse, and therefore even the slightest desires cannot be exempted from the fatal sentence. "In weighing our sins," says Augustine, "let us not use a deceitful balance, weighing at our own discretion what we will, and how we will, calling this heavy and that light: but let us use the divine balance of the Holy Scriptures, as taken from the treasury of the Lord, and by it weigh every offence, nay, not weigh, but rather recognise what has been already weighed by the Lord," (August. De Bapt. cont. Donatist. Lib.2 chap.6). And what saith the Scripture? Certainly when Paul says, that "the wages of sin is death," (Rom.6:23), he shows that he knew nothing of this vile distinction. As we are but too prone to hypocrisy, there was very little occasion for this sop to soothe our torpid consciences.

59. I wish they would consider what our Saviour meant when he said, "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven," (Mt.5:19). Are they not of this number when they presume to extenuate the transgression of the Law, as if it were unworthy of death? The proper course had been to consider not simply what is commanded, but who it is that commands, because every least transgression of his Law derogates from his authority. Do they count it a small matter to insult the majesty of God in any one respect?

Again, since God has explained his will in the Law, every thing contrary to the Law is displeasing to him. Will they feign that the wrath of God is so disarmed that the punishment of death will not forthwith follow upon it? He has declared plainly (if they could be induced to listen to his voice, instead of darkening his clear truth by their insipid subtleties), "The soul that sinneth it shall die," (Ezek.18:20). Again, in the passage lately quoted, "The wages of sin is death." What these men acknowledge to be sin, because they are unable to deny it, they contend is not mortal. Having already indulged this madness too long, let them learn to repent; or, if they persist in their infatuation, taking no further notice of them, let the children of God remember that all sin is mortal, because it is rebellion against the will of God, and necessarily provokes his anger; and because it is a violation of the Law, against every violation of which, without exception, the judgment of God has been pronounced. The faults of the saints are indeed venial, not, however, in their own nature, but because, through the mercy of God, they obtain pardon.

Footnotes:

[190] This chapter is connected with Book 1., chap. 1 and 2, and with Book 2, chap. 1--6. See also Book 2, chap. 2 sec. 22.

[191] See Calvin, *De Vera Ecclesiæ Reformandæ Ratione*.

[192] See Augustin. *De Civitate Dei*, Lib. 4 c. 12, and Lib. 12 c. 20, and Lib. 14 c. 12. See also Lib. *De Bono Conjugali*, and Lib. *Contra Adversarios Legis et Prophetarum*, Lib. 1 c. 14.

[193] "Ne sit nobis *Lesbiæ regulæ*," omitted in the French.

[194] The French is "Tout ainsi comme si quelcun vouloit faire une belle monstre d'un corps sans teste;" just as if one were to try to make a beautiful monster of a body without a head.

[195] Origen in Exod. cap. 20 Homil. 8; Augustin. contra duas Epist. Pelagii, Lib. 3 cap. 4; Quæst. in Vet. Test. Lib. 2 cap. 74; Epist cxix ad Januarium, cap. 11. The opinion of Josephus, and the last-mentioned opinion of Augustine, are briefly refuted by Calvin in Exod. cap. 20, in expounding the Fifth Commandment.

[196] The French is, "Nous avons aussi un autre ancien Pere qui accorde a nostre opinion, celui que a escrit les Commentaires imparfaits sur Saint Matthiue." We have also another ancient Father who agrees with us in our opinion, he who wrote the unfinished Commentaries on St Matthew.

[197] "Præsenti causæ."--The French is, "du temps que la loi devoit estre publiée;" to the time when the Law was to be published.

[198] Exod. 3:6; [Amos 1:2](#); Hab. 2:20; [Psalm 80:2](#); 99:1; [Isaiah 37:16](#).

[199] "E faucibus mortis."--French, "du gouffre d'enfer;" from the gulf of hell.

[200] Calvin. in Catechismo; De Necessitate Reformandæ Ecclesiæ Ratio.

[201] The French adds, "Car c'est un hommage spirituel qui se rend a lui comme souverain Roy, et ayant toute superiorité sur nos ames." For this is a spiritual homage which is rendered to him as sovereign King, having full supremacy over our souls.

[202] Or "Strong," this name being derived from a word denoting strength.

[203] 2:Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:30; Jer. 62:5; Hos. 2:9; Jer. 3:1, 2; Hos. 2:2.

[204] 1:Sam. 14:44; 2 Kings 5:31; 2:Cor. 1:23.

[205] The French adds, "jurans par S. Jaques ou S. Antoine;"--swearing by St James or St Anthony.

[206] Exod. 23:13; Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Heb. 6:13.

[207] Gen. 21:24; 26:31; 31:53; Ruth 3:13; 1 Kings 18:10.

[208] Num. 13:22; Ezek. 20:12; 22:8; 23:38; Jer. 27:21, 22, 27; Isiah 55:2; Neh. 9:14.

[209] N"Finem istum politicum et ecclesiasticum ordinem."P--French, "la police et ordre en l'Eglise;" policy and order in the Church.

[210] As to this liberty, See Socrates, Hist. Trip. Lib. 9 c. 38.

[211] French, "ne discernans entre le Dimanche et le Sabbath autrement, sinon que le septième jour estoit abrogé qu'on gardoit pour lors, mais qu'il on falloit, neantmoins garder un;"--making no other distinction between the Sunday and the Sabbath, save that the seventh day, which was kept till then, was abrogated, but that it was nevertheless necessary to keep some one day.

[212] French, "leur conviendroyent mieux;"--would be more applicable to them.

[213] Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9; Prov. 20:20; Deut. 21:18; Mt. 25:4; Eph. 6:1; Colloss. 3:20.

[214] The French adds, "et la doit plustost augmenter, qu'amoindrir confirmer que viloer;"--and ought to augment rather than diminish, to confirm rather than violate it.

[215] Book 3, Chap. 7 sec 4--7; Chap. 20 sec. 38, 45; Book 4 Chap. 1 sec 13--19; Chap. 17 sec. 38, 40.

[216] See Ambros. Lib. de Philosoph., quoted by Augustine in his book, *Contra Julian*, Lib. 2.

[217] The French is "D'avantage ce precepte s'estend jusques l?, que nous n'affections point une plaisanterie d'honnesteté et une grace de brocarder et mordre en riant les uns et les autres, comme sont aucuns, qui se baignent quand ils peuvent faire vergogne ? quelqu'un: car par telle intemperance souventes fois quelque marque demeure sur l'homme qu'on a ainsi noté."--Moreover, the commandment extends thus far: we must not affect a good-humoured pleasantry and grace in nicknaming, and with a smile say cutting things of others, as some persons do, who are delighted when they can make another blush: by such intemperance a stigma is often fastened on the individual thus attacked.

[218] See *supra*, chap. 2, end of sec. 24; and Book 3 chap 3 sec. 11, 12, 13; and Book 4 chap. 15 sec. 11, 12.

[219] See August. Ep. 200, ad Asellicum, et Quæstio, Lib. 88, sub fin. Quæst. 66; but especially *Conscio*. 8, in Ps. 118. The subject is also touched on in Ps. 142 and *De Temp. Serm.* 45, and *Retract.* Lib. 1 cap. 5, and *De Continentia*, cap. 8.

[220] Is. 1:17; 57:6; Jer. 7:5, 6; Ezek. 18:7, 8; Hosea 6:6; Zech. 7:9, 10.

[221] See Book 3 chap. 7 sec. 4. Also August. *de Doctrina Christiana*, Lib. 1 chap. 23 et seq.

[222] The French is "Ces folastres sans propos prennent un grand mystère en ce mot de Loy;" these foolish fellows absurdly find a great mystery in this term Law.

[223] See Book 3 chap. 4 sec. 28, where it is also shown that this is not the dogma of the Stoics--that all sins are equal.

Christ Known to the Jews Under the Law, Yet on Manifested Under the Gospel

There are three principal heads in this chapter. I. Preparatory to a consideration of the knowledge of Christ, and the benefits procured by him; the 1st and 2nd sections are occupied with the dispensation of this knowledge, which, after the manifestation of Christ in the flesh, was more clearly revealed than under the Law. II. A refutation of the profane dream of Servetus, that the promises are entirely abrogated, sec. 3. Likewise, a refutation of those who do not properly compare the Law with the Gospel, sec. 4. III. A necessary and brief exposition of the ministry of John Baptist, which occupies an intermediate place between the law and the Gospel.

Sections.

1. The holy fathers under the Law saw the day of Christ, though obscurely. He is more fully revealed to us under the Gospel. A reason for this, confirmed by the testimony of Christ and his Apostles.
2. The term Gospel, used in its most extensive sense, comprehends the attestations of mercy which God gave to the fathers. Properly, however, it means the promulgation of grace exhibited in the God-man Jesus Christ.
3. The notion of Servetus, that the promises are entirely abolished, refuted. Why we must still trust to the promises of God. Another reason. Solution of a difficulty.
4. Refutation of those who do not properly compare the Law and the Gospel. Answer to certain questions here occurring. The Law

and the Gospel briefly compared.

5. Third part of the chapter. Of the ministry of John the Baptist.

1. SINCE God was pleased (and not in vain) to testify in ancient times by means of expiations and sacrifices that he was a Father, and to set apart for himself a chosen people, he was doubtless known even then in the same character in which he is now fully revealed to us. Accordingly Malachi, having enjoined the Jews to attend to the Law of Moses (because after his death there was to be an interruption of the prophetic office), immediately after declares that the Sun of righteousness should arise (Mal. 4:2); thus intimating, that though the Law had the effect of keeping the pious in expectation of the coming Messiah, there was ground to hope for much greater light on his advent. For this reason, Peter, speaking of the ancient prophets, says, "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," (1 Pet. 1:12). Not that the prophetic doctrine was useless to the ancient people, or unavailing to the prophets themselves, but that they did not obtain possession of the treasure which God has transmitted to us by their hands. The grace of which they testified is now set familiarly before our eyes. They had only a slight foretaste; to us is given a fuller fruition. Our Saviour, accordingly, while he declares that Moses testified of him, extols the superior measure of grace bestowed upon us (John 5:46). Addressing his disciples, he says, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them," (Mt. 13:16; Luke 10:23). It is no small commendation of the gospel revelation, that God has preferred us to holy men of old, so much distinguished for piety. There is nothing in this view inconsistent with another passage, in which our Saviour says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad," (John 8:56). For though the

event being remote, his view of it was obscure, he had full assurance that it would one day be accomplished; and hence the joy which the holy patriarch experienced even to his death. Nor does John Baptist, when he says, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him," (John 1:18), exclude the pious who had previously died from a participation in the knowledge and light which are manifested in the person of Christ; but comparing their condition with ours, he intimates that the mysteries which they only beheld dimly under shadows are made clear to us; as is well explained by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in these words, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," (Heb. 1:1, 2). Hence, although this only begotten Son, who is now to us the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person, was formerly made known to the Jews, as we have elsewhere shown from Paul, that he was the Deliverer under the old dispensation; it is nevertheless true, as Paul himself elsewhere declares, that "God, who commanded the 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," (2 Cor. 4:6); because, when he appeared in this his image, he in a manner made himself visible, his previous appearance having been shadowy and obscure. More shameful and more detestable, therefore, is the ingratitude of those who walk blindfold in this meridian light. Accordingly, Paul says that "the god of this world has blinded their minds, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them," (2 Cor. 4:4).

2. By the Gospel, I understand the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ. I confess, indeed, that inasmuch as the term Gospel is applied by Paul to the doctrine of faith (2 Tim. 4:10), it includes all the promises by which God reconciles men to himself, and which occur throughout the Law. For Paul there opposes faith to those terrors which vex and torment the conscience when salvation is sought by means of works. Hence it follows that *Gospel*, taken in a large sense, comprehends the evidences of mercy and paternal

favour which God bestowed on the Patriarchs. Still, by way of excellence, it is applied to the promulgation of the grace manifested in Christ. This is not only founded on general use, but has the sanction of our Saviour and his Apostles. Hence it is described as one of his peculiar characteristics, that he preached the Gospel of the kingdom (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14). Mark, in his preface to the Gospel, calls it "*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*" There is no use of collecting passages to prove what is already perfectly known. Christ at his advent "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel," (2 Tim. 1:10). Paul does not mean by these words that the Fathers were plunged in the darkness of death before the Son of God became incarnate; but he claims for the Gospel the honourable distinction of being a new and extraordinary kind of embassy, by which God fulfilled what he had promised, these promises being realised in the person of the Son. For though believers have at all times experienced the truth of Paul's declaration, that "all the promises of God in him are yea and amen," inasmuch as these promises were sealed upon their hearts; yet because he has in his flesh completed all the parts of our salvation, this vivid manifestation of realities was justly entitled to this new and special distinction. Accordingly, Christ says, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." For though he seems to allude to the ladder which the Patriarch Jacob saw in vision, he commends the excellence of his advent in this, that it opened the gate of heaven, and gave us familiar access to it.

3. Here we must guard against the diabolical imagination of Servetus, who, from a wish, or at least the pretence of a wish, to extol the greatness of Christ, abolishes the promises entirely, as if they had come to an end at the same time with the Law. He pretends, that by the faith of the Gospel all the promises have been fulfilled; as if there was no distinction between us and Christ. I lately observed that Christ had not left any part of our salvation incomplete; but from this it is erroneously inferred, that we are now put in possession of all the blessings purchased by him; thereby implying, that Paul was incorrect in saying, "We are saved by hope," (Rom. 3:24). I admit,

indeed, that by believing in Christ we pass from death unto life; but we must at the same time remember the words of John, that though we know we are "the sons of God," "it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is," (1 John 3:2). Therefore, although Christ offers us in the Gospel a present fulness of spiritual blessings, fruition remains in the keeping of hope,²²⁶ until we are divested of corruptible flesh, and transformed into the glory of him who has gone before us. Meanwhile, in leaning on the promises, we obey the command of the Holy Spirit, whose authority ought to have weight enough with us to silence all the barkings of that impure dog. We have it on the testimony of Paul, that "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," (1 Tim. 4:8); for which reason, he glories in being "an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:1). And he elsewhere reminds us, that we have the same promises which were given to the saints in ancient time (2 Cor. 7:1). In fine, he makes the sum of our felicity consist in being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Indeed we have no enjoyment of Christ, unless by embracing him as clothed with his own promises. Hence it is that he indeed dwells in our hearts and yet we are as pilgrims in regard to him, because "we walk by faith, not by sight," (2 Cor. 5:6, 7). There is no inconsistency in the two things--viz. that in Christ we possess every thing pertaining to the perfection of the heavenly life, and yet that faith is only a vision "of things not seen," (Heb. 11:1). Only there is this difference to be observed in the nature or quality of the promises, that the Gospel points with the finger to what the Law shadowed under types.

4. Hence, also, we see the error of those who, in comparing the Law with the Gospel, represent it merely as a comparison between the merit of works, and the gratuitous imputation of righteousness. The contrast thus made is by no means to be rejected, because, by the term Law, Paul frequently understands that rule of holy living in which God exacts what is his due, giving no hope of life unless we obey in every respect; and, on the other hand, denouncing a curse for

the slightest failure. This Paul does when showing that we are freely accepted of God, and accounted righteous by being pardoned, because that obedience of the Law to which the reward is promised is nowhere to be found. Hence he appropriately represents the righteousness of the Law and the Gospel as opposed to each other. But the Gospel has not succeeded the whole Law in such a sense as to introduce a different method of salvation. It rather confirms the Law, and proves that every thing which it promised is fulfilled. What was shadow, it has made substance. When Christ says that the Law and the Prophets were until John, he does not consign the fathers to the curse, which, as the slaves of the Law, they could not escape. He intimates that they were only imbued with the rudiments, and remained far beneath the height of the Gospel doctrine. Accordingly Paul, after calling the Gospel "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," shortly after adds, that it was "witnessed by the Law and the Prophets," (Rom. 1:16; 3:21). And in the end of the same Epistle, though he describes "the preaching of Jesus Christ" as "the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began," he modifies the expression by adding, that it is "now made manifest" "by the scriptures of the prophets," (Rom. 16:25, 26). Hence we infer, that when the whole Law is spoken of, the Gospel differs from it only in respect of clearness of manifestation. Still, on account of the inestimable riches of grace set before us in Christ, there is good reason for saying, that by his advent the kingdom of heaven was erected on the earth (Mt. 12:28).

5. John stands between the Law and the Gospel, holding an intermediate office allied to both. For though he gave a summary of the Gospel when he pronounced Christ to be "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," yet, inasmuch as he did not unfold the incomparable power and glory which shone forth in his resurrection, Christ says that he was not equal to the Apostles. For this is the meaning of the words: "Among them that are born of woman, there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he," (Mt. 11:28). He is not there commending the persons of

men, but after preferring John to all the Prophets, he gives the first place to the preaching of the Gospel, which is elsewhere designated by the kingdom of heaven. When John himself, in answer to the Jews, says that he is only "a voice," (John 1:23), as if he were inferior to the Prophets it is not in pretended humility but he means to teach that the proper embassy was not entrusted to him, that he only performed the office of a messenger, as had been foretold by Malachi, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophets before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," (Mal. 4:5). And, indeed, during the whole course of his ministry, he did nothing more than prepare disciples for Christ. He even proves from Isaiah that this was the office to which he was divinely appointed. In this sense, he is said by Christ to have been "a burning and a shining light," (John 5:35), because full day had not yet appeared. And yet this does not prevent us from classing him among the preachers of the gospel, since he used the same baptism which was afterwards committed to the Apostles. Still, however, he only began that which had freer course under the Apostles, after Christ was taken up into the heavenly glory.

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