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# **Commentary on John - Volume 1**

**John Calvin**



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## Commentary on John - Volume 1

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**Author(s):** Calvin, John (1509-1564)  
(Alternative)  
(Translator)

**Publisher:** Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library

**Description:** *Commentary on John* is an impressive commentary, containing some of Calvin's most important views. Calvin is regarded as one of the Reformation's best interpreters of scripture. He frequently offers his own translations of a passage, explaining the subtleties and nuances of his translation. He has a penchant for incorporating keen pastoral insight into the text as well. He always interacts with other theologians, commentators, and portions of the Bible when interpreting a particular passage. Further, this volume also contains informative notes from the editor. Calvin's *Commentary on John* should not be ignored by anyone interested in the book of John or Calvin himself.

Tim Perrine

CCEL Staff Writer

This volume contains commentary on the first 11 chapters of John.

**Subjects:** The Bible  
Works about the Bible

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**COMMENTARY  
ON THE  
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO  
JOHN**

**BY JOHN CALVIN**

A NEW TRANSLATION, FROM THE ORIGINAL LATIN,  
**BY THE REV. WILLIAM PRINGLE**

**VOLUME FIRST**

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## THE TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Commentaries on the Gospel according to John are numerous, and some of them are written with great learning and ability. Rarely has a separate and extended interpretation been given to any of the other three Gospels, which are, indeed, so closely interwoven with each other, that it is scarcely possible to expound one of them in a satisfactory manner, without bringing the whole into one view, comparing parallel passages, accounting for apparent contradictions, and supplying the omissions of each narrative, to such an extent as to produce what shall be in substance, though not always in form, a Harmony of the Three Evangelists.

Few of these difficulties meet the expositor of John's Gospel, in which the slender thread of narrative — until it reaches the period of the last sufferings of our Savior — does little more than connect long discourses, which He delivered to the multitude and to his disciples. Whatever opinion may be formed as to the theory of the elder Tittmann, that John, wrote his work for the express purpose of proving the supreme Divinity of Christ, we cannot avoid being struck with the fact, that the miracles which he selects are distinguished by peculiar grandeur, and that the discourses which he relates contain the most abundant and delightful exhibitions of the glory of the Son of God, and of the nature of his mediatorial office, which our great Master was pleased to make during his personal ministry.

Lampe, Hutcheson, and Tittmann, are better known, and more highly esteemed, in this country than any other Commentator on John that could be named. The three quarto volumes of Lampe are a monument of judicious toil, and present such stores of philological, historical, and theological learning as ought never to be mentioned but with respect and gratitude. Though not free from the faults of the Cocceian School, of which his miscellaneous treatises afford some unhappy proofs, his Commentary displays generally such caution and judgment, that it deserves to be not only consulted, but perused throughout, and carefully studied. Hutcheson wanted both the acuteness and the industry requisite for the successful elucidation of the Holy Scriptures, but is justly admired for the copiousness, variety, and excellence of his practical observations.

Tittmann's *Meletemata Sacra in Evangelium Joannis*, now happily rendered accessible to the English reader,<sup>1</sup> I must be regarded as one of the most valuable contributions of modern times to biblical interpretation. Accurate scholarship, elegant and flowing language, deep reverence for the inspired volume, and a warmth of affectionate piety closely resembling that of *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, have gained for that work a reputation which is likely to increase. To the reader who is chiefly desirous to ascertain the meaning of Scripture, and who willingly dispenses with what serves no other purpose than illustration: Tittmann's

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1 Clarke's Biblical Cabinet, volumes 44 and 45.

exposition of the first four Chapters of John's Gospel will be highly acceptable; though it must be acknowledged that the remaining portion of the work — not executed till towards the close of the life of the venerable author — is somewhat less attractive, and, if it has been prepared with equal care, yet, in consequence of extreme unwillingness to bring forward explanations which had been already given, it will sometimes disappoint one who only dips into an occasional passage, and has not made himself familiar with the profound views unfolded in the earlier pages.

These and other eminent writers have been deeply indebted to Calvin's Commentary on John's Gospel, but have left its claims to the attention of all classes of readers as strong and urgent as ever. Where they differ from him, they often go astray, and where they agree with him, they generally fall below the instructive power of his own pen; for few can equal his clear and vigorous statements. When he places in a just light — as he frequently does — those texts which had been wrested for the confutation of heretics, none but eager and unscrupulous controversialists will complain. Every honorable mind will admire the unbending integrity of our Author, which, even in the defense of truth, disdains to employ an unlawful weapon, and devoutly bows to the dictates of the Holy Spirit.

The present Work brings under review some of the most intricate questions in theology; and in handling them he is not more careful to learn all that has been revealed than to avoid unauthorized speculation. They who know the difficulty of the path will the more highly appreciate so skillful a guide, who advances with a firm step, points out the bypaths which have misled the unwary, conducts us to scenes which we had not previously explored, and aids us in listening to a Divine voice which says, *This is the way, walk, ye in it.*

In the Harmony of the Three Evangelists, the reader is so constantly referred to this Commentary, which appeared two years sooner, that the benefit of the former cannot be fully reaped, unless the latter be at hand. The Author's references are sometimes vague, but the Translator has endeavored to discover and point out the page in which the desired information may be obtained.

**W.P.**

***Auchterarder, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1847.***

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TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE

THE LORD ROBT. DVDLEY,  
EARLE OF LEYCESTER,

baron of denbigh, maister of the horse to the queene's maiestie,  
knight of the noble order of the garter, and one of the  
queene's maiestie, most honorable priuie counsel,  
chancelour of the most famous vniuersitie  
of oxford, christopher fetherstone,  
wisheth encrease of spirituall  
giftes, long life, happy  
dayes, and encrease  
of honour

It is an old saying, (Right Honorable,) and no lesse true then olde, that saleable wines neede no iuie bush which prouerb importeth thus much, that thinges which are of themselues good & commendable haue not any, at leaste no greate need of commendation. If, therefore, I should with fine filed phrases, with gay geason woords, with straunge examples, and notable hystories, compound some long Prologue and tedious Preface in commendation of this most excellent work and Commentarie, of that famous member and faithfull Doctour of God's Church, Maister Iohn Caluine, I might cause your Honour to suspect the fondnesse thereof: I my selfe should seeme to doubte of the goodness thereof: and, finally, minister occasion to many to condemne me of folly. Omitting, therefore, that which is needlesse, I descend vnto that which is needefull: to wit, to excuse my selfe of arrogancie wherof some may accuse me, in that I dare presume to dedicate vnto your Honour this my translation, vnto whom I am altogether vnknowne. The loade stone, as men say, writers do testifie and experience doth teach, hath in it selfe such power, force, and vertue, that it draweth iron vnto it though it be farre distant; right so, vertue doth drawe men vnto it, and the reporte thereof causeth men to loue those whome they haue not seene, and to reuerence those of who they haue onely heard, which thing, sithence it is so, there is no cause why I shoulde either be accused of arrogancie or condemned of impudencie for approaching so boldly vnto your Honour, and for suffering this my translation to appeare in your name. For your friendes confesse, and your foes cannot Justly denie, that God hath placed in your noble breast great aboundance of most heroicall vertues, I omit to speake of that rare report of your vnfeigned religion which resoundeth euery where, and redoundeth to your prayse. I should be tedious if I should set downe particularly the most vndoubted testimonies of your faithfulness toward your dread Soueraigne: I should seeme to flatter if I would extoll that godly magnanimiti, wherwith the Lord hath endued you to maintaine his truth, to defend

the realm, to subdue those proud aspiring Papists. That great and earnest care which your Honour hath alwaies had, and euen now hath, to support the poore ministers of the Word and Gospell of Iesus Christ in God's cause, and in good causes, hath in it selfe sufficient force to enforce not onely me, but all thankfull heartes, by word and writing, to bewray all thankfulness and dutiffulness towards your good Honor, as this, so that singular liberalitie vsed at all times by your Lordship towards my friends, hath caused me, in dedicating of this booke to your Honour, to testifie some parte of my thankfull minde in their behalfe. And heere I am to craue pardon of you, whiche I hope I shall easily obtaine, for that I haue not behaued my selfe finely as I might though faithfully as I ought in this my worke. And thus, fearing prolixitie, I conclude, praying; unto the Lorde God of heauen and earth, that King of Kinges and Lorde of Lordes, that he will graunt vnto your Honour and to the rest (whom he hath placed in the like degree of dignitie) his Holy Spirite, that Spirite of wisdome and vnder-standing, that you may thereby be so directed that all your thoughts, woordes, and workes, may tend to the setting foorth of God's glory, the maintenance of true religion, the preseruation of the realme. So shall England haue wealth, be voide of woe, enjoy, solace, be free from sorrow, possesse plentie, nor tast of pouertie, inherite pleasure, and not see paine. Which God graunt.

*Your Honour's most humble and obedient,  
Christopher Fetherstone*

## TO THE READER

Being instantly requested (gentle reader) by my godly zealous friendes, to enterprise the translating of this most learned Commentarie of M. Iohn Caluine, and being perswaded therunto by many godly reasons, whereof God's glory and the profite of his Church should be the cheife, I could not nor would not refuse to take that charge vp on me, vnlesse I should haue forgotten my dutie towards God, his Church, and my friendes; and now, forasmuch (gentle reader) as the principal recompence of my paines shal be that profit which thou shalt reape by the reading of this my translation, I beseech thee refuse not to take some paines in reading the same. I haue not stuft it full of strange words deriued of the Latine, which might no lesse molest thee then if they continued Latine as they were. I haue not racked the phrases to make them runn smoothly to please daintie eares, and so digressed from the truth and meaning of the authour; but, so much as possible I could, I haue translated worde for worde, which the learned by conference shall wel perceiue. Long time haue the godly desired to haue this worke published in the English tongue, and seeing they haue their desire now, my request vnto them is to accept of my paines herein. I dare not, good reader, presume so farre vpon mine owne skill as to saye that there is no faultes committed heerein, but I am earnestly to desire thee rather courteously to amend them then curiously to condemne me for them. And thus, trusting to thy curtiesie, I committe thee to the tuition og the Almightye, who so direct thee by his Spirite, that by reading thou maiest profite.

*Thine in the Lorde,  
Christopher Fetherstone*

# THE AUTHOR'S EPISTLE DEDICATORY

To The

TRULY HONOURABLE AND ILLUSTRIOUS LORDS,

THE SYNDICS AND COUNCIL OF GENEVA,

JOHN CALVIN

SUPPLICATES FROM THE LORD THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND FIRMNESS, AND A PROSPEROUS ADMINISTRATION.

I never call to remembrance that saying of Christ, in which he sets so high a value on the duty of receiving strangers with kindness as to reckon it done to himself, without considering, at the same time, the extraordinary honor which he has been pleased to confer on you, by making your city the resort, not of one or a few individuals, but of his Church at large. Among heathen countries hospitality was always commended, and was even accounted one of the principal virtues; and, accordingly, when they intended to denounce any people as barbarians and savages of the lowest stamp, they called them, ἀξένοῦς, or — which means the same thing — *inhospitable*. But far higher praise is due to you that, in these troublesome and unhappy times, the Lord has appointed you to be the persons whose support and protection should be solicited by godly and inoffensive men banished and driven from their native countries by the wicked and cruel tyranny of Antichrist. And not only so, but he has also dedicated to his name a sacred dwelling-place among you, where his worship may be maintained in purity.

Whoever attempts, in the slightest degree, openly to invade, or secretly to take from you, these two advantages, not only labors to deprive your city of its brightest ornaments, but beholds its existence and safety with an envious eye. For though the kind offices which are here performed towards Christ and his scattered members excite the barking of wicked men against you, still you ought to look upon yourselves as abundantly compensated by this single consideration, that angels bless you from heaven, and the children of God bless you from every quarter of the world; so that you may boldly despise the foul slander of those men who are not restrained either by scruples of conscience, or by shame, from pouring out more outrageous insults on God himself than on you, — nay, who, when they wish to calumniate you, begin with blaspheming God. Though this very occasion <sup>2</sup> kindles the rage

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2 (“Ascavoir que l’Evangile, et ceux qui y veulent adherer, ont yei leur retraite,”) — (namely, that the gospel, and those who wish to abide by it, have their retreat here)

of many people against you, yet you have no reason to dread any danger arising from it, so long as their fury shall be counteracted by the protection of His hand who hath promised that He will be the faithful Guardian of those cities in which the doctrine of His Gospel shall remain, and in which godly men, whom the world cannot endure, shall be permitted to dwell. I say nothing as to its being unnecessary to give yourselves any uneasiness about conciliating this class of enemies; for there is no man that is hostile to you for the sake of the Gospel, who would not desire to see you ruined or oppressed on other grounds. But granting that there were no other reason why you are hated by the avowed enemies of sound doctrine, than because they see you employed in defending it, still, disregarding their stratagems and threatenings, you ought resolutely to defend those two impregnable bulwarks, the purity of religious worship, and a godly anxiety to maintain the Church which Christ has placed under the shelter of your wings.

So far as relates to the slanders which are thrown at us by the Pope's hired brawlers — that we have apostatized from the Church, because we have withdrawn from subjection to the See of Rome — I wish it were as much in our power to protest with unshaken confidence before God and the angels, that we are at the greatest possible distance from that filthy puddle, as we can easily and readily defend ourselves from the crime which they are in the habit of laying to our charge. They boast, indeed, of the name of the Catholic Church, though no part of the whole doctrine of the Law and the Gospel has been permitted by them to remain free from shameful corruptions, though they have profaned the whole worship of God by the filth of their superstitions, and have not scrupled to debase all the ordinances of God by their inventions. Nay more, so *Catholic* — so universal — is the mass of errors by which they have overturned the whole of religion, that it would be enough to destroy and swallow up the Church a hundred times over. We can never, therefore, extol, in terms so lofty as the matter deserves, the unbounded goodness of God, by which we have miraculously escaped from that destructive whirlpool, and have fixed the anchor of our faith on the firm and everlasting truth of God.<sup>3</sup> And, indeed, this Commentary will itself, I trust, be a sufficient proof that Popery is nothing else than a monster formed out of the innumerable deceptions of Satan, and that what they call the Church is more confused than Babylon.

Yet I will candidly acknowledge — what is actually true — that we are not at a sufficient distance from that filthy pit, the contagion of which is too widely spread. Antichrist complains that we have fallen away from him; but we<sup>4</sup> are compelled to groan that too many of the pollutions with which he has infected the whole world remain amongst us. God has graciously

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3 The French version adds “a ce qu'elle ne flottast plus parmi les traditions des hommes;” — “that it might no longer be tossed about among; the traditions of men.”

4 “Nous qui taschons de remettre l'estat de l'Eglise a son entier;” — “we who endeavor to restore the Church to her original condition.”

restored to us <sup>5</sup> uncontaminated purity of doctrine, religion in its primitive state, the unadulterated worship of God, and a faithful administration of the Sacraments, as they were delivered to us by Christ. But the principal cause which hinders us from attaining that reformation of conduct and of life which ought to exist is, that very many persons, remembering that unbridled licentiousness in which the Papists indulge in opposition to the command of God, cannot become accustomed to the yoke of Christ. Accordingly, when our enemies, in order to excite against us unfounded dislike among the ignorant, raise a vexatious outcry that we have broken all discipline, their calumny is abundantly refuted (even though we should remain silent) by this single consideration, that at home we have no contest more severe than about — what is considered, at least, by many people to be — our excessive severity. But since you are the most competent witnesses for myself and my colleagues, that we are not more rigid and severe than the claim of duty demands and even compels us to be, as we freely submit to the decision of your conscience respecting us; so, on the other hand, you will easily perceive at a glance the singularly ridiculous impudence of our enemies on this subject.

I shall now say a few words about myself as an individual. Though I trust that my numerous writings will be a sufficient attestation to the world in what manner I have taught this Church, yet I have thought that it would be of very great importance for me to draw up a special record on this subject inscribed with your name; for it is highly necessary that the kind of doctrine which you acknowledge to be taught by me should be exhibited to the view of all. <sup>6</sup> Now though, in all the books which I have hitherto published, it has been my endeavor that you and the people under your charge should derive advantage from them even after my death, and though it would be highly unbecoming that the doctrine which has emanated from your city to foreign nations should yield fruit extensively, but be neglected in the place of its abode, yet I trust that this Commentary, which is especially dedicated to you, will take a firmer hold of your memory. For this purpose I pray to God to inscribe it so deeply with His own finger on your hearts that it may never be obliterated by any stratagem of Satan; for to Him does it belong to crown my labor with success, who has hitherto given me such courage as to desire nothing more than to watch faithfully over the safety of you all. Farther, as I freely acknowledge before the world that I am very far from possessing the careful diligence and the other virtues which the greatness and excellence of the office requires in a good Pastor, and as I continually bewail before God the numerous sins which obstruct my progress Do I venture to declare that I am not without an honest and sincere desire to perform my duty. And if, in the meantime, wicked men do not cease to annoy me, as it is my

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5 “Dieu par sa grace nous a restitue.”

6 The French copy adds: “afin qu'on n'en juge point a l'aventure, ni a credit;” — “that they may not judge of it at random, or on trust.”



duty — by well-doing — to refute their slanders, so it will belong to you to restrain those slanders by the exercise of that sacred authority with which you are invested. Wherefore, my Illustrious and highly honored Lords, I recommend you to the protection of our good God, entreating Him to give you always the spirit of prudence and virtue for governing aright, and to make your administration prosperous, so that His name may be thereby glorified, and that the result may be happy for you and yours.<sup>7</sup>

*Geneva,*  
*1st January, 1553.*

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<sup>7</sup> In the concluding sentence, the more amplified form of the French version has been followed. — *Ed.*)

# THE ARGUMENT

OF THE

## GOSPEL OF JOHN

The meaning of the Greek word, εὐαγγέλιον (*Gospel*) is well known.<sup>8</sup> In Scripture it denotes, by way of eminence, (κατ' ἐξοχήν,) the glad and delightful message of the grace exhibited to us in Christ, in order to instruct us, by despising the world and its fading riches and pleasures, to desire with our whole heart, and to embrace when offered to us, this invaluable blessing. The conduct which we perceive in irreligious men, who take an extravagant delight in the empty enjoyments of the world, while they are little if at all, affected by a relish for spiritual blessings, is natural to us all. For the purpose of correcting this fault, God expressly bestows the name *Gospel* on the message which he orders to be proclaimed concerning Christ; for thus he reminds us that nowhere else can true and solid happiness be obtained, and that in him we have all that is necessary for the perfection of a happy life.

Some consider the word *Gospel* as extending to all the gracious promises of God which are found scattered even in the Law and the Prophets. Nor can it be denied that, whenever God declares that he will be reconciled to men, and forgives their sins, he at the same time exhibits Christ, whose peculiar office it is, wherever he shines, to spread abroad the rays of joy. I acknowledge, therefore, that the Fathers were partakers of the same *Gospel* with ourselves, so far as relates to the faith of a gratuitous salvation. But as it is the ordinary declaration made by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, that the *Gospel* was first proclaimed when Christ came, let us also adhere to this mode of expression; and let us keep by that definition of the *Gospel* which I have given, that it is a solemn publication of the grace revealed in Christ. On this account the *Gospel* is called

the power of God to salvation to every one who believeth,

(Romans 1:16)

because in it God displays his righteousness. It is called also an embassy, by which he reconciles men to himself,

(2 Corinthians 5:20)

and as Christ is the pledge of the mercy of God, and of his fatherly love towards us, so he is, in a peculiar manner, the subject of the Gospel.

Hence it came that the histories which relate that Christ appeared in the flesh and died, and was raised from the dead, and at length was taken up into heaven, have peculiarly obtained the name *Gospel*. For although, for the reason already stated:, this word means the

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8 “On scait assez que le mot, d’Evangile signifie entre les Grecs toutes bonnes nouvelles;” — “it is well known that the word *Gospel* in Greek denotes any kind of good news.”

New Testament, yet the name which denote, the whole has come, by general practice, to stand for that part of it which declares that Christ was manifested to us in the flesh, and died, and rose from the dead. But as the bare history would not be enough, and, indeed, would be of no advantage for salvation, the Evangelists do not merely relate that Christ was born, and that he died and vanquished death, but also explain for what purpose he was born, and died, and rose again, and what benefit we derive from those events.

Yet there is also this difference between them, that the other three are more copious in their narrative of the life and death of Christ, but John dwells more largely on the doctrine by which the office of Christ, together with the power of his death and resurrection, is unfolded. They do not, indeed, omit to mention that Christ came to bring salvation to the world, to atone for the sins of the world by the sacrifice of his death, and, in short, to perform every thing that was required from the Mediator, (as John also devotes a portion of his work to historical details;) but the doctrine, which points out to us the power and benefit of the coming of Christ, is far more clearly exhibited by him than by the rest. And as all of them had the same object in view, to point out Christ, the three former exhibit his body, if we may be permitted to use the expression, but John exhibits his soul. On this account, I am accustomed to say that this Gospel is a key to open the door for understanding the rest; for whoever shall understand the power of Christ, as it is here strikingly portrayed, will afterwards read with advantage what the others relate about the Redeemer who was manifested.

John is believed to have written chiefly with the intention of maintaining the Divinity of Christ, in opposition to the wicked blasphemies of Ebion and Cerinthus; and this is asserted by Eusebius and Jerome, in accordance with the general opinion of the ancients. But whatever might be his motive for writing at that time, there can be no doubt whatever that God intended a far higher benefit for his Church. He therefore dictated to the Four Evangelists what they should write, in such a manner that, while each had his own part assigned him, the whole might be collected into one body; and it is our duty now to blend the Four by a mutual relation, so that we may permit ourselves to be taught by all of them, as by one mouth. As to John being placed the fourth in order, it was done on account of the time when he wrote, but in reading them, a different order would be more advantageous, which is, that when we wish to read in Matthew and the others, that Christ was given to us by the Father, we should first learn from John the purpose for which he was manifested.

# COMMENTARY

ON THE

HOLY GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

ACCORDING TO

## JOHN

## CHAPTER 1

## John 1:1-5

1. In the beginning was the Speech, and the Speech was with God, and the Speech was God. 2. He was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

1. *In the beginning was the Speech.* In this introduction he asserts the eternal Divinity of Christ, in order to inform us that he is the eternal God, who *was manifested in the flesh*, (1 Timothy 3:16.) The design is, to show it to have been necessary that the restoration of mankind should be accomplished by the Son of God, since by his power all things were created, since he alone breathes into all the creatures life and energy, so that they remain in their condition; and since in man himself he has given a remarkable display both of his power and of his grace, and even subsequently to the fall of man has not ceased to show liberality and kindness towards his posterity. And this doctrine is highly necessary to be known; for since apart from God we ought not at all to seek life and salvation, how could our faith rest on Christ, if we did not know with certainty what is here taught? By these words, therefore, the Evangelist assures us that we do not withdraw from the only and eternal God, when we believe in Christ, and likewise that life is now restored to the dead through the kindness of him who was the source and cause of life, when the nature of man was still uncorrupted.

As to the Evangelist calling the Son of God *the Speech*, the simple reason appears to me to be, first, because he is the eternal Wisdom and Will of God; and, secondly, because he is the lively image of His purpose; for, as *Speech* is said to be among men the image of the mind, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God, and to say that He reveals himself to us by his *Speech*. The other significations of the Greek word λόγος (Logos) do not apply so well. It means, no doubt, *definition*, and *reasoning*, and *calculation*; but I am unwilling to carry the abstruseness of philosophy beyond the measure of my faith. And we perceive that the Spirit of God is so far from approving of such subtleties that, in prattling with us, by his very silence he cries aloud with what sobriety we ought to handle such lofty mysteries.

Now as God, in creating the world, revealed himself by that *Speech*, so he formerly had him concealed with himself, so that there is a twofold relation; the former to God, and the latter to men. Servetus, a haughty scoundrel belonging to the Spanish nation, invents the statement, that this eternal *Speech* began to exist at that time when he was displayed in the creation of the world, as if he did not exist before his power was made known by external operation. Very differently does the Evangelist teach in this passage; for he does not ascribe to *the Speech* a *beginning* of time, but says that he was *from the beginning*, and thus rises

beyond all ages. I am fully aware how this dog barks against us, and what cavils were formerly raised by the Arians, namely, that

in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,

(Genesis 1:1)

which nevertheless are not eternal, because the word *beginning* refers to order, instead of denoting eternity. But the Evangelist meets this calumny when he says,

*And the Speech was with God.* If *the Speech* began to be at some time, they must find out some succession of time in God; and undoubtedly by this clause John intended to distinguish him from all created things. For many questions might arise, Where was this *Speech*? How did he exert his power? What was his nature? How might he be known? The Evangelist, therefore, declares that we must not confine our views to the world and to created things; for he was always united to God, before the world existed. Now when men date *the beginning* from the origin of heaven and earth, do they not reduce Christ to the common order of the world, from which he is excluded in express terms by this passage? By this proceeding they offer an egregious insult not only to the Son of God, but to his eternal Father, whom they deprive of his wisdom. If we are not at liberty to conceive of God without his *wisdom*, it must be acknowledged that we ought not to seek the origin of *the Speech* any where else than in the Eternal Wisdom of God.

Servetus objects that *the Speech* cannot be admitted to have existed any earlier than when Moses introduces God as speaking. As if he did not subsist in God, because he was not publicly made known: that is, as if he did not exist *within*, until he began to appear *without*. But every pretense for outrageously absurd fancies of this description is cut off by the Evangelist, when he affirms without reservation, that *the Speech was with God*; for he expressly withdraws us from every moment of time.

Those who infer from the imperfect tense of the verb<sup>9</sup> which is here used, that it denotes continued existence, have little strength of argument to support them. *Was*, they say, is a word more fitted to express the idea of uninterrupted succession, than if John had said, *Has been*. But on matters so weighty we ought to employ more solid arguments; and, indeed, the argument which I have brought forward ought to be reckoned by us sufficient; namely, that the Evangelist sends us to the eternal secrets of God, that we may there learn that *the Speech* was, as it were hidden, before he revealed himself in the external structure of the world. Justly, therefore, does Augustine remark, that this *beginning*, which is now mentioned, has no *beginning*; for though, in the order of nature, the Father came before his *Wisdom*, yet those who conceive of any point of time when he went before his *Wisdom*, deprive Him of his glory. And this is the eternal generation, which, during a period of infinite extent before the foundation of the world, lay hid in God, so to speak — which, for a long succession of

9 “Pource qu’il est dit Estoit, et non pas N’este;” — “Because it is said *Was*, and not *Has been*.”

years, was obscurely shadowed out to the Fathers under the Law, and at length was more fully manifested in flesh.

I wonder what induced the Latins to render ὁ λόγος by *Verbum*, (the Word;) for that would rather have been the translation of τὸ ῥῆμα. But granting that they had some plausible reason, still it cannot be denied that *Sermo* (*the Speech*) would have been far more appropriate. Hence it is evident, what barbarous tyranny was exercised by the theologians of the Sorbonne,<sup>10</sup> who teased and stormed at Erasmus in such a manner, because he had changed a single word for the better.

*And the Speech was with God.* We have already said that *the Son of God* is thus placed above the world and above all the creatures, and is declared to have existed before all ages. But at the same time this mode of expression attributes to him a distinct personality from the Father; for it would have been absurd in the Evangelist to say that *the Speech* was always *with God*, if he had not some kind of subsistence peculiar to himself in God. This passage serves, therefore, to refute the error of Sabellius; for it shows that the Son is distinct from the Father. I have already remarked that we ought to be sober in thinking, and modest in speaking, about such high mysteries. And yet the ancient writers of the Church were excusable, when, finding that they could not in any other way maintain sound and pure doctrine in opposition to the perplexed and ambiguous phraseology of the heretics, they were compelled to invent some words, which after all had no other meaning than what is taught in the Scriptures. They said that there are three Hypostases, or Subsistences, or Persons, in the one and simple essence of God. The word; ὑπόστασις (Hypostasis) occurs in this sense in [Hebrews 1:3](#), to which corresponds the Latin word *Substantia*, (*substance*) as it is employed by Hilary. The Persons (τὰ πρόσωπα) were called by them distinct properties in God, which present themselves to the view of our minds; as Gregory Nazianzen says, “I cannot think of the One (God) without having the Three (Persons) shining around me.”<sup>11</sup>

*And the Speech was God.* That there may be no remaining doubt as to Christ’s divine essence, the Evangelist distinctly asserts that *he is God*. Now since there is but one God, it follows that Christ is of the same essence with the Father, and yet that, in some respect, he is distinct from the Father. But of the second clause we have already spoken. As to the unity of the divine essence, Arius showed prodigious wickedness, when, to avoid being compelled to acknowledge the eternal Divinity of Christ, he prattled about I know not what imaginary

<sup>10</sup> “Les Theologiens Sorbonistes.”

<sup>11</sup> The reader will find our Author’s views of the Holy Trinity very fully illustrated in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I. Chap. 13., and will be at a loss whether to admire most the marvelous acuteness, or the sobriety of judgment, by which the whole discussion is pervaded. — *Ed.*

Deity;<sup>12</sup> but for our part, when we are informed that *the Speech was God*, what right have we any longer to call in question his eternal essence?

2. *He was in the beginning.* In order to impress more deeply on our minds what had been already said, the Evangelist condenses the two preceding clauses into a brief summary, that *the Speech* always *was*, and that *he was with God*; so that it may be understood that *the beginning* was before all time.

3. *All things were made by him.* Having affirmed that the Speech is God, and having asserted his eternal essence, he now proves his Divinity from his works. And this is the practical knowledge, to which we ought to be chiefly accustomed; for the mere name of God attributed to Christ will affect us little, if our faith do not feel it to be such by experience. In reference to the Son of God, he makes an assertion which strictly and properly applies to his person. Sometimes, indeed, Paul simply declares that *all things are by God*, ([Romans 11:36](#)) but whenever the Son is compared with the Father, he is usually distinguished by this mark. Accordingly, the ordinary mode of expression is here employed, that the Father *made all things by* the Son, and that all things are by God through the Son. Now the design of the Evangelist is, as I have already said, to show that no sooner was the world created than *the Speech* of God came forth into external operation; for having formerly been incomprehensible in his essence, he then became publicly known by the effect of his power. There are some, indeed, even among philosophers, who make God to be the Master-builder of the world in such a manner as to ascribe to him intelligence in framing this work. So far they are in the right, for they agree with Scripture; but as they immediately fly off into frivolous speculations, there is no reason why we should eagerly desire to have their testimonies; but, on the contrary, we ought to be satisfied with this inspired declaration, well knowing that it conveys far more than our mind is able to comprehend.

*And without him was not any thing made that was made.* Though there is a variety of readings in this passage, yet for my own part, I have no hesitation in taking it continuously thus: *not any thing was made that was made*; and in this almost all the Greek manuscripts, or at least those of them which are most approved, are found to agree; besides, the sense requires it. Those who separate the words, *which was made*, from the preceding clause, so as to connect them with the following one, bring out a forced sense: *what was made was in him life*; that is, lived, or was sustained in life.<sup>13</sup> But they will never show that this mode of

12 “Que c'estoit je ne scay quel Dieu qui avoit este cree, et eu commencement;”— “That there was I know not what God who had been created, and had a beginning.”

13 The difference of readings lies wholly in the punctuation, and the dispute is, whether the words ὁ γέγονεν shall form the conclusion of the Third, or the commencement of the Fourth verse. Calvin expresses his concurrence with the majority of manuscripts, which connect the words in question with the Third verse thus Καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν, *and without him was not any thing made*, (or, more literally, as well as more emphatically,) *and without him was not one thing made which was made*. Other manuscripts, certainly



expression is, in any instance, applied to creatures. Augustine, who is excessively addicted to the philosophy of Plato, is carried along, according to custom, to the doctrine of ideas; that before God made the world, he had the form of the whole building conceived in his mind; and so the life of those things which did not yet exist was in Christ, because the creation of the world was appointed in him. But how widely different this is From the intention of the Evangelist we shall immediately see.

I now return to the former clause. This is not a faulty redundancy, (περιττολογία) as it appears to be; for as Satan endeavors, by every possible method, to take any thing from Christ, the Evangelist intended to declare expressly, that *of those things which have been made* there is no exception whatever.

4. *In him was life.* Hitherto he has taught us, that by *the Speech* of God *all things were created*. He now attributes to him, in the same manner, the preservation of those things which had been created, as if he had said, that in the creation of the world there was not merely displayed a sudden exercise of his power, which soon passed away, but that it is manifested in the steady and regular order of nature, as he is said to uphold all things *by the word* or will of his power, (Hebrews 1:3). This *life* may be extended either to inanimate creatures, (which live after their own manner, though they are devoid of feeling,) or may be explained in reference to *living* creatures alone. It is of little consequence which you choose; for the simple meaning is, that *the Speech* of God was not only the source of *life* to all the creatures, so that those which were not began to be, but that his *life-giving* power causes them to remain in their condition; for were it not that his continued inspiration gives vigor to the world, every thing that *lives* would immediately decay, or be reduced to nothing. In a word, what Paul ascribes to God, that *in him we are, and move, and live*, (Acts 17:28,) John declares to be accomplished by the gracious agency of *the Speech*; so that it is God who gives us *life*, but it is by the eternal *Speech*

*The life was the light of men.* The other interpretations, which do not accord with the meaning of the Evangelist, I intentionally pass by. He speaks here, in my opinion, of that part of *life* in which men excel other animals; and informs us that *the life* which was bestowed on *men* was not of an ordinary description, but was united to *the light* of understanding. He separates man from the rank of other creatures; because we perceive more readily the power of God by feeling it in us than by beholding it at a distance. Thus Paul charges us not *to seek God* at a distance, because he makes himself to be felt within us, (Acts 17:27.) After having presented a general exhibition of the kindness of Christ, in order to induce men to take a nearer view of it, he points out what has been bestowed peculiarly on themselves;

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of no great authority, connect them with the Fourth verse: Καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωῇ ἦν *And without him was not one thing made* What was made *was in him life*. The preference given by our Author rests on grounds which can scarcely be questioned. — Ed

namely, that they were not created like the beasts, but having been endued with reason, they had obtained a higher rank. As it is not in vain that God imparts his light to their minds, it follows that the purpose for which they were created was, that they might acknowledge Him who is the Author of so excellent a blessing. And since this light, of which *the Speech* was the source, has been conveyed from him to us, it ought to serve as a mirror, in which we may clearly behold the divine power of *the Speech*

5. *And the light shineth in darkness.* It might be objected, that the passages of Scripture in which men are called blind are so numerous and that the blindness for which they are condemned is but too well known. For in all their reasoning faculties they miserably fail. How comes it that there are so many labyrinths of errors in the world, but because men, by their own guidance, are led only to vanity and lies? But if no *light* appears in men, that testimony of the divinity of Christ, which the Evangelist lately mentioned, is destroyed; for that is the third step, as I have said, that in *the life of men* there is something more excellent than motion and breathing. The Evangelist anticipates this question, and first of all lays down this caution, that *the light* which was originally bestowed on men must not be estimated by their present condition; because in this corrupted and degenerate nature *light* has been turned into *darkness*. And yet he affirms that the *light* of understanding is not wholly extinguished; for, amidst the thick darkness of the human mind, some remaining sparks of the brightness still shine.

My readers now understand that this sentence contains two clauses; for he says that men are now widely distant from that perfectly holy nature with which they were originally endued; because their understanding, which ought to have shed *light* in every direction, has been plunged in darkness, and is wretchedly blinded; and that thus the glory of Christ may be said to be *darkened* amidst this corruption of nature. But, on the other hand, the Evangelist maintains that, in the midst of the *darkness*, there are still some remains of light, which show in some degree the divine power of Christ. The Evangelist admits, therefore, that the mind of man is blinded; so that it may justly be pronounced to be covered with *darkness*. For he might have used a milder term, and might have said that the light is dark or cloudy; but he chose to state more distinctly how wretched our condition has become since the fall of the first man. The statement that *the light shineth in darkness* is not at all intended for the commendation of depraved nature, but rather for taking away every excuse for ignorance.

*And the darkness did not comprehend it.* Although by that small measure of *light* which still remains in us, the Son of God has always invited men to himself, yet the Evangelist says that this was attended by no advantage, because *seeing, they did not see*, ([Matthew 13:13](#).) For since man lost the favor of God, his mind is so completely overwhelmed by the thralldom of ignorance, that any portion of *light* which remains in it is quenched and useless. This is daily proved by experience; for all who are not regenerated by the Spirit of God possess

some reason, and this is an undeniable proof that man was made not only to breathe, but to have understanding. But by that guidance of their reason they do not come to God, and do not even approach to him; so that all their understanding is nothing else than mere vanity. Hence it follows that there is no hope of the salvation of men, unless God grant new aid; for though the Son of God sheds his *light* upon them, they are so dull that they *do not comprehend* whence that *light* proceeds, but are carried away by foolish and wicked imaginations to absolute madness.

The *light* which still dwells in corrupt nature consists chiefly of two parts; for, first, all men naturally possess some seed of religion; and, secondly, the distinction between good and evil is engraven on their consciences. But what are the fruits that ultimately spring from it, except that religion degenerates into a thousand monsters of superstition, and conscience perverts every decision, so as to confound vice with virtue? In short, natural reason never will direct men to Christ; and as to their being endued with prudence for regulating their lives, or born to cultivate the liberal arts and sciences, all this passes away without yielding any advantage.

It ought to be understood that the Evangelist speaks of natural gifts only, and does not as yet say any thing about the grace of regeneration. For there are two distinct powers which belong to the Son of God: the first, which is manifested in the structure of the world and the order of nature; and the second, by which he renews and restores fallen nature. As he is the eternal *Speech* of God, by him the world was made; by his power all things continue to possess the life which they once received; man especially was endued with an extraordinary gift of understanding; and though by his revolt he lost the light of understanding, yet he still sees and understands, so that what he naturally possesses from the grace of the Son of God is not entirely destroyed. But since by his stupidity and perverseness he darkens the light which still dwells in him, it remains that a new office be undertaken by the Son of God, the office of Mediator, to renew, by the Spirit of regeneration, man who had been ruined. Those persons, therefore, reason absurdly and inconclusively, who refer this *light*, which the Evangelist mentions, to the gospel and the doctrine of salvation.

## John 1:6-13

6. There was a man sent by God, whose name was John. 7. He came for a testimony<sup>14</sup>, that he might testify of the light; that by him all might believe. 8. He was not that light, but that he might testify concerning the light. 9. The true light was that which enlighteneth every man who cometh into the world. 10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11. He came into his own, and his own received him not. 12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; namely, to those who believe in his name; 13. Who were born not of bloods<sup>15</sup> nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

6. *There was a man.* The Evangelist now begins to discourse about the manner in which the Son of God was manifested in flesh; and that none may doubt that Christ is the eternal Son of God, he relates that Christ was announced by *John* the Baptist, as his herald. For not only did Christ exhibit himself to be seen by men, but he chose also to be made known by the testimony and doctrine of *John*; or rather, God the Father sent this witness before his Christ, that they might more willingly receive the salvation offered by him.

But it might at first sight appear ridiculous that Christ should receive *testimony* from another, as if he needed it; while, on the contrary, he declares that he *does not seek testimony from man*, ([John 5:34](#).) The answer is easy and obvious, that this witness was appointed, not for the sake of Christ, but for our sake. If it be objected that the testimony of man is too weak to prove that Christ is the Son of God, it is likewise easy to reply, that the Baptist is not adduced as a private *witness*, but as one who, having received authority from God, sustained the character rather of an angel than of a man. Accordingly, he receives commendation not for his own virtues, but for this single circumstance, that he was the ambassador of God. Nor is this at variance with the fact, that the preaching of the gospel was committed to Christ, that he might be a witness to himself; for the design contemplated by the preaching of John was, that men might attend to the doctrine and miracles of Christ.

*Sent by God.* He does not say so for the purpose of confirming the baptism of John, but only mentions it in passing. This circumstance is not sufficient to produce certainty, since many run of their own accord, and boast that God has sent them; but the Evangelist, intending afterwards to speak more fully about this *witness*, reckoned it enough, for the present, to say in a single word, that John did not come but by the command of God. We shall afterwards see how he himself affirms that God is the Author of his ministry. We must now recollect — what I formerly noticed — that what is asserted about John is required in all the

14 “Pour (porter) tesmoignage;” — “to bear testimony.”

15 “Nais de sangs, ou, de sang;” — “born of bloods, or, of blood.”

teachers of the Church, that they be called by God; so that the authority of teaching may not be founded on any other than on God alone.

*Whose name was John.* He states the *name*, not only for the purpose of pointing out the man, but because it was given to him in accordance with what he really was. There is no room to doubt that the Lord had reference to the office to which he appointed *John*, when he commanded by the angel that he should be so called, that by means of it all might acknowledge him to be the herald of divine grace.<sup>16</sup> For though the name ~~XXXXXXXX~~<sup>17</sup> (*Jehohannan*) may be taken in a passive signification, and may thus be referred to the person, as denoting that *John* was *acceptable to God*; yet for my own part, I willingly extend it to the benefit which others ought to derive from him.<sup>18</sup>

7. *He came for a testimony.* The end of his calling is briefly noticed; which was, that he might prepare a Church for Christ, as, by inviting all to Christ, he shows plainly enough that he did not come on his own account.

8. *He was not that light.* So far was John from needing commendation, that the Evangelist gives this warning, lest his excessive brightness might obscure the glory of Christ. For there were some who gazed so eagerly upon him that they neglected Christ; just as if a person, enraptured with beholding the dawning of the day, would not deign to turn his eyes towards the sun. In what sense the Evangelist employs the word *light* we shall immediately see. All the godly, indeed, are *light in the Lord*, ([Ephesians 5:8](#)), because, in consequence of their being enlightened by his Spirit, they not only see for themselves, but likewise direct others by their example to the way of salvation. The apostles likewise are peculiarly called *light*, ([Matthew 5:14](#)), because they go before, holding out the torch of the Gospel, to dispel the darkness of the world. But here the Evangelist speaks of him who is the only and eternal source of illumination, as he immediately shows more clearly.

9. *The true light was.* The Evangelist did not intend to contrast *the true light* with the *false*, but to distinguish Christ from all others, that none might imagine that what is called *light* belongs to him in common with angels or men. The distinction is, that whatever is luminous in heaven and in earth borrows its splendor from some other object; but Christ is *the light*, shining from itself and by itself, and enlightening the whole world by its radiance; so that no other source or cause of splendor is anywhere to be found. He gave the name of *the true light*, therefore, to that which has by nature the power of giving *light*

*Which enlighteneth every man.* The Evangelist insists chiefly on this point, in order to show, from the effect which every one of us perceives in him, that Christ is *the light*. He

16 "Heraut et ambassade de la grace de Dieu;" — "Herald and ambassador of the grace of God."

17 "Le nom de Jean, qui signifie Grace;" — "The name John, which signifies Grace."

18 For the meaning of the name *John*, derived from the Hebrew *Jehohannan*, the reader may consult our Author's *Commentary on the Harmony of the Three Evangelists*, vol. i. page 15. — Ed.

might have reasoned more ingeniously, that Christ, as the eternal light, has a splendor which is natural, and not brought from any other quarter; but instead of doing so, he sends us back to the experience which we all possess. For as Christ makes us all partakers of his brightness, it must be acknowledged that to him alone belongs strictly this honor of being called *light*

This passage is commonly explained in two ways. Some restrict the phrase, *every man*, to those who, having been renewed by the Spirit of God, become partakers of the life-giving *light*. Augustine employs the comparison of a schoolmaster who, if he happen to be the only person who has a school in the town, will be called the teacher *of all*, though there be many persons that do not go to his school. They therefore understand the phrase in a comparative sense, that all are enlightened by Christ, because no man can boast of having obtained the *light* of life in any other way than by his grace. But since the Evangelist employs the general phrase, *every man that cometh into the world*, I am more inclined to adopt the other meaning, which is, that from this *light* the rays are diffused over all mankind, as I have already said. For we know that men have this peculiar excellence which raises them above other animals, that they are endued with reason and intelligence, and that they carry the distinction between right and wrong engraven on their conscience. There is no man, therefore, whom some perception of the eternal *light* does not reach.

But as there are fanatics who rashly strain and torture this passage, so as to infer from it that the grace of illumination is equally offered to all, let us remember that the only subject here treated is the common light of nature, which is far inferior to faith; for never will any man, by all the acuteness and sagacity of his own mind, penetrate into the kingdom of God. It is the Spirit of God alone who opens the gate of heaven to the elect. Next, let us remember that the light of reason which God implanted in men has been so obscured by sin, that amidst the thick darkness, and shocking ignorance, and gulf of errors, there are hardly a few shining sparks that are not utterly extinguished.

**10.** *He was in the world.* He accuses men of ingratitude, because of their own accord, as it were, they were so blinded, that the cause of the light which they enjoyed was unknown to them. This extends to every age of the world; for before Christ was manifested in the flesh, his power was everywhere displayed; and therefore those daily effects ought to correct the stupidity of men. What can be more unreasonable than to draw water from a running stream, and never to think of the fountain from which that stream flows? It follows that no proper excuse can be found for the ignorance of the world in not knowing Christ, before he was manifested in the flesh; for it arose from the indolence and wicked stupidity of those who had opportunities of seeing Him always present by his power. The whole may be summed up by saying, that never was Christ in such a manner absent from the world, but that men, aroused by his rays, ought to have raised their eyes towards him. Hence it follows, that the blame must be imputed to themselves.

11. *He came into his own.* Here is displayed the absolutely desperate wickedness and malice of men; here is displayed their execrable impiety, that when the Son of God was manifested in flesh to the Jews, whom God had separated to himself from the other nations to be His own heritage, he was not *acknowledged* or *received*. This passage also has received various explanations. For some think that the Evangelist speaks of the whole world indiscriminately; and certainly there is no part of the world which the Son of God may not lawfully claim as his own property. According to them, the meaning is: "When Christ came down into the world, he did not enter into another person's territories, for the whole human race was his own inheritance." But I approve more highly of the opinion of those who refer it to the Jews alone; for there is an implied comparison, by which the Evangelist represents the heinous ingratitude of men. The Son of God had solicited an abode for himself in one nation; when he appeared there, he was rejected; and this shows clearly the awfully wicked blindness of men. In making this statement, the sole object of the Evangelist must have been to remove the offense which many would be apt to take in consequence of the unbelief of the Jews. For when he was despised and rejected by that nation to which he had been especially promised, who would reckon him to be the Redeemer of the whole world? We see what extraordinary pains the Apostle Paul takes in handling this subject.

Here both the Verb and the Noun are highly emphatic. *He came.* The Evangelist says that the Son of God *came* to that place where he formerly was; and by this expression he must mean a new and extraordinary kind of presence, by which the Son of God was manifested, so that men might have a nearer view of him. *Into his own.* By this phrase the Evangelist compares the Jews with other nations; because by an extraordinary privilege they had been adopted into the family of God. Christ therefore was first offered to them as his own household, and as belonging to his empire by a peculiar right. To the same purpose is that complaint of God by Isaiah:

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel knoweth me not, (Isaiah 1:3;)

for though he has dominion over the whole world, yet he represents himself to be, in peculiar manner, the Lord of Israel, whom he had collected, as it were, into a sacred fold.

12. *But to as many as received him.* That none may be retarded by this stumbling-block, that the Jews despised and rejected Christ, the Evangelist exalts above heaven the godly who believe in him; for he says that by faith they obtain this glory of being reckoned *the sons of God*. The universal term, *as many*, contains an implied contrast; for the Jews were carried away by a blind vaunting,<sup>19</sup> as if they exclusively had God bound to themselves. The Evangelist declares that their condition is changed, because the Jews have been rejected,

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19 "D'une vanterie aveuglee; c'est a dire, n'entendans pas ce qu'ils disoyent;" — "by a blind vaunting; that is, not understanding what they said."

and their place, which had been left empty, is occupied by the Jews; for it is as if he transferred the right of adoption to strangers. This is what Paul says, that the destruction of one nation was the life of the whole world, ([Romans 11:12](#);) for the Gospel, which might be said to have been banished from them, began to be spread far and wide throughout the whole world. They were thus deprived of the privilege which they enjoyed above others. But their impiety was no obstruction to Christ; for he erected elsewhere the throne of his kingdom, and called indiscriminately to the hope of salvation all nations which formerly appeared to have been rejected by God.

*He gave them power.* The word ἐξουσία here appears to me to mean a right, or claim; and it would be better to translate it so, in order to refute the false opinions of the Papists; for they wickedly pervert this passage by understanding it to mean, that nothing more than a choice is allowed to us, if we think fit to avail ourselves of this privilege. In this way they extract free-will from this phrase; but as well might they extract fire from water. There is some plausibility in this at first sight; for the Evangelist does not say that Christ makes them *sons of God*, but that *he gives them power* to become such. Hence they infer that it is this grace only that is offered to us, and that the liberty to enjoy or to reject it is placed at our disposal. But this frivolous attempt to catch at a single word is set aside by what immediately follows; for the Evangelist adds, that they *become the sons of God, not by the will which belongs to the flesh*, but when they are born of God. But if faith regenerates us, so that we are the sons of God, and if God breathes faith into us from heaven, it plainly appears that not by possibility only, but actually — as we say — is the grace of adoption offered to us by Christ. And, indeed, the Greek word, ἐξουσία is sometimes put for ἀξίωσις, (a claim,) a meaning which falls in admirably with this passage.

The circumlocution which the Evangelist has employed tends more to magnify the excellence of grace, than if he had said in a single word, that all who believe in Christ are made by him *sons of God*. For he speaks here of the unclean and profane, who, having been condemned to perpetual ignominy, lay in the darkness of death. Christ exhibited an astonishing instance of his grace in conferring this honor on such persons, so that they began, all at once, to be *sons of God*; and the greatness of this privilege is justly extolled by the Evangelist, as also by Paul, when he ascribes it to

God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love  
with which he loved us, ([Ephesians 2:4](#).)

But if any person shall prefer to take the word *power* in its ordinary acceptation, still the Evangelist does not mean by it any intermediate faculty, or one which does not include the full and complete effect; but, on the contrary, means that Christ gave to the unclean and the uncircumcised what appeared to be impossible; for an incredible change took place when *out of stones Christ raised up children to God*, ([Matthew 3:9](#).) The *power*, therefore, is that *fitness* (ἰκανότης) which Paul mentions, when he



gives thanks to God, who hath made us fit (or meet) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints, ([Colossians 1:12](#).)

*Who believe in his name.* He expresses briefly the manner of *receiving* Christ, that is, *believing in him*. Having been engrafted into Christ by faith, we obtain the right of adoption, so as to be *the sons of God*. And, indeed, as he is the only-begotten Son of God, it is only so far as we are members of him that this honor at all belongs to us. Here again the notion of the Papists about the word *power* is refuted.<sup>20</sup> The Evangelist declares that this *power* is given to those who already *believe*. Now it is certain that such persons are in reality *the sons of God*. They detract too much from the value of faith who say that, by *believing*, a man obtains nothing more than that he may become *a son of God*, if he chooses; for instead of present effect they put a *power* which is held in uncertainty and suspense.

The contradiction appears still more glaring from what immediately follows. The Evangelist says that those who *believe* are already *born of God*. It is not therefore, a mere liberty of choice that is offered, since they obtain the privilege itself that is in question. Although the Hebrew word, נָמָה (*Name*) is sometimes used to denote *power*, yet here it denotes a relation to the doctrine of the Gospel; for when Christ is preached to us, then it is that we *believe* in him. I speak of the ordinary method by which the Lord leads us to faith; and this ought to be carefully observed, for there are many who foolishly contrive for themselves a confused faith, without any understanding of doctrine, as nothing is more common among the Papists than the word *believe*, though there is not among them any knowledge of Christ from hearing the Gospel. Christ, therefore, offers himself to us by the Gospel, and we receive him by faith.

**13. *Who were born not of blood***<sup>21</sup> Some think that an indirect reference is here made to the preposterous confidence of the Jews, and I willingly adopt that opinion. They had continually in their mouth the nobleness of their lineage, as if, because they were descended from a holy stock, they were naturally holy. And justly might they have gloried in their descent from Abraham, if they had been lawful sons, and not bastards; but the glowing of faith ascribes nothing whatever to carnal generation, but acknowledges its obligation to the grace of God alone for all that is good. John, therefore, says, that those among the formerly unclean Gentiles who believe in Christ *are not born* the sons of God from the womb, but are renewed by God, that they may begin to be his sons. The reason why he uses the word

20 “Et par ceci derechef est refutee l’imagination des Papistes de laquelle j’ai parle, a scavoir que Dieu donne aux hommes une possibilite, seulement d’estre faits enfans siens;” — “and here again is refuted the notion of the Papists which I spoke of, namely, that God gives to men bare possibility of becoming His children”

21 Here our Author, either from choice or from inadvertency, has adopted the phrase *of blood*, instead of What he followed in his version of the Text, (see [page 35](#),) of *bloods* — the literal, though not idiomatic, rendering of ἐξ αἱμάτων, which is itself of rare occurrence, but not without classical authority. — *Ed*

*blood* in the plural number appears to have been, that he might express more fully a long succession of lineage; for this was a part of the boasting among the Jews, that they could trace their descent, by an uninterrupted line, upwards to the patriarchs.

*The will of the flesh and the will of man* appear to me to mean the same thing; for I see no reason why *flesh* should be supposed to signify *woman*, as Augustine and many others explain it. On the contrary, the Evangelist repeats the same thing in a variety of words, in order to explain it more fully, and impress it more deeply on the minds of men. Though he refers directly to the Jews, who gloried in the flesh, yet from this passage a general doctrine may be obtained: that our being reckoned the sons of God does not belong to our nature, and does not proceed from us, but because God *begat us* willingly, ([James 1:18](#),) that is, from undeserved love. Hence it follows, first, that faith does not proceed from ourselves, but is the fruit of spiritual regeneration; for the Evangelist affirms that no man can believe, unless he be begotten of God; and therefore faith is a heavenly gift. It follows, secondly, that faith is not bare or cold knowledge, since no man can believe who has not been renewed by the Spirit of God.

It may be thought that the Evangelist reverses the natural order by making regeneration to precede faith, whereas, on the contrary, it is an effect of faith, and therefore ought to be placed later. I reply, that both statements perfectly agree; because by faith we receive the *incorruptible seed*, ([1 Peter 1:23](#),) by which we are born again to a new and divine life. And yet faith itself is a work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in none but the children of God. So then, in various respects, faith is a part of our regeneration, and an entrance into the kingdom of God, that he may reckon us among his children. The illumination of our minds by the Holy Spirit belongs to our renewal, and thus faith flows from regeneration as from its source; but since it is by the same faith that we receive Christ, who sanctifies us by his Spirit, on that account it is said to be the beginning of our adoption.

Another solution, still more plain and easy, may be offered; for when the Lord breathes faith into us, he regenerates us by some method that is hidden and unknown to us; but after we have received faith, we perceive, by a lively feeling of conscience, not only the grace of adoption, but also newness of life and the other gifts of the Holy Spirit. For since faith, as we have said, receives Christ, it puts us in possession, so to speak, of all his blessings. Thus so far as respects our sense, it is only after having believed — that we begin to be the sons of God. But if the inheritance of eternal life is the fruit of adoption, we see how the Evangelist ascribes the whole of our salvation to the grace of Christ alone; and, indeed, how closely soever men examine themselves, they will find nothing that is worthy of the children of God, except what Christ has bestowed on them.

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## John 1:14

14. And the Speech was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

14. *And the Speech was made flesh.* The Evangelist shows what was that coming of Christ which he had mentioned; namely, that having been clothed with our flesh, he showed himself openly to the world. Although the Evangelist touches briefly the unutterable mystery, that the Son of God was clothed with human nature, yet this brevity is wonderfully perspicuous. Here some madmen amuse themselves with foolish and trivial subtleties of this sort: that *the Speech* is said to have been made flesh, because God sent his Son into the world, according to the conception which he had formed in his mind; as if *the Speech* were I know not what shadowy image. But we have demonstrated that that word denotes a real hypostasis, or subsistence, in the essence of God.

The word *Flesh* expresses the meaning of the Evangelist more forcibly than if he had said that *he was made man*. He intended to show to what a mean and despicable condition the Son of God, on our account, descended from the height of his heavenly glory. When Scripture speaks of man contemptuously, it calls him *flesh*. Now, though there be so wide a distance between the spiritual glory of *the Speech* of God and the abominable filth of our *flesh*, yet the Son of God stooped so low as to take upon himself that *flesh*, subject to so many miseries. The word *flesh* is not taken here for corrupt nature, (as it is often used by Paul,) but for mortal man; though it marks disdainfully his frail and perishing nature, as in these and similar passages, *for he remembered that they were flesh*, (Psalm 78:39;) *all flesh is grass*, (Isaiah 40:6.) We must at the same time observe, however, that this is a figure of speech in which a part is taken for the whole; for the lower part includes the whole man.<sup>22</sup> It was therefore highly foolish in Apollinaris to imagine that Christ was merely clothed with a human body without a soul; for it may easily be proved from innumerable passages, that he had a soul as well as a body; and when Scripture calls men *flesh*, it does not therefore deprive them of a soul.

The plain meaning therefore is, that *the Speech* begotten by God before all ages, and who always dwelt with the Father, *was made man*. On this article there are two things chiefly to be observed. The first is, that two natures were so united in one Person in Christ, that one and the same Christ is true God and true man. The second is, that the unity of person does not hinder the two natures from remaining distinct, so that his Divinity retains all that is peculiar to itself, and his humanity holds separately whatever belongs to it. And, therefore,

<sup>22</sup> “Car sous la chair et la partie inferieure tout l’homme est compris;” — “for under the *flesh*, and the lower part, the whole man is included.”

as Satan has made a variety of foolish attempts to overturn sound doctrine by heretics, he has always brought forward one or another of these two errors; either that he was the Son of God and the Son of man in so confused a manner, that neither his Divinity remained entire, nor did he wear the true nature of man; or that he was clothed with *flesh*, so as to be as it were double, and to have two separate persons. Thus Nestorius expressly acknowledged both natures, but imagined two Christs, one who was God, and another who was man. Eutyches, on the other hand, while he acknowledged that the one Christ is the Son of God and the Son of man, left him neither of the two natures, but imagined that they were mingled together. And in the present day, Servetus and the Anabaptists invent a Christ who is confusedly compounded of two natures, as if he were a Divine man. In words, indeed, he acknowledges that Christ is God; but if you admit his raving imaginations, the Divinity is at one time changed into human nature, and at another time, the nature of man is swallowed up by the Divinity.

The Evangelist says what is well adapted to refute both of these blasphemies. When he tells us that *the Speech was made flesh*, we clearly infer from this the unity of his Person; for it is impossible that he who is now a man could be any other than he who was always the true God, since it is said that God *was made* man. On the other hand, since he distinctly gives to the man Christ the name of *the Speech*, it follows that Christ, when he became man, did not cease to be what he formerly was, and that no change took place in that eternal essence of God which was clothed with *flesh*. In short, the Son of God began to be man in such a manner that he still continues to be that eternal *Speech* who had no beginning of time.

*And dwelt.* Those who explain that *the flesh* served, as it were, for an abode to Christ, do not perceive the meaning of the Evangelist; for he does not ascribe to Christ a permanent residence amongst us, but says that he remained in it as a guest, for a short time. For the word which he employs (ἐσκήνωσεν) is taken from *tabernacles*<sup>23</sup> He means nothing else than that Christ discharged on the earth the office which had been appointed to him; or, that he did not merely appear for a single moment, but that he conversed among men until he completed the course of his office.

*Among us.* It is doubtful whether he speaks of men in general, or only of himself and the rest of the disciples who were eye-witnesses of what he says. For my own part, I approve more highly of the second view for the Evangelist immediately adds:

*And we beheld his glory.* for though all men might have beheld the *glory* of Christ, yet it was unknown to the greater part on account of their blindness. It was only a few, whose eyes the Holy Spirit opened, that saw this manifestation of *glory*. In a word, Christ was known to be man in such a manner that he exhibited in his Person something far more

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23 “Est deduit d’un mot qui signifie Tabernacles, c’est a dire, tentes et avillons;” — “is derived from a word which signifies Tabernacles, that is, tents and pavilions.”

noble and excellent. Hence it follows that the majesty of God was not annihilated, though it was surrounded by *flesh*; it was indeed concealed under the low condition of the *flesh*, but so as to cause its splendor to be seen.

*As of the only-begotten of the Father.* The word *as* does not, in this passage, denote an inappropriate comparison, but rather expresses true and hearty approbation; as when Paul says, *Walk as children of light*, he bids us actually demonstrate by our works that we are *the children of light*. The Evangelist therefore means, that in Christ was *beheld a glory* which was worthy of the Son of God, and which was a sure proof of his Divinity. He calls him *the Only-begotten*, because he is the only Son of God by nature; as if he would place him above men and angels, and would claim for him alone what belongs to no creature.

*Full of grace.* There were, indeed, other things in which the majesty of Christ appeared, but the Evangelist selected this instance in preference to others, in order to train us to the speculative rather than the practical knowledge of it; and this ought to be carefully observed. Certainly when Christ walked with dry feet upon the waters, ([Matthew 14:26](#); [Mark 6:48](#); [John 6:19](#);) when he cast out devils, and when he displayed his power in other miracles, he might be known to be *the only-begotten* Son of God; but the Evangelist brings forward a part of the approbation, from which faith obtains delightful advantage, because Christ demonstrated that he actually is an inexhaustible fountain of *grace and truth*. Stephen, too, is said to have been *full of grace*,<sup>24</sup> but in a different sense; for the *fullness of grace* in Christ is the fountain from which all of us must draw, as we shall have occasion shortly afterwards to explain more fully.

*Grace and truth.* This might be taken, by a figure of speech, for *true grace*, or the latter term might be explanatory, thus: that he was *full of grace*, which is *truth* or perfection; but as we shall find that he immediately afterwards repeats the same mode of expression, I think that the meaning is the same in both passages. This *grace and truth* he afterwards contrasts with *the Law*; and therefore I interpret it as simply meaning, that the apostles acknowledged Christ to be the Son of God, because he had in himself the fulfillment of things which belong to the spiritual kingdom of God; and, in short, that in all things he showed himself to be the Redeemer and Messiah; which is the most striking mark by which he ought to be distinguished from all others.

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24 This must have been a slip of memory on the part of our Author; for the phrases applied to Stephen are different, though parallel. He is called *a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*, ([Acts 6:5](#);) *full of faith and power*, ([Acts 6:8](#);) and *full of the Holy Ghost*, ([Acts 7:55](#).) — *Ed.*

## John 1:15-18

15. John testifieth <sup>25</sup> of himself, and cried, saying, This is he of whom I spoke; who, coming after me, was preferred to me, for he was more excellent than I. <sup>26</sup> 16. And out of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace. 17. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 18. No man hath ever seen God: the only-begotten Son himself, who is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared him.

15. *John testifieth.* He now relates what was the preaching of John. By using the verb *testifieth* (μαρτυρεῖ) in the present tense, <sup>27</sup> he denotes a continued act, and certainly this doctrine must be continually in force, as if the voice of John were continually resounding in the ears of men. In the same manner he afterwards uses the word *cry*, to intimate that the doctrine of John was in no degree obscure or ambiguous, and that he did not mutter among a few men, <sup>28</sup> but openly, and with a loud voice, preached Christ. The first sentence is intended to convey the statement, that he was sent for the sake of Christ, and therefore that it would have been unreasonable that he should be exalted, while Christ was lying low.

*This is he of whom I spoke.* By these words he means that his intention was, from the beginning, to make Christ known, and that this was the design of his public discourses; as, indeed, there was no other way in which he could discharge his office as ambassador than by calling his disciples to Christ.

*Who, coming after me.* Though John the Baptist was older than Christ by a few months, yet he does not now speak of age; but as he had discharged the office of prophet for a short period before Christ appeared in public, so he makes himself the predecessor with respect to time. With respect, therefore, to public manifestation, Christ *came after* John the Baptist. The words which follow might be literally rendered, *he was made before me, for he was before me*; but the meaning is, that Christ was justly *preferred to* John, *because he was more excellent.* He therefore surrenders his office to Christ and — as the proverb runs — “delivers to him the torch,” or gives way to him as his successor. But as he arose later in the order of time, John reminds his hearers that this is no reason why he should not be *preferred to* himself, as his rank deserved. Thus, all who are superior to others, either in the gifts of God or in any degree of honor, must remain in their own rank, so as to be placed below Christ.

25 “Jean rend (*ou, a rendu*) tesmoignage de luy.” “John gives (*or, gave*) testimony of him.”

26 “Plus excellent que moy, *ou, premier que moy*,” — “more excellent than I, *or, before me*.”

27 “En usant du verbe du temps present, a scavoir, *Rend* tesmoignage, et on pas, *Rendoit*,” — “by using the verb in the present tense, giveth *testimony*, and not gave *testimony*.”

28 “Qu’il n’a point parle entre ses dents, et communique la chose comme en secret a peu de gens;” — “that he did not speak between his teeth, and communicate the matter, as it were secretly, to a few persons.”

**16. *And out of his fullness.*** He begins now to preach about the office of Christ, that it contains within itself an abundance of all blessings, so that no part of salvation must be sought anywhere else. True, indeed, the fountain of life, righteousness, virtue, and wisdom, is with God, but to us it is a hidden and inaccessible fountain. But an abundance of those things is exhibited to us in Christ, that we may be permitted to have recourse to him; for he is ready to flow to us, provided that we open up a channel by faith. He declares in general, that out of Christ we ought not to seek any thing good, though this sentence consists of several clauses. First, he shows that we are all utterly destitute and empty of spiritual blessings; for the abundance which exists in Christ is intended to supply our deficiency, to relieve our poverty, to satisfy our hunger and thirst. Secondly, he warns us that, as soon as we have departed from Christ, it is ill vain for us to seek a single drop of happiness, because God hath determined that whatever is good shall reside in him alone. Accordingly, we shall find angels and men to be dry, heaven to be empty, the earth to be unproductive, and, in short, all things to be of no value, if we wish to be partakers of the gifts of God in any other way than through Christ. Thirdly, he assures us that we shall have no reason to fear the want of any thing, provided that we draw from the *fullness* of Christ, which is in every respect; so complete, that we shall experience it to be a truly inexhaustible fountain; and John classes himself with the rest, not for the sake of modesty, but to make it more evident that no man whatever is excepted.

It is indeed uncertain whether he speaks generally of the whole human race, or means only those who, subsequently to the manifestation of Christ in the flesh, have been made more fully partakers of his blessings. All the godly, no doubt, who lived under the law, drew out of the same *fullness*; but as John immediately afterwards distinguishes between different periods, it is more probable that here he especially recommends that rich abundance of blessings which Christ displayed at his coming. For we know that under the Law the gifts of God were more sparingly tasted, but that when Christ was manifested in flesh, they were poured out, as it were, with a full hand, even to satiety. Not that any of us has obtained a greater abundance of the grace of the Spirit than Abraham did, but I speak of God's ordinary dispensation, and of the way and manner of dispensing. John the Baptist, that he may the more freely invite his disciples to come to Christ, declares that in him is laid up for all an abundance of the blessings of which they are destitute. And yet if any one choose to extend the meaning farther, there will be no absurdity in doing so; or rather, it will agree well with the strain of the discourse, that all the fathers, from the beginning of the world, drew from Christ all the gifts which they possessed; for though *the law was given by Moses*, yet they did not obtain grace by it. But I have already stated what appears to me to be the preferable view; namely, that John here compares us with the fathers, so as to magnify, by means of that comparison, what has been given to us.

*And, grace for grace.* In what manner Augustine explains this passage is well known - that all the blessings which God bestows upon us from time to time, and at length life everlasting, are not granted as the reward due to our merits, but that it proceeds from pure liberality that God thus rewards former *grace*, and crowns his own gifts in us. This is piously and judiciously said, but has nothing to do with the present passage. The meaning would be more simple if you were to take the word *for* (ἀντὶ) comparatively, as meaning, that whatever graces God bestows on us, proceed equally from the same source. It might also be taken as pointing out the final cause, that we now receive *grace*, that God may one day fulfill the work of our salvation, which will be the fulfillment of *grace*. For my own part, I agree with the opinion of those who say that we are watered with the *graces* which were poured out on Christ; for what we receive from Christ he does not bestow upon us as being God, but the Father communicated to him what would flow to us as through a channel. This is the anointing with which he was anointed, that he might anoint us all along with him. Hence, too, he is called Christ, (*the Anointed*), and we are called Christians.

17. *For the Law was given by Moses.* This is an anticipation, by which he meets an objection that was likely to arise; for so highly was *Moses* esteemed by the Jews that they could hardly receive anything that differed from him. The Evangelist therefore shows how far inferior the ministry of *Moses* was to the power of *Christ*. At the same time, this comparison sheds no small luster on the power of Christ; for while the utmost possible deference was rendered to *Moses* by the Jews, the Evangelist reminds them that what he brought was exceedingly small, when compared with the grace of Christ. It would otherwise have been a great hindrance, that they expected to receive from *the Law* what we can only obtain through Christ.

But we must attend to the antithesis, when he contrasts *the law* with *grace and truth*; for his meaning is, that *the law* wanted both of them.<sup>29</sup> The word *Truth* denotes, in my opinion, a fixed and permanent state of things. By the word *Grace* I understand the spiritual fulfillment of those things, the bare letter of which was contained in *the Law*. And those two words may be supposed to refer to the same thing, by a well-known figure of speech, (hypallage;) as if he had said, that *grace*, in which the *truth* of *the Law* consists, was at length exhibited in *Christ*. But as the meaning will be in no degree affected, it is of no importance whether you view them as united or as distinguished. This at least is certain, that the Evangelist means, that in *the Law* there was nothing more than a shadowy image of spiritual blessings, but that they are actually found in *Christ*; whence it follows, that if you separate *the Law* from *Christ*, there remains nothing in it but empty figures. For this reason Paul says that

*the shadows were in the law, but the body is in Christ,*

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29 “Que la Loy n’a eu ne l’un ne l’autre;” — “that the Law had neither the one nor the other.”



(Colossians 2:17.)

And yet it must not be supposed that anything was exhibited by *the Law* in a manner fitted to deceive; for *Christ* is the soul which gives life to that which would otherwise have been dead under *the law*. But here a totally different question meets us, namely, what *the law* could do by itself and without Christ; and the Evangelist maintains that nothing permanently valuable is found in it until we come to Christ. This *truth* consists in our obtaining through Christ that *grace* which *the law* could not at all bestow; and therefore I take the word *grace* in a general sense, as denoting both the unconditional forgiveness of sins, and the renewal of the heart. For while the Evangelist points out briefly the distinction between the Old and New Testaments,<sup>30</sup> (which is more fully described in [Jeremiah 31:31](#)), he includes in this word all that relates to spiritual righteousness. Now this righteousness consists of two parts; first, that God is reconciled to us by free *grace*, in not imputing to us our sins; and, secondly, that he has engraven his *law* in our hearts, and, by his Spirit, renews men within to obedience to it; from which it is evident that *the Law* is incorrectly and falsely expounded, if there are any whose attention it fixes on itself, or whom it hinders from coming to *Christ*

**18.** *No man hath ever seen God.* Most appropriately is this added to confirm the preceding statement; for the knowledge of God is the door by which we enter into the enjoyment of all blessings; and as it is by Christ alone that God makes himself known to us, hence too it follows that we ought to seek all things from Christ. This order of doctrine ought to be carefully observed. No remark appears to be more common than this, that each of us receives, according to the measure of his faith, what God offers to us; but there are few who think that we must bring the vessel of faith and of the knowledge of God with which we draw.

When he says that *no man hath seen God*, we must not understand him to refer to the outward perception of the bodily eye; for he means generally, that as God *dwells in inaccessible light*, ([1 Timothy 6:16](#)), he cannot be known but in Christ, who is his lively image. This passage is usually explained thus that as the naked majesty of God is concealed within himself, he never could be comprehended, except so far as he revealed himself in Christ; and therefore that it was only in Christ that God was formerly known to the fathers. But I rather think that the Evangelist here abides by the comparison already stated, namely, how much better our condition is than that of the fathers, because God, who was formerly concealed in his secret glory, may now be said to have rendered himself visible; for certainly when Christ is called *the lively image of God*, ([Hebrews 1:3](#)), this refers to the peculiar privilege of the New Testament. In like manner, the Evangelist describes, in this passage, something new and uncommon, when he says that *the only-begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the*

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<sup>30</sup> The points of agreement and of difference between the Old and New Testaments are copiously illustrated by our Author in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II. chap. 10.11 — *Ed.*

*Father*, hath made known to us what was formerly concealed. He therefore magnifies the manifestation of God, which has been brought to us by the gospel, in which he distinguishes us from the fathers, and shows that we are superior to them; as also Paul explains more fully in the Third and Fourth chapters of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. For he maintains that there is now no longer any *veil*, such as existed under the Law, but that God is openly beheld in the face of Christ.

If it be thought unreasonable that the fathers are deprived of the knowledge of God, who have the prophets daily going before them and holding out the torch, I reply, that what is ascribed to us is not simply or absolutely denied to them, but that a comparison is made between the less and the greater, as we say; because they had nothing more than little sparks of the true light, the full brightness of which daily shines around us. If it be objected, that at that time also God was *seen face to face*, ([Genesis 32:30](#); [Deuteronomy 34:10](#);) I maintain that that sight is not at all to be compared with ours; but as God was accustomed at that time to exhibit himself obscurely, and, as it were, from a distance, those to whom he was more clearly revealed say that they *saw him face to face*. They say so with reference to their own time; but they did not see God in any other way than wrapped up in many folds of figures and ceremonies.<sup>31</sup> That vision which Moses obtained on the mountain was remarkable and more excellent than almost all the rest; and yet God expressly declares,

thou shalt not be able to see my face, only thou shalt see my back, ([Exodus 33:23](#);)

by which metaphor he shows that the time for a full and clear revelation had not yet come. It must also be observed that, when the fathers wished to behold God, they always turned their eyes towards Christ. I do not only mean that they beheld God in his eternal *Speech*, but also that they attended, with their whole mind and with their whole heart, to the promised manifestation of Christ. For this reason we shall find that Christ afterwards said, *Abraham saw my day*, ([John 8:56](#);) and that which is subordinate is not contradictory. It is therefore a fixed principle, that God, who was formerly invisible, hath now made himself visible in Christ.

When he says that the Son *was in the bosom of the Father*, the metaphor is borrowed from men, who are said to receive into their *bosom* those to whom they communicate all their secrets. The breast is the seat of counsel. He therefore shows that the Son was acquainted with the most hidden secrets of his Father, in order to inform us that we have the breast of God, as it were, laid open to us in the Gospel.

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31 "Enveloppemens de figures et ceremonies."

### John 1:19-23

**19.** And this is <sup>32</sup> the testimony of John, when the Jews sent Priests and Levites to Jerusalem, to ask him, Who art thou? **20.** And he confessed, and denied not; he confessed, I say, I am not the Christ. **21.** They then asked him, What art thou then? Art thou Elijah? And he said, I am not. Art thou a Prophet? <sup>33</sup> And he answered, No. **22.** They said therefore to him, Who art thou, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What sayest thou of thyself? **23.** He saith, I am the voice of him who crieth in the wilderness, <sup>34</sup> Prepare the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah.

**19.** *And this is the testimony.* Hitherto the Evangelist has related the preaching of John about Christ; he now comes down to a more illustrious testimony, which was delivered to the ambassadors of *the Priests*, that they might convey it to Jerusalem. He says, therefore, that John openly confessed for what purpose he was sent by God. The first inquiry here is, for what purpose *the Priests* put questions to him. It is generally believed that, out of hatred to Christ, they gave to John an honor which did not belong to him; but this could not be the reason, for Christ was not yet known to them. Others say that they were better pleased with John, because he was of the lineage and order of the priesthood; but neither do I think that this is probable; for since they expected from *Christ* all prosperity, why did they voluntarily contrive a false *Christ*? I think, therefore, that there was another reason that induced them. It was now a long time since they had the Prophets; John came suddenly and contrary to expectation; and the minds of all were aroused to expect the Messiah. Besides, all entertained the belief that the coining of the Messiah was at hand.

That they may not appear to be careless about their duty, if they neglect or disguise a matter of so great importance, they *ask John, Who art thou?* At first, therefore, they did not act from malice, but, on the contrary, actuated by the desire of redemption, they wish to know if John be the Christ, because he begins to change the order which had been customary in the Church. And yet I do not deny that ambition, and a wish to retain their authority, had some influence over them; but nothing certainly was farther from their intention than to transfer the honor of Christ to another. Nor is their conduct in this matter inconsistent with the office which they sustain; for since they held the government of the Church of God, it was their duty to take care that no one rashly obtruded himself, that no founder of a new sect should arise, that the unity of faith should not be broken in the Church, and that none should introduce new and foreign ceremonies. It is evident, therefore, that a report about

32 “C’est ici aussi (*ou, c’est donc ci*) le tesmoignage;” — “this is also (*or, this is therefore*) the testimony.”

33 “Es-tu Prophete, ou, le Prophete?” — “Art thou a Prophet, or, the Prophet?”

34 “De celuy qui crie au desert.”

John was widely spread and aroused the minds of all; and this was arranged by the wonderful Providence of God, that this *testimony* might be more strikingly complete.

20. *And he confessed, and denied not.* That is, *he confessed* openly, and without any ambiguity or hypocrisy. The word *confess*, in the first instance, means generally, that he stated the fact as it really was. In the second instance, it is repeated in order to express the form of the confession. He replied expressly, *that he was not the Christ*

21. *Art thou Elijah?* Why do they name *Elijah* rather than Moses? It was because they learned from the prediction of [Malachi 4:2, 5](#), that when the Messiah, *the Sun of Righteousness*, should arise, *Elijah* would be the morning star to announce his approach. But the question is founded on a false opinion which they had long held; for, holding the opinion that the soul of a man departs out of one body into another, when the Prophet Malachi announced that *Elijah* would be sent, they imagined that the same *Elijah*, who lived under the reign of king Ahab, ([1 Kings 17:1](#);) was to come. It is therefore a just and true reply which John makes, that *he is not Elijah*; for he speaks according to the opinion which they attached to the words; but Christ, giving the true interpretation of the Prophet, affirms that *John is Elijah*, ([Matthew 11:14](#); [Mark 9:13](#).)

*Art thou a Prophet?* Erasmus gives an inaccurate explanation of these words by limiting them to Christ; for the addition of the article (ὁ προφήτης, *the prophet*) carries no emphasis in this passage; and the messengers afterwards declare plainly enough, that they meant a different *prophet* from Christ; for they sum up the whole: by saying, (verse 25,) *if thou art neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor a Prophet*. Thus we see that they intended to point out different persons. Others think that they inquired if he was one of the ancient *prophets*; but neither do I approve of that exposition. Rather do they by this term point out the office of John, and ask if God had appointed him to be *a prophet*. When he replies, *I am not*, he does not for the sake of modesty tell a lie, but honestly and sincerely detaches himself from the company of the *prophets*. And yet this reply is not inconsistent with the honorable attestation which Christ gives him. Christ bestows on John the designation of *prophet*, and even adds that he is *more than a prophet*, ([Matthew 11:9](#);) but by these words he does nothing more than demand credit and authority for his doctrine, and at the same time describes, in lofty terms, the excellence of the office which had been conferred on him. But in this passage John has a different object in view, which is, to show that he has no special message, as was usually the case with the *prophets*, but that he was merely appointed to be the herald of Christ.

This will be made still more clear by a comparison. All ambassadors — even those who are not sent on matters of great importance — obtain the name and authority of ambassadors, because they hold special commissions. Such were all the Prophets who, having been enjoined to deliver certain predictions, discharged the prophetic office. But if some weighty matter come to be transacted, and if two ambassadors are sent, one of whom announces the speedy

arrival of another who possesses full power to transact the whole matter, and if this latter has received injunctions to bring it to a conclusion, will not the former embassy be reckoned a part and appendage of the latter, which is the principal? Such was the case with John the Baptist, to whom God had given no other injunction than to prepare the Jews for listening to Christ, and becoming his disciples.<sup>35</sup> That this is the meaning, will still more fully appear from the context; for we must investigate the opposite clause, which immediately follows. *I am not a prophet*, says he, but *a voice crying in the wilderness*. The distinction lies in this, that *the voice crying, that a way may be prepared for the Lord*, is not a *prophet*, but merely a subordinate minister, so to speak; and his doctrine is only a sort of preparation for listening to another Teacher. In this way John, though he is more excellent than all the prophets, still is *not a prophet*

**23.** *The voice of him who crieth.* As he would have been chargeable with rashness in undertaking the office of teaching, if he had not received a commission, he shows what was the duty which he had to perform, and proves it by a quotation from the Prophet [Isaiah 60:3](#). Hence it follows that he does nothing but what God commanded him to do. *Isaiah* does not, indeed, speak there of John alone, but, promising the restoration of the Church, he predicts that there will yet be heard joyful voices, commanding to *prepare the way for the Lord*. Though he points out the coming of God, when he brought back the people from their captivity in Babylon, yet the true accomplishment was the manifestation of Christ in flesh. Among the heralds who announced that the Lord was at hand, John held the chief place.

To enter into ingenious inquiries, as some have done, into the meaning of the word *Voice*, would be frivolous. John is called *a Voice*, because he was enjoined to cry. It is in a figurative sense, undoubtedly, that *Isaiah* gives the name *wilderness* to the miserable desolation of the Church, which seemed to preclude the return of the people; as if he had said, that a passage would indeed be opened up for the captive people, but that the Lord would find a road through regions in which there was no road. But that visible *wilderness*, in which John preached, was a figure or image of the awful desolation which took away all hope of deliverance. If this comparison be considered, it will be easily seen that no torture has been given to the words of the prophet in this application of them; for God arranged everything in such a manner, as to place before the eyes of his people, who were overwhelmed with their calamities, a mirror of this prediction.

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35 “Sinon de preparer les Juifs a donner audience a Christ, et estre ses disciples.”

## John 1:24-28

24. Now those who were sent were of the Pharisees. 25. Therefore they asked him, and said to him, Why then dost thou baptize, if thou art not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor a Prophet? 26. John answered them, saying, I baptize with water; but one standeth in the midst of you, whom you know not. 27. It is he who, coming after me, is preferred to me; whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to loose. 28. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

24. *Were of the Pharisees.* He says that they were *Pharisees*, who at that time held the highest rank in the Church; and he says so in order to inform us, that they were not some contemptible persons of the order of the Levites, but men clothed with authority. This is the reason why they raise a question about his *baptism*. Ordinary ministers would have been satisfied with any kind of answer; but those men, because they cannot draw from John what they desired, accuse him of rashness for venturing to introduce a new religious observance.

25. *Why then dost thou baptize?* By laying down those three degrees, they appear to form a very conclusive argument: *if thou art not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor a prophet*; for it does not belong to every man to institute the practice of *baptism*. The *Messiah* was to be one who possessed all authority. Of *Elijah* who was to come, they had formed this opinion, that he would commence the restoration both of the royal authority and of the Church. The *prophets* of God, they readily grant, have a right to discharge the office committed to them. They conclude, therefore, that for John to *baptize* is an unlawful novelty, since he has received from God no public station. But they are wrong in not acknowledging him to be that *Elijah* who is mentioned by [Malachi 4:5](#); though he denies that he is that *Elijah* of whom they foolishly dreamed.

26. *I baptize with water.* This ought to have been abundantly sufficient for the correction of their mistake, but a reproof otherwise clear is of no advantage to the deaf; for, when he sends them to Christ, and declares that Christ is present, this is a clear proof not only that he was divinely appointed to be a minister of Christ, but that he is the true *Elijah*, who is sent to testify that the time is come<sup>36</sup> for the renovation of the Church. There is a contrast here which is not fully stated; for the spiritual *baptism* of Christ is not expressly contrasted with the external *baptism* of John, but that latter clause about the *baptism* of the Spirit might easily be supplied, and shortly afterwards both are set down by the Evangelist.

This answer may be reduced to two heads: first, that John claims nothing for himself but what he has a right to claim, because he has Christ for the Author of his *baptism*, in which consists the truth of the sign; and, secondly, that he has nothing but the administration

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36 “Que le temps estoit venu.”

of the outward sign, while the whole power and efficacy is in the hands of Christ alone. Thus he defends his *baptism* so far as its truth depends on anything else; but, at the same time, by declaring that he has not the power of the Spirit, he exalts the dignity of Christ, that the eyes of men may be fixed on him alone. This is the highest and best regulated moderation, when a minister borrows from Christ whatever authority he claims for himself, in such a manner as to trace it to him, ascribing to him alone all that he possesses.

It is a foolish mistake, however, into which some people have been led, of supposing that John's baptism was different from ours; for John does not argue here about the advantage and usefulness of his baptism, but merely compares his own person with the person of Christ. In like manner, if we were inquiring, at the present day, what part belongs to us, and what belongs to Christ, in baptism, we must acknowledge that Christ alone performs what baptism figuratively represents, and that we have nothing beyond the bare administration of the sign. There is a twofold way of speaking in Scripture about the sacraments; for sometimes it tells us that they are *the laver of regeneration*, ([Titus 3:5](#);) that by them *our sins are washed away*, ([1 Peter 3:21](#);) that we are in-grafted into the body of Christ, that our old man is crucified, and that we rise again to newness of life, ([Romans 6:4, 5, 6](#);)

and, in those cases, Scripture joins the power of Christ with the ministry of man; as, indeed, man is nothing else than the hand of Christ. Such modes of expression show, not what man can of himself accomplish, but what Christ performs by man, and by the sign, as his instruments. But as there is a strong tendency to fall into superstition, and as men, through the pride which is natural to them, take from God the honor due to him, and basely appropriate it to themselves; so Scripture, in order to restrain this blasphemous arrogance, sometimes distinguishes ministers from Christ, as in this passage, that we may learn that ministers are nothing and can do nothing.

*One standeth in the midst of you.* He indirectly charges them with stupidity, in not knowing Christ, to whom their minds ought to have been earnestly directed; and he always insists earnestly on this point, that nothing can be known about his ministry, until men have come to him who is the Author of it. When he says that Christ standeth in the midst of, them, it is that he may excite their desire and their exertion to know him. The amount of what he says is, that he wishes to place himself as low as possible, lest any degree of honor improperly bestowed on him might obscure the excellence of Christ. It is probable that he had these sentences frequently in his mouth, when he saw himself immoderately extolled by the perverse opinions of men.

*27. Who coming after me.* Here he says two things; first, that Christ was behind him in the order of time; but, secondly, that he was far before him in rank and dignity, because the rather preferred him to all. Soon after he will add a third statement, that Christ was preferred to all others, because he is in reality more exalted than all others.

28. *These things were done in Bethabara.* The place is mentioned, not only to authenticate the narrative, but also to inform us that this answer was given amidst a numerous assembly of people; for there were many who flocked to John's baptism, and this was his ordinary place for baptizing. It is likewise supposed by some to be a passage across Jordan, and, from this circumstance, they derive the name, for they interpret it *the house of passage*; unless, perhaps, some may prefer the opinion of those who refer to the memorable *passage* of the people, ([Joshua 3:13](#),) when God opened up a way for them in the midst of the waters, under the direction of Joshua. Others say that it ought rather to be read *Betharaba*. Instead of *Bethabara*, some have inserted here the name *Bethany*, but this is a mistake; for we shall afterwards see how near *Bethany* was to Jerusalem. The situation of *Bethabara*, as laid down by those who have described the country, agrees best with the words of the Evangelist; though I have no wish to dispute about the pronunciation of the word.



### John 1:29-34

29. The next day, John seeth Jesus coming to him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! 30. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man who was preferred to me, because he was more excellent than I. 31. And I knew him not; but in order that he might be manifested to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water. 32. And John testified, saying, I saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven, and it remained upon him. 33. And I knew him not; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, it is he who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. 34. I saw therefore, and testified, that he is the Son of God.

29. *The next day.* There can be no doubt that John had already spoken about the manifestation of the Messiah; but when Christ began to appear, he wished that his announcement of him should quickly become known, and the time was now at hand when Christ would put an end to John's ministry, as, when the sun is risen, the dawn suddenly disappears. After having testified to the priests who were sent to him, that he from whom they ought to seek the truth and power of baptism was already present, and was conversing in the midst of the people, *the next day* he pointed him out to the view of all. For these two acts, following each other in close succession, must have powerfully affected their minds. This too is the reason why Christ appeared in the presence of John.

*Behold the Lamb of God.* The principal office of Christ is briefly but clearly stated; that he *takes away the sins of the world* by the sacrifice of his death, and reconciles men to God. There are other favors, indeed, which Christ bestows upon us, but this is the chief favor, and the rest depend on it; that, by appeasing the wrath of God, he makes us to be reckoned holy and righteous. For from this source flow all the streams of blessings, that, by not imputing our sins, he receives us into favor. Accordingly, John, in order to conduct us to Christ, commences with the gratuitous forgiveness of sins which we obtain through him.

By the word *Lamb* he alludes to the ancient sacrifices of the Law. He had to do with Jews who, having been accustomed to sacrifices, could not be instructed about atonement for sins in any other way than by holding out to them a sacrifice. As there were various kinds of them, he makes one, by a figure of speech, to stand for the whole; and it is probable that John alluded to the paschal *lamb*. It must be observed, in general, that John employed this mode of expression, which was better adapted to instruct the Jews, and possessed greater force; as in our own day, in consequence of baptism being generally practiced, we understand better what is meant by obtaining forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ, when we are told that we are washed and cleansed by it from our pollutions. At the same time, as the Jews commonly held superstitious notions about sacrifices, he corrects this fault in passing,

by reminding them of the object to which all the sacrifices were directed. It was a very wicked abuse of the institution of sacrifice, that they had their confidence fixed on the outward signs; and therefore John, holding out Christ, testifies that he is *the Lamb of God*; by which he means that all the sacrifices, which the Jews were accustomed to offer under the Law, had no power whatever to atone for sins, but that they were only figures, the truth of which was manifested in Christ himself.

*Who taketh away the sin of the world.* He uses the word sin in the singular number, for any kind of iniquity; as if he had said, that every kind of unrighteousness which alienates men from God is *taken away* by Christ. And when he says, *the sin Of The World*, he extends this favor indiscriminately to the whole human race; that the Jews might not think that he had been sent to them alone. But hence we infer that the whole *world* is involved in the same condemnation; and that as all men without exception are guilty of unrighteousness before God, they need to be reconciled to him. John the Baptist, therefore, by speaking generally of *the sin of the world*, intended to impress upon us the conviction of our own misery, and to exhort us to seek the remedy. Now our duty is, to embrace the benefit which is offered to all, that each of us may be convinced that there is nothing to hinder him from obtaining reconciliation in Christ, provided that he comes to him by the guidance of faith.

Besides, he lays down but one method of *taking away sins*. We know that from the beginning of the world, when their own consciences held them convinced, men labored anxiously to procure forgiveness. Hence the vast number of propitiatory offerings, by which they falsely imagined that they appeased God. I own, indeed, that all the spurious rites of a propitiatory nature drew their existence from a holy origin, which was, that God had appointed the sacrifices which directed men to Christ; but yet every man contrived for himself his own method of appeasing God. But John leads us back to Christ alone, and informs us that there is no other way in which God is reconciled to us than through his agency, because he alone *takes away sin*. He therefore leaves no other refuge for sinners than to flee to Christ; by which he overturns all satisfactions, and purifications, and redemptions, that are invented by men; as, indeed, they are nothing else than base inventions framed by the subtlety of the devil.

The verb ἀῖρειν (*to take away*) may be explained in two ways; either that Christ took upon himself the load which weighed us down, as it is said that he *carried our sins on the tree*, (1 Peter 2:24;) and Isaiah says that

the chastisement of our peace was laid on him, (Isaiah 53:5;)

or that he *blots out* sins. But as the latter statement depends on the former, I gladly embrace both; namely, that Christ, by bearing our sins, *takes them away*. Although, therefore, sin continually dwells in us, yet there is none in the judgment of God, because when it has been annulled by the grace of Christ, it is not imputed to us. Nor do I dislike the remark of Chrysostom, that the verb in the present tense — ὁ αἴρων, *who taketh away*, denotes a

continued act; for the satisfaction which Christ once made is always in full vigor. But he does not merely teach us that Christ *takes away sin*, but points out also the method, namely, that he hath reconciled the Father to us by means of his death; for this is what he means by the word *Lamb*. Let us therefore learn that we become reconciled to God by the grace of Christ, if we go straight to his death, and when we believe that he who was nailed to the cross is the only propitiatory sacrifice, by which all our guilt is removed.

30. *This is he of whom I said.* He comprehends every thing in a few words, when he declares that Christ is the person who, he said, was to be preferred to him; for hence it follows that John is nothing more than a herald sent on his account; and hence again it is evident that Christ is the Messiah. Three things are here stated; for when he says that a man *cometh after him*, he means that he himself was before him in the order of time, to prepare the way for Christ, according to the testimony of Malachi,

Behold, I send my messenger before my face, ([Malachi 3:1](#).)

Again, when he says that *he was preferred to himself*, this relates to the glory with which God adorned his Son, when he came into the world to fulfill the office of a Redeemer. At last, the reason is added, which is, that Christ is far superior in dignity to John the Baptist. That honor, therefore, which the Father bestowed upon him was not accidental, but was due to his eternal majesty. But of this expression, *he was preferred to me, because he was before me*, I have already Spoken.<sup>37</sup>

31. *And I knew him not.* That his testimony may not be suspected of having been given either from friendship or favor, he anticipates such a doubt, by affirming that he had no other knowledge of Christ than what he had obtained by divine inspiration. The meaning, therefore, amounts to this, that John does not speak at his own suggestion, nor for the favor of man, but by the inspiration of the Spirit and the command of God.

*I came baptizing with water;* that is, I was called and appointed to this office, *that I might manifest him to Israel;* which the Evangelist afterwards explains more fully, and confirms, when he introduces John the Baptist, testifying that he had no knowledge of Christ but what he had obtained by oracle; that is, by information or revelation from God.<sup>38</sup> Instead of what we find here, I came to baptize, he there states expressly (verse 33) that he was sent; for it is only the calling of God that makes lawful ministers, because every person who of his own accord, thrusts himself forward, whatever learning or eloquence he may possess, is not entitled to any authority, and the reason is, that he is not authorized by God. Now since it was necessary that John, in order that he might lawfully baptize, should be sent by God, let it be inferred from this, that it is not in the power of any man whatever to institute sacraments,

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37 See [page 49](#).

38 “Par oracle; c’est a dire, advertisement ou revelation de Dieu.”

but that this right belongs to God alone, as Christ, on another occasion, in order to prove the baptism of John, asks *if it was from heaven, or from men*, ([Matthew 21:25](#).)

32. *I saw the Spirit, descending like a dove*. This is not a literal but a figurative mode of expression; for with what eyes could he *see the Spirit*? But as the *dove* was a certain and infallible sign of the presence of *the Spirit*, it is called *the Spirit*, by a figure of speech in which one name is substituted for another; not that he is in reality *the Spirit*, but that he points him out, as far as human capacity can admit. And this metaphorical language is frequently employed in the sacraments; for why does Christ call the bread *his body*, but because the name of the thing is properly transferred to the sign? especially when the sign is, at the same time, a true and efficacious pledge, by which we are made certain that the thing itself which is signified is bestowed on us. Yet it must not be understood that the *dove* contained *the Spirit* who *fills heaven and earth*, ([Jeremiah 23:24](#),) but that he was present by his power, so that John knew that such an exhibition was not presented to his eyes in vain. In like manner, we know that the body of Christ is not connected with the bread, and yet we are partakers of his body.

A question now arises, why did *the Spirit* at that time appear in the form of a *dove*? We must always hold that there is a correspondence between the sign and the reality. When *the Spirit* was given to the apostles, they *saw cloven tongues of fire*, ([Acts 2:3](#),) because the preaching of the gospel was to be spread through all tongues, and was to possess the power of fire. But in this passage God intended to make a public representation of that mildness of Christ of which Isaiah speaks in lofty terms,

The smoking flax he will not quench, and the bruised reed he will not break, ([Isaiah 42:3](#).)

It was then, for the first time, that *the Spirit* was *seen descending on him*; not that he had formerly been destitute of him, but because he might be said to be then consecrated by a solemn rite. For we know that he remained in concealment, during thirty years, like a private individual, because the time for his manifestation was not yet come; but when he intended to make himself known to the world, he began with his baptism. At that time, therefore, he received *the Spirit* not only for himself, but for his people; and on that account his descent was visible, that we may know that there dwells in him an abundance of all gifts of which we are empty and destitute. This may easily be inferred from the words of the Baptist; for when he says, *Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, it is he who baptizeth with the Spirit*, his meaning is, that the reason why *the Spirit* was beheld in a visible form, and *remained on Christ*, was, that he might water all his people with his fullness. What it is to *baptize with the Spirit* I have already noticed in a few words; namely, that he imparts its efficacy to baptism, that it may not be vain or useless, and this he accomplishes by the power of his Spirit.

33. *Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending*. Here a difficult question arises; for if John *did not know Christ*, why does he refuse to admit him to baptism? To a person whom

he did not know he would not say, *I ought rather to be baptized by thee*, ([Matthew 3:14](#).) Some reply, that he knew him to such an extent as to regard him with the reverence due to a distinguished Prophet, but was not aware that he was *the Son of God*. But this is a poor solution of the difficulty, for every man ought to obey the calling of God without any respect of persons. No rank or excellence of man ought to prevent us from doing our duty, and therefore John would have shown disrespect to God and to his baptism, if he had spoken in this manner to any other person than the Son of God. it follows that he must have previously known Christ.

In the first place, it ought to be observed, that the *knowledge* here mentioned is that which arises from personal and long acquaintance. Although he recognizes Christ whenever he sees him, still it does not cease to be true that they were not known to each other according to the ordinary custom of men, for the commencement of his knowledge proceeded from God. But the question is not yet fully answered; for he says that the sight of the Holy Spirit was the mark by which he was pointed out to him. Now he had not yet *seen the Spirit*, when he had addressed Christ as the Son of God. For my own part, I willingly embrace the opinion of those who think that this sign was added for confirmation, and that it was not so much for the sake of John as for the sake of us all. John indeed saw it, but it was rather for others than for himself. *Bucer* appropriately quotes that saying of Moses,

This shall be a sign to you, that after three days journey, you shall sacrifice to me on the mountain, ([Exodus 3:12](#).)

Undoubtedly, when they were going out, they already knew that God would conduct and watch over their deliverance; but this was a confirmation *a posteriori*, as the phrase is; that is, from the event, after it had taken place. In like manner, this came as an addition to the former revelation which had been given to John.

**34.** *I saw and testified.* He means that what he declares is not doubtful; because God was pleased to make him fully and thoroughly acquainted with those things of which he was to be the witness to the world; and it is worthy of notice, that he *testified* that Christ was *the Son of God*, because he who gives the Holy Spirit must be the Christ, for to no other belongs the honor and the office of reconciling men to God.

### John 1:35-39

35. The next day John was again standing, and two of his disciples; 36. And looking at Jesus walking, he said, Behold the Lamb of God! 37. And those two disciples heard him speak, and followed Jesus. 38. And Jesus turning, and looking at them following him, saith to them, What do you seek? And they said to him, Rabbi, (which, if you interpret it, is explained Master,) where dwellest thou? 39. He saith to them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and remained with him that day; for it was about the tenth hour.

36. *Behold the Lamb of God!* Hence appears more clearly what I have already stated, that when John perceived that he was approaching the end of his course, he labored incessantly to resign his office to Christ. His firmness too gives greater credit to his testimony. But by insisting so earnestly, during many successive days, in repeating the commendation of Christ, he shows that his own course was nearly finished. Here we see also how small and low the beginning of the Church was. John, indeed, prepared disciples for Christ, but it is only now that Christ begins to collect a Church. He has no more than two men who are mean and unknown, but this even contributes to illustrate his glory, that within a short period, without human aid, and without a strong hand, he spreads his kingdom in a wonderful and incredible manner. We ought also to observe what is the chief object to which John directs the attention of men; it is, to find in Christ the forgiveness of sins. And as Christ had presented himself to the disciples for the express purpose that they might come to him, so now when they come, he gently encourages and exhorts them; for he does not wait until they first address him, but asks, *What do you seek?* This kind and gracious invitation, which was once made to two persons, now belongs to all. We ought not therefore to fear that Christ will withdraw from us or refuse to us easy access, provided that he sees us desirous to come to him; but, on the contrary, he will stretch out his hand to assist our endeavors. And how will not he meet those who come to him, who seeks at a distance those who are wandering and astray, that he may bring them back to the right road?

38. *Rabbi.* This name was commonly given to persons of high rank, or who possessed any kind of honor. But the Evangelist here points out another use of it which was made in his own age, which was, that they addressed by this name the teachers and expounders of the word of God. Although, therefore, those two disciples do not yet recognize Christ as the only Teacher of the Church, yet, moved by the commendation bestowed on him by John the Baptist, they hold him to be a Prophet and teacher, which is the first step towards receiving instruction.

*Where dwellest thou?* By this example we are taught that from the first, rudiments of the Church we ought to draw such a relish for Christ as will excite our desire to profit; and

next, that we ought not to be satisfied with a mere passing look, but that we ought to seek his dwelling, that he may receive us as guests. For there are very many who smell the gospel at a distance only, and thus allow Christ suddenly to disappear, and all that they have learned concerning him to pass away. And though those two persons did not at that time become his ordinary disciples, yet there can be no doubt that, during that night, he instructed them more fully, so that they soon afterwards became entirely devoted to him.

39. *It was about the tenth hour;* that is, the evening was approaching, for it was not more than two hours till sunset. The day was at that time divided by them into twelve hours, which were longer in summer and shorter in winter. But from this circumstance we infer that those disciples were so eagerly desirous to hear Christ, and to gain a more intimate knowledge of him, that they gave themselves no concern about a night's lodging. On the contrary, we are, for the most part, very unlike them, for we incessantly delay, because it is not convenient for us to follow Christ.

## John 1:40-42

**40.** Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of those who heard John speak and followed him. **41.** He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith to him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. **42.** He brought him therefore to Jesus; and Jesus, looking at him, said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jonah; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, being interpreted, Peter.

**40.** *Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.* The design of the Evangelist, down to the end of the chapter, is to inform us how gradually the disciples were brought to Christ. Here he relates about Peter, and afterwards he will mention Philip and Nathanael. The circumstance of *Andrew* immediately bringing his brother expresses the nature of faith, which does not conceal or quench the light, but rather spreads it in every direction. *Andrew* has scarcely a spark, and yet, by means of it, he enlightens his brother. Woe to our indolence, therefore, if we do not, after having been fully enlightened, endeavor to make others partakers of the same grace. We may observe in *Andrew* two things which Isaiah requires from the children of God; namely, that each should take his neighbor by the hand, and next, that he should say,

Come, let us go up into the mountain of the Lord,  
and he will teach us, ([Isaiah 2:3](#).)

For Andrew stretches out the hand to his brother, but at the same time he has this object in view, that he may become a fellow-disciple with him in the school of Christ. We ought also to observe the purpose of God, which determined that *Peter*, who was to be far more eminent, was brought to the knowledge of Christ by the agency and ministry of Andrew; that none of us, however excellent, may refuse to be taught by an inferior; for that man will be severely punished for his peevishness, or rather for his pride, who, through his contempt of a man, will not deign to come to Christ.

**41.** *We have found the Messiah.* The Evangelist has interpreted the Hebrew word *Messiah* (*Anointed*) by the Greek word *Christ*, in order to publish to the whole world what was secretly known to the Jews. It was the ordinary designation of kings,<sup>39</sup> as *anointing* was observed by them as a solemn rite. But still they were aware that one King would be anointed by God, under whom they might hope to obtain perfect and eternal happiness; especially when they should learn that the earthly kingdom of David would not be permanent. And as God raised their minds, when subdued and weighed down by various calamities, to the expectation of the Messiah, so he more clearly revealed to them that his coming was at hand. The prediction of Daniel is more clear and forcible than all the rest, so far as relates to the

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<sup>39</sup> See *Harmony of the Three Evangelists*, volume 1 [page 92, n. 2](#); and [page 142, n. 2](#).



name of *Christ*; for he does not, like the earlier Prophets, ascribe it to kings, but appropriates it exclusively to the Redeemer, ([Daniel 9:25, 26](#).) Hence this mode of expression became prevalent, so that when the *Messiah* or *Christ* was mentioned, it was understood that no other than the Redeemer was meant. Thus we shall find the woman of Samaria saying, *the Messiah will come*, ([John 4:25](#);) which makes it the more wonderful that he who was so eagerly desired by all, and whom they had constantly in their mouths, should be received by so small a number of persons.

**42. *Thou art Simon.*** Christ gives a name to *Simon*, not as men commonly do, from some past event, or from what is now perceived in them, but because he was to make him Peter, (*a stone*.) First, he says, *Thou art Simon, the son of Jonah*. He repeats the name of his father in an abridged form; which is common enough when names are translated into other languages; for it will plainly appear from the last chapter that he was the son of *Johanna* or *John*. But all this amounts to nothing more than that he will be a very different person from what he now is. For it is not for the sake of honor that he mentions his father; but as he was descended from a family which was obscure, and which was held in no estimation among men, Christ declares that this will not prevent him from making *Simon* a man of unshaken courage. The Evangelist, therefore, mentions this as a prediction, that *Simon* received a new name. I look upon it as a prediction, not only because Christ foresaw the future steadfastness of faith in *Peter*, but because he foretold what he would give to him. He now magnifies the grace which he determined afterwards to bestow upon him; and therefore he does not say that this is now his name, but delays it till a future time.

*Thou shalt be called Cephas.* All the godly, indeed, may justly be called *Peters* (*stones*;) which, having been Sounded on Christ, are fitted for building the temple of God; but he alone is so called on account of his singular excellence. Yet the Papists act a ridiculous part, when they substitute him in the place of Christ; so as to be the foundation of the Church, as if he too were not founded on Christ along with the rest of the disciples; and they are doubly ridiculous when out of a *stone* they make him a *head*. For among the rhapsodies of Gratian there is a foolish canon under the name of Anacletus, who, exchanging a Hebrew word for a Greek one, and not distinguishing the Greek word κεφαλή (*kephale*) from the Hebrew word *Cephas*, thinks that by this name Peter was appointed to be Head of the Church. *Cephas* is rather a Chaldaic than a Hebrew word; but that was the customary pronunciation of it after the Babylonish captivity. There is, then, no ambiguity in the words of Christ; for he promises what Peter had not at all expected, and thus magnifies his own grace to all ages, that his former condition may not lead us to think less highly of him, since this remarkable appellation informs us that he was made a new man.

## John 1:43-46

43. The next day Jesus wished to go into Galilee, and found Philip, and said to him, Follow me. 44. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith to him, We have found Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets write. 46. Nathanael said to him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see.

43. *Follow me.* When *Philip* was inflamed by this single word to follow Christ, we infer from it how great is the efficacy of the word of God; but it does not appear indiscriminately in all, for God addresses many without any advantage, just as if he struck their ears with a sound which vanished into air. So then the external preaching of the word is in itself unfruitful, except that it inflicts a deadly wound on the reprobate, so as to render them inexcusable before God. But when the secret grace of God quickens it, all the senses must be affected in such a manner that men will be prepared to *follow* wherever God calls them. We ought, therefore, to pray to Christ that he may display in us the same power of the Gospel. In the case of *Philip*, there was no doubt a peculiarity about his *following* Christ; for he is commanded to follow, not like one of us, but as a domestic, and as a familiar companion. But still the calling of all of us is illustrated by this calling of *Philip*.

44. *Was of Bethsaida.* The name of the city appears to have been mentioned on purpose, that the goodness of God to the three Apostles may be more illustriously displayed. We know how severely, on other occasions, Christ threatens and curses that city, ([Matthew 11:21](#); [Luke 10:13](#).) Accordingly, when God brought into favor with him some out of a nation so ungodly and wicked, we ought to view it in the same light as if they had been brought out of the lowest hell. And when Christ, after having drawn them out of that deep gulf, honors them so highly as to make them Apostles, it is a distinguished favor and worthy of being recorded.

45. *Philip findeth Nathanael.* Though proud men despise these feeble beginnings of the Church, yet we ought to perceive in them a brighter display of the divine glory, than if the condition of the Kingdom of Christ had been in every respect, from the outset, splendid and magnificent; for we know to how rich a harvest this small seed afterwards grew. Again, we see in *Philip* the same desire of building which formerly appeared in *Andrew*. His modesty, too, is remarkable, in desiring and seeking nothing else than to have others to learn along with him, from Him who is a Teacher common to all.

*We have found Jesus.* How small was the measure of Philip's faith appears from this circumstance, that he cannot utter a few words about Christ without mingling with them two gross errors. He calls him *the son of Joseph*, and says, that *Nazareth* was his native town, both of which statements were false; and yet, because he is sincerely desirous to do good to

his brother, and to make Christ known, God approves of this instance of his diligence, and even crowns it with good success. Each of us ought, no doubt, to endeavor to keep soberly within his own limits; and, certainly, the Evangelist does not mention it as worthy of commendation in Philip, that he twice disgraces Christ, but relates that his doctrine, though faulty and involved in error, was useful, because it nevertheless had this for its object, that Christ might be truly known. He foolishly says that he was *the son of Joseph*, and ignorantly calls him a native of *Nazareth*, but yet he leads *Nathanael* to no other than the Son of God who was born in Bethlehem, ([Matthew 2:1](#)), and does not contrive a false Christ, but only wishes that they should know him as he was exhibited by *Moses and the Prophets*. We see, then, that the chief design of doctrine is, that those who hear us should come to Christ in some way or other.

There are many who engage in abstruse inquiries about Christ, but who throw such darkness and intricacy around him by their subtleties that they can never find him. The Papists, for example, will not say that Christ is *the son of Joseph*, for they distinctly know what is his name; but yet they annihilate his power, so as to hold out a phantom in the room of Christ. Would it not be better to stammer ridiculously, like *Philip*, and to hold by the true Christ, than by eloquent and ingenious language to introduce a false Christ? On the other hand, there are many poor dunces in the present day, who, though ignorant and unskilled in the use of language, make known Christ more faithfully than all the theologians of the Pope with their lofty speculations. This passage, therefore, warns us that, if any unsuitable language has been employed concerning Christ by ignorant and unlearned men, we ought not to reject such persons with disdain, provided they direct us to Christ; but that we may not be withdrawn from Christ by the false imaginations of men, let us always have this remedy at hand, to seek the pure knowledge of him from *the Law and the Prophets*.

**46.** *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* At first, *Nathanael* refuses, the place of Christ's nativity (as described by *Philip*) having given him offense. But, first of all, he is deceived by the inconsiderate discourse of *Philip*; for what *Philip* foolishly believed *Nathanael* receives as certain. Next, there is added a foolish judgment arising from hatred or contempt of the place. Both of these points ought to be carefully observed by us. This holy man was not far from shutting out against himself all approach to Christ. Why was this? Because he rashly believes what *Philip* spoke incorrectly about Christ; and next, because his mind was under the influence of a preconceived opinion that *no good thing could come out of Nazareth*. If then we are not carefully on our guard, we shall be liable to the same danger; and Satan labors every day, by similar obstacles, to hinder us from coming to Christ; for he has the dexterity to spread many falsehoods, the tendency of which is to excite our hatred or suspicion against the Gospel, that we may not venture to taste it. And next, he ceases not to try another method, namely, to make us look on Christ with contempt; for we see how many there are who take offense at the degradation of the cross, which appears both in Christ the head and

in his members. But as we can hardly be so cautious as not to be tempted by those stratagems of Satan, let us at least remember immediately this caution:

*Come and see.* Nathanael allowed his twofold error to be corrected by this expression which Philip uttered. Following his example, let us first show ourselves to be submissive and obedient; and next, let us not shrink from inquiry, when Christ himself is ready to remove the doubts which harass us. Those who read these words not as a question, but as an affirmation, *Some good thing may come out of Nazareth*, are greatly mistaken. For, in the first place, how trivial would such an observation be? And next, we know that the city *Nazareth* was not at that time held in estimation; and Philip's reply shows plainly enough that it was expressive of hesitation and distrust.

### John 1:47-51

47. When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he saith of him, Behold, one truly an Israelite, in whom there is no deceit. 48. Nathanael saith to him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said to him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. 49. Nathanael answered and said to him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King: of Israel. 50. Jesus answered and said to him, Because I said to thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, thou believest; <sup>40</sup> thou shalt see greater things than these. 51. Then he said to him, Verily, verily, I say to you, Hereafter you shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man.

47. *Behold, one truly an Israelite.* It is not on Nathanael's own account that Christ bestows on him this commendation, but under his person he holds out a general doctrine. For, since many who boast of being believers are very far from being actually believers, it is of great importance that some mark should be found for distinguishing the true and genuine from the false. We know how haughtily the Jews gloried in their father Abraham, and how presumptuously they boasted of the holiness of their descent; and yet there was scarcely one in a hundred among them who was not utterly degenerate and alienated from the faith of the Fathers. For this reason, Christ, in order to tear the mask from hypocrites, gives a short definition of a *true Israelite*, and, at the same time, removes the offense which would afterwards arise from the wicked obstinacy of the nation. For those who wished to be accounted the children of Abraham, and the holy people of God, were shortly afterwards to become the deadly enemies of the Gospel. That none may be discouraged or alarmed by the impiety which was generally found in almost all ranks, he gives a timely warning, that of those by whom the name of Israelites is assumed there are few who are true Israelites.

Again, as this passage contains a definition of Christianity, we must not pass by it slightly. To sum up the meaning of Christ in a few words, it ought to be observed that *deceit* is contrasted with uprightness and sincerity; <sup>41</sup> so that he calls those persons *sly* <sup>42</sup> and *deceitful* who are called in other parts of Scripture *double in heart*, ([Psalm 12:2](#).) Nor is it only that gross hypocrisy by which those who are conscious of their wickedness pretend to be good men, but likewise another inward hypocrisy, when men are so blinded by their vices that they not only deceive others but themselves. So then it is integrity of heart before God, and uprightness before men, that makes a Christian; but Christ points out chiefly that kind of *deceit* which is mentioned in [Psalm 32:2](#). In this passage ἀληθῶς (*truly*) means something

40 "Tu crois, ou, crois-tu?" — "Thou believest, or, believest thou?"

41 "Rondeur et syncerite."

42 "Canteleux et frauduleux."

more than *certainly*. The Greek word, no doubt, is often used as a simple affirmation; but as we must here supply a contrast between the fact and the mere name, he is said to be *truly*, who is *in reality* what he is supposed to be.

48. *Whence knowest thou?* Though Christ did not intend to flatter him, yet he wished to be heard by him, in order to draw forth a new question, by the reply to which he would prove himself to be the Son of God. Nor is it without a good reason that Nathanael asks *whence Christ knew him*; for to meet with a man of such uprightness as to be free from all deceit is an uncommon case, and to know such purity of heart belongs to God alone. The reply of Christ, however, appears to be inappropriate; for though he *saw Nathanael under the fig-tree*, it does not follow from this that he could penetrate into the deep secrets of the heart. But there is another reason; for as it belongs to God to know men when they are not seen, so also does it belong to Him to see what is not visible to the eyes. As Nathanael knew that Christ did not see him after the manner of men, but by a look truly divine, this might lead him to conclude that Christ did not now speak as a man. The proof, therefore, is taken from things which are of the same class; for not less does it belong to God to see what lies beyond our view than to judge concerning purity of heart. We ought also to gather from this passage a useful doctrine, that when we are not thinking of Christ, we are observed by him; and it is necessary that it should be so, that he may bring us back, when we have wandered from the right path.

49. *Thou art the Son of God.* That he acknowledges him to be *the Son of God* from his divine power is not wonderful; but on what ground does he call him *King of Israel*? for the two things do not appear to be necessarily connected. But Nathanael takes a loftier view. He had already heard that he is the Messiah, and to this doctrine he adds the confirmation which had been given him. He holds also another principle, that *the Son of God* will not come without exercising the office of *King* over the people of God. Justly, therefore, does he acknowledge that he who is *the Son of God* is also *King of Israel*. And, indeed, faith ought not to be fixed on the essence of Christ alone, (so to speak,) but ought to attend to his power and office; for it would be of little advantage to know who Christ is, if this second point were not added, what he wishes to be towards us, and for what purpose the Father sent him. The reason why the Papists have nothing more than a shadow of Christ is, that they have been careful to look at his mere essence, but have disregarded his *kingdom*, which consists in the power to save.

Again, when Nathanael calls him *King of Israel*, though his *kingdom* extends to the remotest bounds of the earth, the confession is limited to the measure of faith. For he had not yet advanced so far as to know that Christ was appointed to be King over the whole world, or rather, that from every quarter would be collected the children of Abraham, so that the whole world would be the *Israel* of God. We to whom the wide extent of Christ's kingdom has been revealed ought to go beyond those narrow limits. Yet following the example of

Nathanael, let us exercise our faith in hearing the word, and let us strengthen it by all the means that are in our power; and let it not remain buried, but break out into confession.

50. *Jesus answered.* He does not reprove Nathanael as if he had been too easy of belief, but rather approving of his faith, promises to him and to others that he will confirm it by stronger arguments. Besides, it was peculiar to one man that *he was seen under a fig-tree* by Christ, when absent and at a distance from him; but now Christ brings forward a proof which would be common to all, and thus — as if he had broken off from what he originally intended — instead of addressing one man, he turns to address all.

51. *You shall see heaven opened.* They are greatly mistaken, in my opinion, who anxiously inquire into the place where, and the time when, Nathanael and others *saw heaven opened*; for he rather points out something perpetual which was always to exist in his kingdom. I acknowledge indeed, that the disciples sometimes *saw angels*, who are not seen in the present day; and I acknowledge also that the manifestation of the heavenly glory, when Christ ascended to heaven, was different from what we now behold. But if we duly consider what took place at that time, it is of perpetual duration; for the kingdom of God, which was formerly closed against us, is actually opened in Christ. A visible instance of this was shown to Stephen, ([Acts 7:55](#),) to the three disciples on the mountain, ([Matthew 17:5](#),) and to the other disciples at Christ's ascension, ([Luke 24:51](#); [Acts 1:9](#).) But all the signs by which God shows himself present with us depend on this *opening of heaven*, more especially when God communicates himself to us to be our life.

*Ascending and descending on the Son of man.* This second clause refers to *angels*. They are said to *ascend* and *descend*, so as to be ministers of God's kindness towards us; and therefore this mode of expression points out the mutual intercourse which exists between God and men. Now we must acknowledge that this benefit was received through Christ, because without him the *angels* have rather a deadly enmity against us than a friendly care to help us. They are said to *ascend and descend* on the son of man, not because they minister to him, but because — in reference to him, and for his honor — they include the whole body of the Church in their kindly regard. Nor have I any doubt that he alludes to the *ladder* which was exhibited to the patriarch Jacob in a dream, ([Genesis 28:12](#);) for what was pre-figured by that vision is actually fulfilled in Christ. In short, this passage teaches us, that though the whole human race was banished from the kingdom of God, the gate of *heaven is now opened* to us, so that we are *fellow-citizens of the saints*, and companions of the angels, ([Ephesians 2:19](#);) and that they, having been appointed to be guardians of our salvation, descend from the blessed rest of the heavenly glory<sup>43</sup> to relieve our distresses.

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43 “De la gloire celeste.”

# CHAPTER 2



## John 2:1-11

1. Three days after,<sup>44</sup> there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. 2. And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage 3. And when the wine fell short, the mother of Jesus saith to him, They have no wine. 4. Jesus saith to her, What have I to do with thee? my hour is not yet come. 5. His mother saith to the servants, Do whatever he shall bid you. 6. And there were there six water-pots of stone, placed according to the Jewish custom of cleansing, containing each of them about two or three baths. 7. Jesus saith to them, Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them to the brim. 8. And he saith to them, Draw out now, and carry to the master of the feast; and they carried. 9. And when the master of the feast had tasted the water which was made wine, (and knew not whence it was, but the servants who drew the water knew,) the master of the feast calleth the bridegroom, 10. And saith to him, Every man at first sets down good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine till now. 11. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and displayed his glory, and his disciples believed on him.

1. *There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee.* As this narrative contains the first miracle which Christ performed, it would be proper for us, were it on this ground alone, to consider the narrative attentively; though — as we shall afterwards see — there are other reasons which recommend it to our notice. But while we proceed, the various advantages arising from it will be more clearly seen. The Evangelist first mentions *Cana of Galilee*, not that which was situated towards Zare-phath (1 Kings 17:9; Obadiah 20; Luke 4:26) or Sarepta, between Tyre and Sidon, and was called the greater in comparison of this latter *Cana*, which is placed by some in the tribe of Zebulun, and by others in the tribe of Asher. For Jerome too assures us that, even in his time, there existed a small town which bore that name. There is reason to believe that it was near the city of Nazareth, since the mother of Christ came there to attend the marriage. From the fourth chapter of this book it will be seen that it was not more than one day's journey distant from Capernaum. That it lay not far from the city of Bethsaida may also be inferred from the circumstance, that *three days after* Christ had been in those territories, the marriage was celebrated — the Evangelist tells us — in *Cana of Galilee*. There may have been also a third Cana, not far from Jerusalem, and yet out of Galilee; but I leave this undetermined, because I am unacquainted with it.

*And the mother of Jesus was there.* It was probably one of Christ's near relations who married a wife; for *Jesus* is mentioned as having accompanied *his mother*. From the fact that the disciples also are invited, we may infer how plain and frugal was his way of living; for

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44 "Tertio die;" — "trois jours apres."

he lived in common with them. It may be thought strange, however, that a man who has no great wealth or abundance (as will be made evident from the scarcity of the wine) invites four or five other persons, on Christ's account. But the poor are readier and more frank in their invitations; because they are not, like the rich, afraid of being disgraced, if they do not treat their guests with great costliness and splendor; for the poor adhere more zealously to the ancient custom of having an extended acquaintance.

Again, it may be supposed to show a want of courtesy, that the bridegroom allows his guests, in the middle of the entertainment, to be in want of wine; for it looks like a man of little thoughtfulness not to have a sufficiency of wine for his guests. I reply, nothing is here related which does not frequently happen, especially when people are not accustomed to the daily use of wine. Besides, the context shows, that it was towards the conclusion of the banquet that *the wine fell short*, when, according to custom, it might be supposed that they had already drunk enough; for the master of the feast thus speaks, *Other men place worse wine before those who have drunk enough, but thou hast kept the best till now*. Besides, I have no doubt that all this was regulated by the Providence of God, that there might be room for the miracle.

3. *The mother of Jesus saith to him*. It may be doubted if she expected or asked any thing from her Son, since he had not yet performed any miracle; and it is possible that, without expecting any remedy of this sort, she advised him to give some pious exhortations which would have the effect of preventing the guests from feeling uneasiness, and at the same time of relieving the shame of *the bridegroom*. I consider her words to be expressive of (συμπαθεία) earnest compassion; for the holy woman, perceiving that those who had been invited were likely to consider themselves as having been treated with disrespect, and to murmur against the bridegroom, and that the entertainment might in that way be disturbed, wished that some means of soothing them could be adopted. Chrysostom throws out a suspicion that she was moved by the feelings of a woman to seek I know not what favor for herself and her Son; but this conjecture is not supported by any argument.

4. *Woman, what have I to do with thee?* Why does Christ repel her so rashly? I reply, though she was not moved by ambition, nor by any carnal affection, still she did wrong in going beyond her proper bounds. Her anxiety about the inconvenience endured by others, and her desire to have it in some way mitigated, proceeded from humanity, and ought to be regarded as a virtue; but still, by putting herself forward, she might obscure the glory of Christ. Though it ought also to be observed, that what Christ spoke was not so much for her sake as for the sake of others. Her modesty and piety were too great, to need so severe a chastisement. Besides, she did not knowingly and willingly offend; but Christ only meets the danger, that no improper use may be made of what his mother had said, as if it were in obedience to her command that he afterwards performed the miracle.

The Greek words (Τί ἔμοι καὶ σοὶ) literally mean, *What to me and to thee?* But the Greek phraseology is of the same import with the Latin — *Quid tibi mecum?* (*what hast thou to do with me?*) The old translator led many people into a mistake, by supposing Christ to have asserted, that it was no concern of his, or of his mother's, if the wine fell short. But from the second clause we may easily conclude how far removed this is from Christ's meaning; for he takes upon himself this concern, and declares that it belongs to him to do so, when he adds, *my hour is not yet come*. Both ought to be joined together — that Christ understands what it is necessary for him to do, and yet that he will not act in this matter at his mother's suggestion.

It is a remarkable passage certainly; for why does he absolutely refuse to his mother what he freely granted afterwards, on so many occasions, to all sorts of persons? Again, why is he not satisfied with a bare refusal? and why does he reduce her to the ordinary rank of *women*, and not even deign to call her *mother*? This saying of Christ openly and manifestly warns men to beware lest, by too superstitiously elevating the honor of the name of mother in the Virgin Mary,<sup>45</sup> they transfer to her what belongs exclusively to God. Christ, therefore, addresses his mother in this manner, in order to lay down a perpetual and general instruction to all ages, that his divine glory must not be obscured by excessive honor paid to his mother.

How necessary this warning became, in consequence of the gross and disgraceful superstitions which followed afterwards, is too well known. For Mary has been constituted the Queen of Heaven, the Hope, the Life, and the Salvation of the world; and, in short, their fury and madness proceeded so far that they stripped Christ of his spoils, and left him almost naked. And when we condemn those horrid blasphemies against the Son of God, the Papists call us malignant and envious; and — what is worse — they maliciously slander us as deadly foes to the honor of the holy Virgin. As if she had not all the honor that is due to her, unless she were made a Goddess; or as if it were treating her with respect, to adorn her with blasphemous titles, and to substitute her in the room of Christ. The Papists, therefore, offer a grievous insult to Mary when, in order to disfigure her by false praises, they take from God what belongs to Him.

*My hour is not yet come*. He means that he has not hitherto delayed through carelessness or indolence, but at the same time he states indirectly that he will attend to the matter, when the proper time for it shall arrive. As he reproves his mother for unseasonable haste, so, on the other hand, he gives reason to expect a miracle. The holy Virgin acknowledges both, for she abstains from addressing him any farther; and when she advises the servants to do whatever he commands, she shows that she expects something now. But the instruction conveyed here is still more extensive than whenever the Lord holds us in suspense, and delays his aid, he is not therefore asleep, but, on the contrary, regulates all His works in such a

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45 “En la vierge Marie.”

manner that he does nothing but at the proper time. Those who have applied this passage to prove that the time of events is appointed by Fate, are too ridiculous to require a single word to be said for refuting them. *The hour of Christ* sometimes denotes *the hour* which had been appointed to him by the Father; and by *his time* he will afterwards designate what he found to be convenient and suitable for executing the commands of his Father; but in this place he claims the right to take and choose *the time* for working and for displaying his Divine power.<sup>46</sup>

5. *His mother saith to the servants.* Here the holy Virgin gives an instance of true obedience which she owed to her Son,<sup>47</sup> when the question related, not to the relative duties of mankind, but to his divine power. She modestly acquiesces, therefore, in Christ's reply; and in like manner exhorts others to comply with his injunctions. I acknowledge, indeed, that what the Virgin now said related to the present occurrence, and amounted to a declaration that, in this instance, she had no authority, and that Christ would do, according to his own pleasure, whatever he thought right. But if you attend closely to her design, the statement which she made is still more extensive; for she first disclaims and lays aside the power which she might seem to have improperly usurped; and next, she ascribes the whole authority to Christ, when she bids them *do whatever he shall command*. We are taught generally by these words, that if we desire any thing from Christ, we will not obtain our wishes, unless we depend on him alone, look to him, and, in short, *do whatever he commands*. On the other hand, he does not send us to his mother, but rather invites us to himself.

6. *And there were there six water-pots of stone.* According to the computation of Budaeus, we infer that these *water-pots* were very large; for as the *metreta*<sup>48</sup> (μετρητής) contains twenty *congi*, each contained, at least, a *Sextier* of this country.<sup>49</sup> Christ supplied them, therefore, with a great abundance of wine, as much as would be sufficient for a banquet to a hundred and fifty men. Besides, both the number and the size of the *water-pots* serve to prove the truth of the miracle. If there had been only two or three jars, many might have suspected that they had been brought from some other place. If in one vessel only the water had been changed into wine, the certainty of the miracle would not have been so obvious, or so well ascertained. It is not, therefore, without a good reason that the Evangelist mentions the number of the *water-pots*, and states how much they contained.

46 "De bosongner et desployer sa virtue Divine."

47 "a son Fils."

48 The exact size of the *firkin* cannot be easily ascertained. If μετρητής be here used by the Evangelist as a purely Greek word, we must conclude it to be an Attic measure, which was nearly equal to nine English gallons. If, again, it be placed here as a substitute for the Hebrew word כֵּי, (*Bath*), as the Septuagint has done in [2 Chronicles 4:5](#), it will probably be rated at seven gallons and a half. — *Ed*

49 "De ce pays de Savoye;" — "of this country, Savoy."

It arose from superstition that vessels so numerous and so large were placed there. They had the ceremony of washing, indeed, prescribed to them by the Law of God; but as the world is prone to excess in outward matters, the Jews, not satisfied with the simplicity which God had enjoined, amused themselves with continual washings; and as superstition is ambitious, they undoubtedly served the purpose of display, as we see at the present day in Popery, that every thing which is said to belong to the worship of God is arranged for pure display. There was, then, a twofold error: that without the command of God, they engaged in a superfluous ceremony of their own invention; and next, that, under the pretense of religion, ambition reigned amidst that display. Some Popish scoundrels have manifested an amazing degree of wickedness, when they had the effrontery to say that they had among their relics those *water-pots* with which Christ performed this miracle in Cana, and exhibited some of them,<sup>50</sup> which, first, are of small size, and, next, are unequal in size. And in the present day, when the light of the Gospel shines so clearly around us, they are not ashamed to practice those tricks, which certainly is not to deceive by enchantments, but daringly to mock men as if they were blind; and the world, which does not perceive such gross mockery, is evidently bewitched by Satan.

7. *Fill the water-pots with water.* The servants might be apt to look upon this injunction as absurd; for they had already more than enough of water. But in this way the Lord often acts towards us, that his power may be more illustriously displayed by an unexpected result; though this circumstance is added to magnify the miracle; for when the servants drew wine out of vessels which had been filled with water, no suspicion can remain.

8. *And carry to the master of the feast.* For the same reason as before, Christ wished that the flavor of the wine should be tried by *the master of the feast*, before it had been tasted by himself, or by any other of the guests; and the readiness with which the servants obey him in all things shows us the great reverence and respect in which he was held by them. The Evangelist gives the name of *the master of the feast* to him who had the charge of preparing the banquet and arranging the tables; not that the banquet was costly and magnificent, but because the honorable appellations borrowed from the luxury and splendor of the rich are applied even to the marriages of the poor. But it is wonderful that a large quantity of wine, and of the very best wine, is supplied by Christ, who is a teacher of sobriety. I reply, when God daily gives us a large supply of wine, it is our own fault if his kindness is an excitement to luxury; but, on the other hand, it is an undoubted trial of our sobriety, if we are sparing and moderate in the midst of abundance; as Paul boasts that *he had learned to know both how to be full and to be hungry*, ([Philippians 4:12.](#))

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50 “Qu’ils avoyent entre leurs reliques de ces cruches, esquelles Christ avoit fait ce miracle en Cana, et en monstroyent.”

11. *This beginning of miracles.* The meaning is, that this was the first of Christ's miracles; for when the angels announced to the shepherds that he was born in Bethlehem, (Luke 2:8,) when the *star* appeared to the *Magi*, (Matthew 2:2,) when the *Holy Spirit descended on him in the shape of a dove*, (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 1:32,) though these were *miracles*, yet, strictly speaking, they were not performed by him; but the Evangelist now speaks of the *miracles* of which he was himself the Author. For it is a frivolous and absurd interpretation which some give, that this is reckoned the first among the miracles which Christ performed in Cana of Galilee; as if a place, in which we do not read that he ever was more than twice, had been selected by him for a display of his power. It was rather the design of the Evangelist to mark the order of time which Christ followed in the exercise of his power. For until he was thirty years of age, he kept himself concealed at home, like one who held no public office. Having been consecrated, at his baptism, to the discharge of his office, he then began to appear in public, and to show by clear proofs for what purpose he was sent by the Father. We need not wonder, therefore, if he delayed till this time the first proof of his Divinity. It is a high honor given to marriage, that Christ not only deigned to be present at a nuptial banquet, but honored it with his first miracle. There are some ancient Canons which forbid the clergy to attend a marriage. The reason of the prohibition was, that by being the spectators of the wickedness which was usually practiced on such occasions, they might in some measure be regarded as approving of it. But it would have been far better to carry to such places so much gravity as to restrain the licentiousness in which unprincipled and abandoned men indulge, when they are withdrawn from the eyes of others. Let us, on the contrary, take Christ's example for our rule; and let us not suppose that any thing else than what we read that he did can be profitable to us.

*And manifested his glory;* that is, because he then gave a striking and illustrious proof, by which it was ascertained that he was the Son of God; for all the miracles which he exhibited to the world were so many demonstrations of his divine power. The proper time for displaying his glory was now come, when he wished to make himself known agreeably to the command of his Father. Hence, also, we learn the end of *miracles*; for this expression amounts to a declaration that Christ, in order to *manifest his glory*, performed this miracle. What, then, ought we to think of those miracles which obscure the glory of Christ?

*And his disciples believed on him.* If they were *disciples*, they must already have possessed some faith; but as they had hitherto followed him with a faith which was not distinct and firm, they began at that time to devote themselves to him, so as to acknowledge him to be the Messiah, such as he had already been announced to them. The forbearance of Christ is great in reckoning as disciples those whose faith is so small. And indeed this doctrine extends generally to us all; for the faith which is now full grown had at first its infancy, nor is it so perfect in any as not to make it necessary that all to a man should make progress in *believing*. Thus, they who now *believed* may be said to begin to *believe*, so far as they daily make progress

towards the end of their faith. Let those who have obtained the first-fruits of faith labor always to make progress. These words point out likewise the advantage of miracles; namely, that they ought to be viewed as intended for the confirmation and progress of faith. Whoever twists them to any other purpose corrupts and debases the whole use of them; as we see that Papists boast of their pretended miracles for no other purpose than to bury faith, and to turn away the minds of men from Christ to the creatures.

## John 2:12-17

**12.** After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples and he remained there not many days. **13.** And the passover of the Jews was at hand; therefore, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14.** And found in the temple some who sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and money-changers also sitting. **15.** And having made a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen, and threw down the money of the changers, and overturned the tables; **16.** And said to those who sold doves, Take those things hence; do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise. **17.** And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.

**12.** *He went down to Capernaum.* The Evangelist passes to an additional narrative; for having resolved to collect a few things worthy of remembrance which the other three had left out, he states the time when the occurrence which he is about to relate took place; for the other three also relate what we here read that Christ did, but the diversity of the time shows that it was a similar event, but not the same. On two occasions, then, did Christ cleanse the temple from base and profane merchandise; once, when he was beginning to discharge his commission, and another time, ([Matthew 21:12](#); [Mark 11:15](#); [Luke 19:45](#);) when he was about to *leave the world and go to the Father*, ([John 16:28](#).)

To obtain a general view of the passage, it will be necessary briefly to examine the details in their order. That *oxen, and sheep, and doves*, were exposed to sale *in the temple*, and that *money-changers* were sitting there, was not without a plausible excuse. For they might allege that the *merchandise* transacted there was not irreligious, but, on the contrary, related to the sacred worship of God, that every person might obtain, without difficulty, what he might offer to the Lord; and, certainly, it was exceedingly convenient for godly persons to find oblations of any sort laid ready to their hand, and in this way to be freed from the trouble of running about in various directions to obtain them. We are apt to wonder, therefore, why Christ was so highly displeased with it. But there are two reasons which deserve our attention. First, as the Priests abused this *merchandise* for their own gain and avarice, such a mockery of God could not be endured. Secondly, whatever excuse men may plead, as soon as they depart, however slightly, from the command of God, they deserve reproof and need correction. And this is the chief reason why Christ undertook to purify *the temple*; for he distinctly states that *the temple of God is not a place of merchandise*

But it may be asked, Why did he not rather begin with doctrine? For it seems to be a disorderly and improper method to apply the hand for correcting faults, before the remedy of doctrine has been applied. But Christ had a different object in view: for the time being now at hand when he would publicly discharge the office assigned to him by the Father, he



wished in some way to take possession of the temple, and to give a proof of his divine authority. And that all might be attentive to his doctrine, it was necessary that something new and strange should be done to awaken their sluggish and drowsy minds. Now, *the temple* was a sanctuary of heavenly doctrine and of true religion. Since he wished to restore purity of doctrine, it was of great importance that he should prove himself to be the Lord of the temple. Besides, there was no other way in which he could bring back sacrifices and the other exercises of religion to their spiritual design than by removing the abuse of them. What he did at that time was, therefore, a sort of preface to that reformation which the Father had sent him to accomplish. In a word, it was proper that the Jews should be aroused by this example to expect from Christ something that was unusual and out of the ordinary course; and it was also necessary to remind them that the worship of God had been corrupted and perverted, that they might not object to the reformation of those abuses

*And his brethren.* Why the *brethren* of Christ accompanied him, cannot be determined with certainty, unless, perhaps, they intended to go along with him to Jerusalem. The word *brethren*, it is well known, is employed, in the Hebrew language, to denote cousins and other relatives.

**13.** *And the passover of the Jews was at hand; therefore Jesus went up to Jerusalem.* The Greek words καὶ ἀνέβη, may be literally rendered, and *he went up*; but the Evangelist has used the copulative and instead of *therefore*; for he means that Christ *went up* at that time, in order to celebrate *the passover* at Jerusalem. There were two reasons why he did so; for since the Son of God became subject to the Law on our account, he intended, by observing with exactness all the precepts of the Law, to present in his own person a pattern of entire subjection and obedience. Again, as he could do more good, when there was a multitude of people, he almost always availed himself of such an occasion. Whenever, therefore, we shall afterwards find it said that Christ came to Jerusalem at the feast, let the reader observe that he did so, first, that along with others he might observe the exercises of religion which God had appointed, and, next, that he might publish his doctrine amidst a larger concourse of people.

**16.** *Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.* At the second time that he drove the traders out of the Temple, the Evangelists relate that he used sharper and more severe language; for he said, that they *had made* the Temple of God *a den of robbers*, ([Matthew 21:13](#);) and this was proper to be done, when a milder chastisement was of no avail. At present, he merely warns them not to profane the Temple of God by applying it to improper uses. The Temple was called *the house of God*; because it was the will of God that there He should be peculiarly invoked; because there He displayed his power; because, finally, he had set it apart to spiritual and holy services.

*My Father's house.* Christ declares himself to be *the Son of God*, in order to show that he has a right and authority to cleanse the Temple. As Christ here assigns a reason for what

he did, if we wish to derive any advantage from it, we must attend chiefly to this sentence. Why, then, does he drive the buyers and sellers out of the Temple? It is that he may bring back to its original purity the worship of God, which had been corrupted by the wickedness of men, and in this way may restore and maintain the holiness of the Temple. Now that temple, we know, was erected, that it might be a shadow of those things the lively image of which is to be found in Christ. That; it might continue to be devoted to God, it was necessary that it should be applied exclusively to spiritual purposes. For this reason he pronounces it to be unlawful that it should be converted into a market-place; for he founds his statement on the command of God, which we ought always to observe. Whatever deceptions Satan may employ, let us know that any departure — however small — from the command of God is wicked. It was a plausible and imposing disguise, that; the worship of God was aided and promoted, when the sacrifices which were to be offered by believers were laid ready to their hand; but as God had appropriated his Temple to different purposes, Christ disregards the objections that might be offered against the order which God had appointed.

The same arguments do not apply, in the present day, to our buildings for public worship; but what is said about the ancient Temple applies properly and strictly to the Church, for it is the heavenly sanctuary of God on earth. We ought always, therefore, to keep before our eyes the majesty of God, which dwells in the Church, that it may not be defiled by any pollutions; and the only way in which its holiness can remain unimpaired is, that nothing shall be admitted into it that is at variance with the word of God.

17. *And his disciples remembered.* It is to no purpose that some people tease themselves with the inquiry how *the disciples remembered* a passage of Scripture, with the meaning of which they were hitherto unacquainted. For we must not understand that this passage of Scripture came to their remembrance at that time; but afterwards, when, having been taught by God, they considered with themselves what was the meaning of this action of Christ, by the direction of the Holy Spirit this passage of Scripture occurred to them. And, indeed, it does not always happen that the reason of God's works is immediately perceived by us, but afterwards, in process of time, He makes known to us his purpose. And this is a bridle exceedingly well adapted to restrain our presumption, that we may not murmur against God, if at any time our judgment does not entirely approve of what he does. We are at the same time reminded, that when God holds us as it were in suspense, it is our duty to wait for the time of more abundant knowledge, and to restrain the excessive haste which is natural to us; for the reason why God delays the full manifestation of his works is, that he may keep us humble.

*The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.* The meaning is, that the disciples at length came to know, that the zeal for the house of God, with which Christ burned, excited him to drive out of it those profanations. By a figure of speech, in which a part is taken for the

whole, David employs the name of the temple to denote the whole worship of God; for the entire verse runs thus:

the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up, and the reproaches of them who reproached thee  
have fallen on me, ([Psalm 69:9](#).)

The second clause corresponds to the first, or rather it is nothing else than a repetition explaining what had been said. The amount of both clauses is, that David's anxiety about maintaining the worship of God was so intense, that he cheerfully laid down his head to receive all *the reproaches* which wicked men threw against God; and that he burned with such *zeal*, that this single feeling swallowed up every other. He tells us that he himself had such feelings; but there can be no doubt that he described in his own person what strictly belonged to the Messiah.

Accordingly, the Evangelist says, that this was one of the marks by which *the disciples* knew that it was Jesus who protected and restored the kingdom of God. Now observe that they followed the guidance of Scripture, in order to form such an opinion concerning Christ as they ought to entertain; and, indeed, no man will ever learn what Christ is, or the object of what he did and suffered, unless he has been taught and guided by Scripture. So far, then, as each of us shall desire to make progress in the knowledge of Christ, it will be necessary that Scripture shall be the subject of our diligent and constant meditation. I go it without a good reason that David mentions the house of God, when the divine glory is concerned; for though God is sufficient for himself, and needs not the services of any, yet he wishes that his glory should be displayed in the Church. In this way he gives a remarkable proof of his love towards us, because he unites his glory — as it were, by an indissoluble link — with our salvation.

Now as Paul informs us that, in the example of the head, a general doctrine is presented to the whole body, ([Romans 15:3](#),) let each of us apply to the invitation of Christ, that — so far as lies in our power — we may not permit the temple of God to be in any way polluted. But, at the same time, we must beware lest any man transgress the bounds of his calling. All of us ought to have zeal in common with the Son of God; but all are not at liberty to seize *a whip*, that we may correct vices with our hands; for we have not received the same power, nor have we been entrusted with the same commission.

## John 2:18-22

**18.** The Jews then answered and said to him, What sign <sup>51</sup> showest thou to us, that thou doest these things? **19.** Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days. **20.** The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building; and wilt thou raise it up in three days? **21.** But he spoke of the temple of his body. **22.** When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.

**18.** *What sign showest thou to us?* When in so large an assembly no man laid hands on Christ, and none of the dealers in cattle or of the money-changers repelled him by violence, we may conclude that they were all stunned and struck with astonishment by the hand of God. And, therefore, if they had not been utterly blinded, this would have been a sufficiently evident miracle, that one man against a great multitude, an unarmed man against strong men, all unknown man against so great rulers, attempted so great an achievement. For since they were far stronger, why did they not oppose him, but because their hands were loosened and — as it were — broken?

Yet they have some ground for putting the question; for it does not belong to every man to change suddenly, if any thing is faulty or displeases him in the temple of God. All are, indeed, at liberty to condemn corruptions; but if a private man put forth his hand to remove them, he will be accused of rashness. As the custom of selling in the temple had been generally received, Christ attempted what was new and uncommon; and therefore they properly call on him to prove that he was sent by God; for they found their argument on this principle, that in public administration it is not lawful to make any change without an undoubted calling and command of God. But they erred on another point, by refusing to admit the calling of Christ, unless he had performed a miracle; for it was not an invariable rule that the Prophets and other ministers of God should perform miracles; and God did not limit himself to this necessity. They do wrong, therefore, in laying down a law to God by demanding a sign. When the Evangelist says that the Jews *asked him*, he unquestionably means by that term the multitude who were standing there, and, as it were, the whole body of the Church; as if he had said, that it was not the speech of one or two persons, but of the people.

**19.** *Destroy this temple.* This is an allegorical mode of expression; and Christ intentionally spoke with that degree of obscurity, because he reckoned them unworthy of a direct reply; as he elsewhere declares that *he speaks to them in parables*, because they are unable to comprehend the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, ([Matthew 13:13](#).) But first he refuses

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<sup>51</sup> “Quel signe, ou, miracle?” — “What sign? or, What miracle?”

to them the sign which they demanded, either because it would have been of no advantage, or because he knew that it was not the proper time. Some compliances he occasionally made even with their unreasonable requests, and there must have been a strong reason why he now refused. Yet that they may not seize on this as a pretense for excusing themselves, he declares that his power will be approved and confirmed by a *sign* of no ordinary value; for no greater approbation of the divine power in Christ could be desired than his resurrection from the dead. But he conveys this information figuratively, because he does not reckon them worthy of an explicit promise. In short, he treats unbelievers as they deserve, and at the same time protects himself against all contempt. It was not yet made evident, indeed, that they were obstinate, but Christ knew well what was the state of their feelings.

But it may be asked, since he performed so many miracles, and of various kinds, why does he now mention but one? I answer, he said nothing about all the other miracles, First, because his resurrection alone was sufficient to shut their mouth: Secondly, he was unwilling to expose the power of God to their ridicule; for even respecting the glory of his resurrection he spoke allegorically: Thirdly, I say that he produced what was appropriate to the case in hand; for, by these words, he shows that all authority over *the Temple* belongs to him, since his power is so great in building the true *Temple* of God.

*This temple.* Though he uses the word *temple* in accommodation to the present occurrence, yet the body of Christ is justly and appropriately called a *temple*. The body of each of us is called a *tabernacle*, (2 Corinthians 5:4; 2 Peter 1:13,) because the soul dwells in it; but the body of Christ was the abode of his Divinity. For we know that the Son of God clothed himself with our nature in such a manner that the eternal majesty of God dwelt in the flesh which he assumed, as in his sanctuary.

The argument of Nestorius, who abused this passage to prove that it is not one and the same Christ who is God and man, may be easily refuted. He reasoned thus: the Son of God dwelt in the flesh, as in a *temple*; therefore the natures are distinct, so that the same person was not God and man. But this argument might be applied to men; for it will follow that it is not one man whose soul dwells in the body as in a tabernacle; and, therefore, it is folly to torture this form of expression for the purpose of taking away the unity of Person in Christ. It ought to be observed, that our bodies also are called temples of God, (1 Corinthians 3:16, and 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16) but it is in a different sense, namely, because God dwells in us by the power and grace of his Spirit; but in Christ the fullness of the God-head dwells bodily, so that he is truly *God manifested in flesh*, (1 Timothy 3:16.)

*I will raise it up again.* Here Christ claims for himself the glory of his resurrection, though, in many passages of Scripture, it is declared to be the work of God the Father. But these two statements perfectly agree with each other; for, in order to give us exalted conceptions of the power of God, Scripture expressly ascribes to the Father that he raised up his

Son from the dead; but here, Christ in a special manner asserts his own Divinity. And Paul reconciles both.

If the Spirit of Him, that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you,

(Romans 8:11.)

While he makes *the Spirit* the Author of the resurrection, he calls Him indiscriminately sometimes *the Spirit of Christ*, and sometimes *the Spirit of the Father*.

20. *Forty and six years.* The computation of Daniel agrees with this passage, (Daniel 9:25;) for he reckons *seven weeks*, which make Forty-nine years; but, before the last of these weeks had ended, *the temple* was finished. The time described in the history of Ezra is much shorter; but, though it has some appearance of contradiction, it is not at all at variance with the words of the Prophet. For, when the sanctuary had been reared, before the building of the temple was completed, they began to offer sacrifices. The work was afterwards stopped for a long time through the indolence of the people, as plainly appears from the complaints of the Prophet Haggai 1:4; for he severely reproveth the Jews for being too earnestly engaged in building their private dwellings, while they left the Temple of God in an unfinished state.

But why does he mention that *temple* which had been destroyed by Herod about forty years before that time? For the *temple* which they had at that time, though it had been built with great magnificence and at a vast expense, had been completed by Herod, contrary to the expectation of men, as is related by Josephus, (Ant. Book 15. chapter 11.) I think it probable that this new building of the temple was reckoned as if the ancient temple had always remained in its original condition, that it might be regarded with greater veneration; and that they spoke in the usual and ordinary manner, that their fathers, with the greatest difficulty, had scarcely built the temple in *Forty-six, years*

This reply shows plainly enough what was their intention in asking a *sign*; for if they had been ready to obey, with reverence, a Prophet sent by God, they would not have so disdainfully rejected what he had said to them about the confirmation of his office. They wish to have some testimony of divine power, and yet they receive nothing which does not correspond to the feeble capacity of man. Thus the Papists in the present day demand miracles, not that they would give way to the power of God, (for it is a settled principle with them to prefer men to God, and not to move a hair's breadth from what they have received by custom and usage;) but that they may not appear to have no reason for rebelling against God, they hold out this excuse as a cloak for their obstinacy. In such a manner do the minds of unbelievers storm in them with blind impetuosity, that they desire to have the hand of God exhibited to them and yet do not wish that it should be divine.

*When therefore he was risen from the dead.* This recollection was similar to the former, which the Evangelist lately mentioned, (verse 17.) The Evangelist did not understand Christ when he said this; but the doctrine, which appeared to have been useless, and to have vanished

into air, afterwards produced fruit in its own time. Although, therefore, many of the actions and sayings of our Lord are obscure for a time, we must not give them up in despair, or despise that which we do not all at once understand.<sup>52</sup> We ought to observe the connection of the words, that *they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken*; for the Evangelist means that, by comparing *the Scripture* with *the word of Christ*, they were aided in making progress in faith.

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52 “Il ne faut pas pourtant quitter la tout par desespoir, ne mespriser ce que nous n’entendons pas tout incontinent.”

### John 2:23-25

23. And when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, many believed in his name, beholding the signs which he performed. 24. But Jesus himself did not confide in them, because he knew them all. <sup>53</sup> 25. And needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.

23. *Many believed.* The Evangelist appropriately connects this narrative with the former. Christ had not given such a sign as the Jews demanded; and now, when he produced no good effect on them by many miracles — except that they entertained a cold faith, which was only the shadow of faith — this event sufficiently proves that they did not deserve that he should comply with their wishes. It was, indeed, some fruit of *the signs*, that *many believed in Christ*, and in his name, so as to profess that they wished to follow his doctrine; for *name* is here put for *authority*. This appearance of faith, which hitherto was fruitless, might ultimately be changed into true faith, and might be a useful preparation for celebrating the name of Christ among others; and yet what we have said is true, that they were far from having proper feelings, so as to profit by the works of God, as they ought to have done.

Yet this was not a pretended faith by which they wished to gain reputation among men; for they were convinced that Christ was some great Prophet, and perhaps they even ascribed to him the honor of being the Messiah, of whom there was at that time a strong and general expectation. But as they did not understand the peculiar office of the Messiah, their faith was absurd, because it was exclusively directed to the world and earthly things. It was also a cold belief, and unaccompanied by the true feelings of the heart. For hypocrites assent to the Gospel, not that they may devote themselves in obedience to Christ, nor that with sincere piety they may follow Christ when he calls them, but because they do not venture to reject entirely the truth which they have known, and especially when they can find no reason for opposing it. For as they do not voluntarily, or of their own accord, make war with God, so when they perceive that his doctrine is opposed to their flesh and to their perverse desires, they are immediately offended, or at least withdraw from the faith which they had already embraced.

When the Evangelist says, therefore, that those men *believed*, I do not understand that they counterfeited a faith which did not exist, but that they were in some way constrained to enroll themselves as the followers of Christ; and yet it appears that their faith was not true and genuine, because Christ excludes them from the number of those on whose sentiments reliance might be placed. Besides, that faith depended solely on miracles, and had no root in the Gospel, and therefore could not be steady or permanent. Miracles do indeed assist

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53 “Il les cognoissoient tous,”



the children of God in arriving at the truth; but it does not amount to actual believing, when they admire the power of God so as merely to believe that it is true, but not to subject themselves wholly to it. And, therefore, when we speak generally about faith, let us know that there is a kind of faith which is perceived by the understanding only, and afterwards quickly disappears, because it is not fixed in the heart; and that is the faith which James calls *dead*; but true faith always depends on the Spirit of regeneration, ([James 2:17, 20, 26.](#)) Observe, that all do not derive equal profit from the works of God; for some are led by them to God, and others are only driven by a blind impulse, so that, while they perceive indeed the power of God, still they do not cease to wander in their own imaginations.

**24.** *But Christ did not rely on them.* Those who explain the meaning to be, that Christ was on his guard against them, because he knew that they were not upright and faithful, do not appear to me to express sufficiently well the meaning of the Evangelist. Still less do I agree with what Augustine says about recent converts. The Evangelist rather means, in my opinion, that Christ did not reckon them to be genuine disciples, but despised them as volatile and unsteady. It is a passage which ought to be carefully observed, that not all who profess to be Christ's followers are such in his estimation. But we ought also to add the reason which immediately follows:

*Because he knew them all.* Nothing is more dangerous than hypocrisy, for this reason among others, that it is an exceedingly common fault. There is scarcely any man who is not pleased with himself; and while we deceive ourselves by empty flatteries, we imagine that God is blind like ourselves. But here we are reminded how widely his judgment differs from ours; for he sees clearly those things which we cannot perceive, because they are concealed by some disguise; and he estimates according to their hidden source, that is, according to the most secret feeling of the heart, those things which dazzle our eyes by false luster. This is what Solomon says, that

God weighs in his balance the hearts of men, while they flatter themselves in their ways,  
([Proverbs 21:2.](#))

Let us remember, therefore, that none are the true disciples of Christ but those whom He approves, because in such a matter He alone is competent to decide and to judge.

A question now arises: when the Evangelist says that Christ *knew them all*, does he mean those only of whom he had lately spoken, or does the expression refer to the whole human race? Some extend it to the universal nature of man, and think that the whole world is here condemned for wicked and perfidious hypocrisy. And, certainly, it is a true statement, that Christ can find in men no reason why he should deign to place them in the number of his followers; but I do not see that this agrees with the context, and therefore I limit it to those who had been formerly mentioned.

**25.** *For he knew what was in man.* As it might be doubted whence Christ obtained this knowledge, the Evangelist anticipates this question, and replies that Christ perceived every

thing in men that is concealed from our view, so that he could on his own authority make a distinction among men. Christ, therefore, who knows the hearts, *had no need of any one* to inform him what sort of men they were. He knew them to have such a disposition and such feelings, that he justly regarded them as persons who did not belong to him.

The question put by some — whether we too are authorized by the example of Christ to hold those persons as suspected who have not given us proof of their sincerity — has nothing to do with the present passage. There is a wide difference between him and us; for Christ knew the very roots of the trees, but, except from the fruits which appear outwardly, we cannot discover what is the nature of any one tree. Besides, as Paul tells us, that *charity is not suspicious*, (1 [Corinthians 13:5](#),) we have no right to entertain unfavorable suspicions about men who are unknown to us. But, that we may not always be deceived by hypocrites, and that the Church may not be too much exposed to their wicked impostures, it belongs to Christ to impart to us the Spirit of discretion.

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# CHAPTER 3

### John 3:1-6

1. Now there was a man of the Pharisees, called Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews. 2. He came to Jesus by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these signs which thou doest, unless God be with him. 3. Jesus answered and said to him, Verily, verily, I say to thee, Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4. Nicodemus saith to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter again into his mother's womb and be born? 5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say to thee, Unless a man be: born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6. That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

1. *Now there was a man of the Pharisees.* In the person of Nicodemus the Evangelist now exhibits to our view how vain and fleeting was the faith of those who, having been excited by miracles, suddenly professed to be the disciples of Christ. For since this man was of the order of the Pharisees, and held the rank of a ruler in his nation, he must have been far more excellent than others. The common people, for the most part, are light and unsteady; but who would not have thought that he who had learning and experience was also a wise and prudent man? Yet from Christ's reply it is evident, that nothing was farther from his design in coming than a desire to learn the first principles of religion. If he who was a ruler among men is less than a child, what ought we to think of the multitude at large? Now though the design of the Evangelist was, to exhibit, as in a mirror, how few there were in Jerusalem who were properly disposed to receive the Gospel, yet, for other reasons, this narrative is highly useful to us; and especially because it instructs us concerning the depraved nature of mankind, what is the proper entrance into the school of Christ, and what must be the commencement of our training to make progress in the heavenly doctrine. For the sum of Christ's discourse is, that, in order that we may be his true disciples, we must become new men. But, before proceeding farther, we must ascertain from the circumstances which are here detailed by the Evangelist, what were the obstacles which prevented Nicodemus from giving himself unreservedly to Christ.

*Of the Pharisees.* This designation was, no doubt, regarded by his countrymen as honorable to *Nicodemus*; but it is not for the sake of honor that it is given to him by the Evangelist, who, on the contrary, draws our attention to it as having prevented him from coming freely and cheerfully to Christ. Hence we are reminded that they who occupy a lofty station in the world are, for the most part, entangled by very dangerous snares; nay, we see many of them held so firmly bound, that not even the slightest wish or prayer arises from them towards heaven throughout their whole life. Why they were called *Pharisees* we have elsewhere ex-

plained; <sup>54</sup> for they boasted of being the only expounders of the Law, as if they were in possession, of the marrow and hidden meaning of Scripture; and for that reason they called themselves *Perushim* (Perushim.) Though the *Essenes* led a more austere life, which gained them a high reputation for holiness; yet because, like hermits, they forsook the ordinary life and custom of men, the sect of the *Pharisees* was on that account held in higher estimation. Besides, the Evangelist mentions not only that *Nicodemus* was of the order of the *Pharisees*, but that he was one of the *rulers* of his nation.

2. *He came to Jesus by night.* From the circumstance of his *coming by night* we infer that his timidity was excessive; for his eyes were dazzled, as it were, by the splendor of his own greatness and reputation. <sup>55</sup> Perhaps too he was hindered by shame, for ambitious men think that their reputation is utterly ruined, if they have once descended from the dignity of teachers to the rank of scholars; and he was unquestionably puffed up with a foolish opinion of his knowledge. In short, as he had a high opinion of himself, he was unwilling to lose any part of his elevation. And yet there appears in him some seed of piety; for hearing that a Prophet of God had appeared, he does not despise or spurn the doctrine which has been brought from heaven, and is moved by some desire to obtain it, — a desire which sprung from nothing else than fear and reverence for God. Many are tickled by an idle curiosity to inquire eagerly about any thing that is new, but there is no reason to doubt that it was religious principle and conscientious feeling that excited in *Nicodemus* the desire to gain a more intimate knowledge of the doctrine of Christ. And although that seed remained long concealed and apparently dead, yet after the death of Christ it yielded fruit, such as no man would ever have expected, ([John 19:39](#).)

*Rabbi, we know.* The meaning of these words is, “*Master, we know that thou art come to be a teacher.*” But as learned men, at that time, were generally called *Masters*, *Nicodemus* first salutes Christ according to custom, and gives him the ordinary designation, *Rabbi*, (which means Master, <sup>56</sup>) and afterwards declares that he was sent *by God* to perform the office of a *Master*. And on this principle depends all the authority of the teachers in the Church; for as it is only from the word of God that we must learn wisdom, we ought not to listen to any other persons than those by whose mouth God speaks. And it ought to be observed, that though religion was greatly corrupted and almost destroyed among the Jews,

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<sup>54</sup> Our Author’s views of the etymology of the term are fully stated and examined, *Harmony*, volume 1 page 281; but it cannot be supposed that this *Commentary on the Gospel by John*, which appeared in the year 1553, makes reference to the *Harmony*, which did not appear till 1555. The priority of the date (1548) of the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* more naturally sends us to consult that [passage](#), in which Paul says that he was a *Pharisee*, (3:5.) — *Ed.*

<sup>55</sup> “De sa grandeur et reputation.”

<sup>56</sup> “Qui signific Maistre.”

still they always held this principle, that no man was a lawful *teacher*, unless he had been sent *by God*. But as there are none who more haughtily and more daringly boast of having been *sent by God* than the false prophets do, we need discernment in this case for trying the spirits. Accordingly Nicodemus adds:

*For no man can do the signs which thou doest, unless God be with him.* It is evident, he says, that Christ has been sent *by God*, because God displays his power in him so illustriously, that it cannot be denied that *God is with him*. He takes for granted that God is not accustomed to work but by his ministers, so as to seal the office which he has entrusted to them. And he had good grounds for thinking so, because God always intended that miracles should be seals of his doctrine. Justly therefore does he make God the sole Author of miracles, when he says that *no man can do these signs, unless God be with him*; for what he says amounts to a declaration that miracles are not performed by the arm of man, but that the power of God reigns, and is illustriously displayed in them. In a word, as miracles have a twofold advantage, to prepare the mind for faith, and, when it has been formed by the word, to confirm it still more, Nicodemus had profited aright in the former part, because by miracles he recognizes Christ as a true prophet of God.

Yet his argument appears not to be conclusive; for since the false prophets deceive the ignorant by their impostures as fully as if they had proved by true *signs* that they are the ministers of God, what difference will there be between truth and falsehood, if faith depends on miracles? Nay, Moses expressly says that God employs this method *to try if we love him*, ([Deuteronomy 13:3](#).) We know also, the warning of Christ, ([Matthew 24:14](#),) and of Paul, ([2 Thessalonians 2:9](#),) that believers ought to beware of *lying signs*, by which Anti-Christ dazzles the eyes of many. I answer, God may justly permit this to be done, that those who deserve it may be deceived by the enchantments of Satan. But I say that this does not hinder the elect from perceiving in miracles the power of God, which is to them an undoubted confirmation of true and sound doctrine. Thus, Paul boasts that his apostleship was confirmed by *signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds*, ([2 Corinthians 12:12](#).) To whatever extent Satan may, like an ape, counterfeit the works of God in the dark, yet when the eyes are opened and the light of spiritual wisdom shines, miracles are a sufficiently powerful attestation of the presence of God, as Nicodemus here declares it to be.

3. *Verily, verily, I say to thee.* The word Verily (ἀμήν) is twice repeated, and this is done for the purpose of arousing him to more earnest attention. For when he was about to speak of the most important and weighty of all subjects, he found it necessary to awaken the attention of Nicodemus, who might otherwise have passed by this whole discourse in a light or careless manner.<sup>57</sup> Such, then, is the design of the double affirmation.

57 “L’oyant seulement comme en pensant ailleurs, et sans en tenir grand conte:” — “merely listening to it as if he were thinking of something else, and without caring much about it.”

Though this discourse appears to be far-fetched and almost inappropriate, yet it was with the utmost propriety that Christ opened his discourse in this manner. For as it is useless to sow seed in a field which has not been prepared by the labors of the husbandman, so it is to no purpose to scatter the doctrine of the Gospel, if the mind has not been previously subdued and duly prepared for docility and obedience. Christ saw that the mind of Nicodemus was filled with many thorns, choked by many noxious herbs, so that there was scarcely any room for spiritual doctrine. This exhortation, therefore, resembled a ploughing to purify him, that nothing might prevent him from profiting by the doctrine. Let us, therefore, remember that this was spoken to one individual, in such a manner that the Son of God addresses all of us daily in the same language. For which of us will say that he is so free from sinful affections that he does not need such a purification? If, therefore, we wish to make good and useful progress in the school of Christ, let us learn to begin at this point.

*Unless a man be born again.* That is, So long as thou art destitute of that which is of the highest importance in the kingdom of God, I care little about your calling me *Master*; for the first entrance into the kingdom of God is, to become a new man. But as this is a remarkable passage, it will be proper to survey every part of it minutely.

To SEE *the kingdom of God* is of the same meaning as *to enter into the kingdom of God*, as we shall immediately perceive from the context. But they are mistaken who suppose that *the kingdom of God* means *Heaven*; for it rather means the spiritual life, which is begun by faith in this world, and gradually increases every day according to the continued progress of faith. So the meaning is, that no man can be truly united to the Church, so as to be reckoned among the children of God, until he has been previously renewed. This expression shows briefly what is the beginning of Christianity, and at the same time teaches us, that we are born exiles and utterly alienated from *the kingdom of God*, and that there is a perpetual state of variance between God and us, until he makes us altogether different by our being *born again*; for the statement is general, and comprehends the whole human race. If Christ had said to one person, or to a few individuals, that they could not *enter into heaven*, *unless they had been previously born again*, we might have supposed that it was only certain characters that were pointed out, but he speaks of all without exception; for the language is unlimited, and is of the same import with such universal terms as these: *Whosoever shall not be born again cannot enter into the kingdom of God*

By the phrase *born again* is expressed not the correction of one part, but the renovation of the whole nature. Hence it follows, that there is nothing in us that is not sinful; for if reformation is necessary in the whole and in each part, corruption must have been spread throughout. On this point we shall soon have occasion to speak more largely. Erasmus, adopting the opinion of Cyril, has improperly translated the adverb *ἄνωθεν*, from above, and renders the clause thus: *unless a man be born from above*. The Greek word, I own, is ambiguous; but we know that Christ conversed with Nicodemus in the Hebrew language. There

would then have been no room for the ambiguity which occasioned the mistake of Nicodemus and led him into childish scruples about a second birth of the flesh. He therefore understood Christ to have said nothing else than that *a man must be born* again, before he is admitted into the kingdom of God.

4. *How can a man be born when he is old?* Though the form of expression which Christ employed was not contained in the Law and the prophets, yet as renewal is frequently mentioned in Scripture, and is one of the first principles of faith, it is evident how imperfectly skilled the Scribes at that time were in the reading of the Scriptures. It certainly was not one man only who was to blame for not knowing what was meant by the grace of regeneration; but as almost all devoted their attention to useless subtleties, what was of chief importance in the doctrine of piety was disregarded. Popery exhibits to us, at the present day, an instance of the same kind in her Theologians. For while they weary out their whole life with profound speculations, as to all that strictly relates to the worship of God, to the confident hope of our salvation, or to the exercises of religion, they know no more on these subjects than a cobbler or a cowherd knows about the course of the stars; and, what is more, taking delight in foreign mysteries, they openly despise the true doctrine of Scripture as unworthy of the elevated rank which belongs to them as teachers. We need not wonder, therefore, to find here that Nicodemus stumbles at a straw; for it is a just vengeance of God, that they who think themselves the highest and most excellent teachers, and in whose estimation the ordinary simplicity of doctrine is vile and despicable, stand amazed at small matters.

5. *Unless a man be born of water.* This passage has been explained in various ways. Some have thought that the two parts of regeneration are distinctly pointed out, and that by the word *Water* is denoted the renunciation of the old man, while by *the Spirit* they have understood the new life. Others think that there is an implied contrast, as if Christ intended to contrast *Water and Spirit*, which are pure and liquid elements, with the earthly and gross nature of man. Thus they view the language as allegorical, and suppose Christ to have taught that we ought to lay aside the heavy and ponderous mass of the flesh, and to become like *water and air*, that we may move upwards, or, at least, may not be so much weighed down to the earth. But both opinions appear to me to be at variance with the meaning of Christ.

*Chrysostom*, with whom the greater part of expounders agree, makes the word *Water* refer to baptism. The meaning would then be, that by baptism we enter into the kingdom of God, because in baptism we are regenerated by the Spirit of God. Hence arose the belief of the absolute necessity of baptism, in order to the hope of eternal life. But though we were to admit that Christ here speaks of baptism, yet we ought not to press his words so closely as to imagine that he confines salvation to the outward sign; but, on the contrary, he connects the *Water* with the *Spirit*, because under that visible symbol he attests and seals that newness of life which God alone produces in us by his Spirit. It is true that, by neglecting baptism, we are excluded from salvation; and in this sense I acknowledge that it is necessary; but it



is absurd to speak of the hope of salvation as confined to the sign. So far as relates to this passage, I cannot bring myself to believe that Christ speaks of baptism; for it would have been inappropriate.

We must always keep in remembrance the design of Christ, which we have already explained; namely, that he intended to exhort Nicodemus to newness of life, because he was not capable of receiving the Gospel, until he began to be a new man. It is, therefore, a simple statement, that we must be born again, in order that we may be the children of God, and that the Holy Spirit is the Author of this second birth. For while Nicodemus was dreaming of the regeneration (παλιγγενεσία) or transmigration taught by Pythagoras, who imagined that souls, after the death of their bodies, passed into other bodies,<sup>58</sup> Christ, in order to cure him of this error, added, by way of explanation, that it is not in a natural way that men *are born a second time*, and that it is not necessary for them to be clothed with a new body, but that they are *born* when they are renewed in mind and heart by the grace of the Spirit.

Accordingly, he employed the words *Spirit* and *water* to mean the same thing, and this ought not to be regarded as a harsh or forced interpretation; for it is a frequent and common way of speaking in Scripture, when *the Spirit* is mentioned, to add the word *Water* or *Fire*, expressing his power. We sometimes meet with the statement, that it is Christ who *baptizeth with the Holy Ghost and with fire*, (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16,) where *fire* means nothing different from the Spirit, but only shows what is his efficacy in us. As to the word *water* being placed first, it is of little consequence; or rather, this mode of speaking flows more naturally than the other, because the metaphor is followed by a plain and direct statement, as if Christ had said that no man is a son of God until he has been renewed by *water*, and that this *water* is *the Spirit* who cleanseth us anew and who, by spreading his energy over us, imparts to us the rigor of the heavenly life, though by nature we are utterly dry. And most properly does Christ, in order to reprove Nicodemus for his ignorance, employ a form of expression which is common in Scripture; for Nicodemus ought at length to have acknowledged, that what Christ had said was taken from the ordinary doctrine of the Prophets.

By *water*, therefore, is meant nothing more than the inward purification and invigoration which is produced by *the Holy Spirit*. Besides, it is not unusual to employ the word *and* instead of *that is*, when the latter clause is intended to explain the former. And the view which I have taken is supported by what follows; for when Christ immediately proceeds to assign the reason why we *must be born again*, without mentioning the *water*, he shows that the newness of life which he requires is produced by the *Spirit* alone; whence it follows, that *water* must not be separated from *the Spirit*

6. *That which is born of the flesh.* By reasoning from contraries, he argues that the kingdom of God is shut against us, unless an entrance be opened to us by a *new birth*,

58 “Qui imaginoit que los ames apres la mort de leurs corps cntroyent dedans des autres corps.”

(παλιγγενεσία ) For he takes for granted, that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless we are spiritual. But we bring nothing from the womb but a carnal nature. Therefore it follows, that we are naturally banished from the kingdom of God, and, having been deprived of the heavenly life, remain under the yoke of death. Besides, when Christ argues here, that men must be *born again*, because they are only *flesh*, he undoubtedly comprehends all mankind under the term *flesh*. By the *flesh*, therefore, is meant in this place not the body, but the soul also, and consequently every part of it. When the Popish divines restrict the word to that part which they call sensual, they do so in utter ignorance of its meaning;<sup>59</sup> for Christ must in that case have used an inconclusive argument, that we need a second birth, because part of us is corrupt. But if the *flesh* is contrasted with *the Spirit*, as a corrupt thing is contrasted with what is uncorrupted, a crooked thing with what is straight, a polluted thing with what is holy, a contaminated thing with what is pure, we may readily conclude that the whole nature of man is condemned by a single word. Christ therefore declares that our understanding and reason is corrupted, because it is carnal, and that all the affections of the heart are wicked and reprobate, because they too are carnal.

But here it may be objected, that since the soul is not begotten by human generation, we are not *born of the flesh*, as to the chief part of our nature. This led many persons to imagine that not only our bodies, but our souls also, descend to us from our parents; for they thought it absurd that original sin, which has its peculiar habitation in the soul, should be conveyed from one man to all his posterity, unless all our souls proceeded from his soul as their source. And certainly, at first sight, the words of Christ appear to convey the idea, that we are *flesh*, because we are *born of flesh*. I answer, so far as relates to the words of Christ, they mean nothing else than that we are all carnal when we are born; and that as we come into this world mortal men, our nature relishes nothing but what is *flesh*. He simply distinguishes here between nature and the supernatural gift; for the corruption of all mankind in the person of Adam alone did not proceed from generation, but from the appointment of God, who in one man had adorned us all, and who has in him also deprived us of his gifts. Instead of saying, therefore, that each of us draws vice and corruption from his parents, it would be more correct to say that we are all alike corrupted in Adam alone, because immediately after his revolt God took away from human nature what He had bestowed upon it.

Here another question arises; for it is certain that in this degenerate and corrupted nature some remnant of the gifts of God still lingers; and hence it follows that we are not in every respect corrupted. The reply is easy. The gifts which God hath left to us since the fall, if they are judged by themselves, are indeed worthy of praise; but as the contagion of wickedness is spread through every part, there will be found in us nothing that is pure and

<sup>59</sup> “Monstrent bien qu'ils n'en entendent rien.”

free from every defilement. That we naturally possess some knowledge of God, that some distinction between good and evil is engraven on our conscience, that our faculties are sufficient for the maintenance of the present life, that — in short — we are in so many ways superior to the brute beasts, that is excellent in itself, so far as it proceeds from God; but in us all these things are completely polluted, in the same manner as the wine which has been wholly infected and corrupted by the offensive taste of the vessel loses the pleasantness of its good flavor, and acquires a bitter and pernicious taste. For such knowledge of God as now remains in men is nothing else than a frightful source of idolatry and of all superstitions; the judgment exercised in choosing and distinguishing things is partly blind and foolish, partly imperfect and confused; all the industry that we possess flows into vanity and trifles; and the will itself, with furious impetuosity, rushes headlong to what is evil. Thus in the whole of our nature there remains not a drop of uprightness. Hence it is evident that we must be formed by the second birth, that we may be fitted for the kingdom of God; and the meaning of Christ's words is, that as a man is born only *carnal* from the womb of his mother; he must be formed anew by *the Spirit*, that he may begin to be spiritual.

The word *Spirit* is used here in two senses, namely, for grace, and the effect of grace. For in the first place, Christ informs us that *the Spirit* of God is the only Author of a pure and upright nature, and afterwards he states, that we are *spiritual*, because we have been renewed by his power.

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### John 3:7-12

7. Wonder not that I said to thee, You must be born again. 8. The wind bloweth where it pleaseth, and thou hearest its voice; but knowest not whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. 9. Nicodemus answered, and said to him, How can these things be? 10. Jesus answered, and said to him, Thou art a teacher of Israel, and knowest you not these things? 11. Verily, verily, I say to thee, We speak what we know, and testify what we have seen; and you receive not our testimony. 12. If 'I have told you earthly things, and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

7. *Wonder not.* This passage has been tortured by commentators in various ways. Some think that Christ reproves the gross ignorance of Nicodemus and other persons of the same class, by saying that *it is not wonderful*, if they do not comprehend that heavenly mystery of regeneration, since even in the order of nature they do not perceive the reason of those things which fall under the cognizance of the senses. Others contrive a meaning which, though ingenious, is too much forced: that, "as *the wind blows* freely, so by the regeneration of the Spirit we are set at liberty, and, having been freed from the yoke of sin, run voluntarily to God. Equally removed from Christ's meaning is the exposition given by Augustine, that the Spirit of God exerts his power according to his own pleasure. A better view is given by Chrysostom and Cyril, who say that the comparison is taken from the wind, and apply it thus to the present passage: though its power be felt, *we know not* its source and cause." While I do not differ greatly from their opinion, I shall endeavor to explain the meaning of Christ with greater clearness and certainty.

I hold by this principle, that Christ borrows a comparison from the order of nature. Nicodemus reckoned that what he had heard about regeneration and a new life was incredible, because the manner of this regeneration exceeded his capacity. To prevent him from entertaining any scruple of this sort, Christ shows that even in the bodily life there is displayed an amazing power of God, the reason of which is concealed. For all draw from the air their vital breath; we perceive the agitation of the air, but *know not whence it comes to us or whither it departs*. If in this frail and transitory life God acts so powerfully that we are constrained to admire his power, what folly is it to attempt to measure by the perception of our own mind his secret work in the heavenly and supernatural life, so as to believe no more than what we see? Thus Paul, when he breaks out into indignation against those who reject the doctrine of the resurrection, on the ground of its being impossible that the body which is now subject to putrefaction, after having been reduced to dust and to nothing, should be clothed with a blessed immortality, reproaches them for stupidity in not considering that a similar display of the power of God may be seen in *a grain of wheat*; for the seed does not

spring until it; has been putrefied, (1 Corinthians 15:36, 37.) This is the astonishing wisdom of which David exclaims,

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all,  
(Psalm 104:24)

They are therefore excessively stupid who, having been warned by the common order of nature, do not rise higher, so as to acknowledge that the hand of God is far more powerful in the spiritual kingdom of Christ. When Christ says to Nicodemus that he ought not to wonder, we must not understand it in such a manner as if he intended that we should despise a work of God, which is so illustrious, and which is worthy of the highest admiration; but he means that we ought not to wonder with that kind of admiration which hinders our faith. For many reject as fabulous what they think too lofty and difficult. In a word, let us not doubt that by the Spirit of God we are formed again and made new men, though his manner of doing this be concealed from us.

**8.** *The wind bloweth where it pleaseth.* Not that, strictly speaking, there is will in the *blowing*, but because the agitation is free, and uncertain, and variable; for the air is carried sometimes in one direction and sometimes in another. How this applies to the case in hand; for if it flowed in a uniform motion like water, it would be less miraculous.

*So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* Christ means that the movement and operation of the Spirit of God is not less perceptible in the renewal of man than the motion of the air in this earthly and outward life, but that the manner of it is concealed; and that, therefore, we are ungrateful and malicious, if we do not adore the inconceivable power of God in the heavenly life, of which we behold so striking an exhibition in this world, and if we ascribe to him less in restoring the salvation of our soul than in upholding the bodily frame. The application will be somewhat more evident, if you turn the sentence in this manner: *Such is the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit in the renewed man*

**9.** *How can these things be?* We see what is the chief obstacle in the way of Nicodemus. Every thing that he hears appears monstrous, because he does not understand the manner of it; so that there is no greater obstacle to us than our own pride; that is, we always wish to be wise beyond what is proper, and therefore we reject with diabolical pride every thing that is not explained to our reason; as if it were proper to limit the infinite power of God to our poor capacity. We are, indeed, permitted, to a certain extent, to inquire into the manner and reason of the works of God, provided that we do so with sobriety and reverence; but Nicodemus rejects it as a fable, on this ground, that he does not believe it to be possible. On this subject we shall treat more fully under the Sixth Chapter.

**10.** *Thou art a teacher of Israel.* As Christ sees that he is spending his time and pains to no purpose in teaching so proud a man, he begins to reprove him sharply. And certainly such persons will never make any progress, until the wicked confidence, with which they are puffed up, be removed. This is, very properly, placed first in order; for in the very matter

in which he chiefly plumes himself on his acuteness and sagacity, Christ censures his ignorance. He thought, that not to admit a thing to be possible would be considered a proof of gravity and intelligence, because that man is accounted foolishly credulous who assents to what is told him by another, before he has fully inquired into the reason. But still Nicodemus, with all his magisterial haughtiness, exposes himself to ridicule by more than childish hesitation about the first principles. Such hesitation, certainly, is base and shameful. For what religion have we, what knowledge of God, what rule of living well, what hope of eternal life, if we do not believe that man is renewed by the Spirit of God? There is an emphasis, therefore, in the word *these*; for since Scripture frequently repeats this part of doctrine, it ought not to be unknown even to the lowest class of beginners. It is utterly beyond endurance that any man should be ignorant and unskilled in it, who professes to be a *teacher* in the Church of God.

11. *We speak what we know.* Some refer this to Christ and John the Baptist; others say that the plural number is used instead of the singular. For my own part, I have no doubt that Christ mentions himself in connection with all the prophets of God, and speaks generally in the person of all. Philosophers and other vain-glorious teachers frequently bring forward trifles which they have themselves invented; but Christ claims it as peculiar to himself and all the servants of God, that they deliver no doctrine but what is certain. For God does not send ministers to prattle about things that are unknown or doubtful, but trains them in his school, that what they have learned from himself they may afterwards deliver to others. Again, as Christ, by this testimony, recommends to us the certainty of his doctrine, so he enjoins on all his ministers a law of modesty, not to put forward their own dreams or conjectures — not to preach human inventions, which have no solidity in theme but to render a faithful and pure testimony to God. Let every man, therefore, see what the Lord has revealed to him, that no man may go beyond the bounds of his faith; and, lastly, that no man may allow himself to speak any thing but what he has heard from the Lord. It ought to be observed, likewise, that Christ here confirms his doctrine by an oath, that it may have full authority over us.

*You receive not our testimony.* This is added, that the Gospel may lose nothing on account of the ingratitude of men. For since few persons are to be found who exercise faith in the truth of God, and since the truth is everywhere rejected by the world, we ought to defend it against contempt, that its majesty may not be held in less estimation, because the whole world despises it, and obscures it by impiety. Now though the meaning of the words be simple and one, still we must draw from this passage a twofold doctrine. The first is, that our faith in the Gospel may not be weakened, if it have few disciples on the earth; as if Christ had said, Though you do not receive my doctrine, it remains nevertheless certain and durable; for the unbelief of men will never prevent God from remaining always true. The other is, that they who, in the present day, disbelieve the Gospel, will not escape with impunity, since

the truth of God is holy and sacred. We ought to be fortified with this shield, that we may persevere in obedience to the Gospel in opposition to the obstinacy of men. True indeed, we must hold by this principle, that our faith be founded on God. But when we have God as our security, we ought, like persons elevated above the heavens, boldly to tread the whole world under our feet, or regard it with lofty disdain, rather than allow the unbelief of any persons whatever to fill us with alarm. As to the complaint which Christ makes, that his testimony is not received, we learn from it, that the word of God has, in all ages, been distinguished by this peculiar feature, that they who believed it were few; for the expression — *you receive not* — belongs to the greater number, and almost to the whole body of the people. There is no reason, therefore, that we should now be discouraged, if the number of those who believe be small.

**12.** *If I have told you earthly things.* Christ concludes that it ought to be laid to the charge of Nicodemus and others, if they do not make progress in the doctrine of the Gospel; for he shows that the blame does not lie with him, that all are not properly instructed, since he comes down even *to the earth*, that he may raise us *to heaven*. It is too common a fault that men desire to be taught in an ingenious and witty style. Hence, the greater part of men are so delighted with lofty and abstruse speculations. Hence, too, many hold the Gospel in less estimation, because they do not find in it high-sounding words to fill their ears, and on this account do not deign to bestow their attention on a doctrine so low and mean. But it shows an extraordinary degree of wickedness, that we yield less reverence to God speaking to us, because he condescends to our ignorance; and, therefore, when God prattles to us in Scripture in a rough and popular style, let us know that this is done on account of the love which he bears to us.<sup>60</sup> Whoever exclaims that he is offended by such meanness of language, or pleads it as an excuse for not subjecting himself to the word of God, speaks falsely; for he who cannot endure to embrace God, when he approaches to him, will still less fly to meet him above the clouds.

*Earthly things.* Some explain this to mean the elements of spiritual doctrine; for self-denial may be said to be the commencement of piety. But I rather agree with those who refer it to the form of instruction; for, though the whole of Christ's discourse was *heavenly*, yet he spoke in a manner so familiar, that the style itself had some appearance of being *earthly*. Besides, these words must not be viewed as referring exclusively to a single sermon; for Christ's ordinary method of teaching — that is, a popular simplicity of style — is here contrasted with the pompous and high-sounding phrases to which ambitious men are too strongly addicted.

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60 “Pour l'amour de nous.”

### John 3:13-18

**13.** And <sup>61</sup> no one hath ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven. **14.** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up; **15.** That whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have eternal life. **16.** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. **17.** For God hath not sent his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world may be saved by him. **18.** He who believeth in him is not condemned; but he who believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

**13.** *No one hath ascended to heaven.* He again exhorts Nicodemus not to trust to himself and his own sagacity, because no mortal man can, by his own unaided powers, enter into heaven, but only he who goes thither under the guidance of the Son of God. For *to ascend to heaven* means here, “to have a pure knowledge of the mysteries of God, and the light of spiritual understanding.” For Christ gives here the same instruction which is given by Paul, when he declares that

the sensual man does not comprehend the things which are of God,

(1 Corinthians 2:14;)

and, therefore, he excludes from divine things all the acuteness of the human understanding, for it is far below God.

But we must attend to the words, that Christ alone, who is heavenly, *ascends to heaven*, but that the entrance is closed against all others. For, in the former clause, he humbles us, when he excludes the whole world from *heaven*. Paul enjoins

those who are desirous to be wise with God to be fools with themselves,

(1 Corinthians 3:18.)

There is nothing which we do with greater reluctance. For this purpose we ought to remember, that all our senses fail and give way when we come to God; but, after having shut us out from heaven, Christ quickly proposes a remedy, when he adds, that what was denied to all others is granted to the Son of God. And this too is the reason why he calls himself the Son of man, that we may not doubt that we have an entrance into heaven in common with him who clothed himself with our flesh, that he might make us partakers of all blessings. Since, therefore, he is the Father’s only Counselor, (Isaiah 9:6,) he admits us into those secrets which otherwise would have remained in concealment.

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<sup>61</sup> “Car personne n’est monte;” — “For no one hath ascended.”



*Who is in heaven.* It may be thought absurd to say that *he is in heaven*, while he still dwells on the earth. If it be replied, that this is true in regard to his Divine nature, the mode of expression means something else, namely, that while he was man, he was *in heaven*. It might be said that no mention is here made of any place, but that Christ is only distinguished from others, in regard to his condition, because he is the heir of the kingdom of God, from which the whole human race is banished; but, as it very frequently happens, on account of the unity of the Person of Christ, that what properly belongs to one nature is applied to another, we ought not to seek any other solution. Christ, therefore, who *is in heaven*, hath clothed himself with our flesh, that, by stretching out his brotherly hand to us, he may raise us to heaven along with him.

14. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent.* He explains more clearly why he said that it is he alone to whom heaven is opened; namely, that he brings to heaven all who are only willing to follow him as their guide; for he testifies that he will be openly and publicly manifested to all, that he may diffuse his power over men of every class.<sup>62</sup> To be *lifted up* means to be placed in a lofty and elevated situation, so as to be exhibited to the view of all. This was done by the preaching of the Gospel; for the explanation of it which some give, as referring to the cross, neither agrees with the context nor is applicable to the present subject. The simple meaning of the words therefore is, that, by the preaching of the Gospel, Christ was to be raised on high, like a standard to which the eyes of all would be directed, as Isaiah had foretold, ([Isaiah 2:2](#).) As a type of this *lifting up*, he refers to *the brazen serpent*, which was erected by Moses, the sight of which was a salutary remedy to those who had been wounded by the deadly bite of serpents. The history of that transaction is well known, and is detailed in [Numbers 21:9](#). Christ introduces it in this passage, in order to show that he must be placed before the eyes of all by the doctrine of the Gospel, that all who look at him by faith may obtain salvation. Hence it ought to be inferred that Christ is clearly exhibited to us in the Gospel, in order that no man may complain of obscurity; and that this manifestation is common to all, and that faith has its own look, by which it perceives him as present; as Paul tells us that a lively portrait of Christ with his cross is exhibited, when he is truly preached, ([Galatians 3:1](#).)

The metaphor is not inappropriate or far-fetched. As it was only the outward appearance of a serpent, but contained nothing within that was pestilential or venomous, so Christ clothed himself with the form of sinful flesh, which yet was pure and free from all sin, that he might cure in us the deadly wound of sin. It was not in vain that, when the Jews were wounded by serpents, the Lord formerly prepared this kind of antidote; and it tended to confirm the discourse which Christ delivered. For when he saw that he was despised as a mean and unknown person, he could produce nothing more appropriate than *the lifting up*

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62 “Sur toutes manieres de gens.”

*of the serpent*, to tell them, that they ought not to think it strange, if, contrary to the expectation of men, he were *lifted up* on high from the very lowest condition, because this had already been shadowed out under the Law by the type of the serpent.

A question now arises: Does Christ compare himself to the *serpent*, because there is some resemblance; or, does he pronounce it to have been a sacrament, as the Manna was? For though the Manna was bodily food, intended for present use, yet Paul testifies that it was a *spiritual* mystery, (1 Corinthians 10:3.) I am led to think that this was also the case with the brazen serpent, both by this passage, and the fact of its being preserved for the future, until the superstition of the people had converted it into an idol, (2 Kings 18:4.) If any one form a different opinion, I do not debate the point with him.

**16.** *For God so loved the world.* Christ opens up the first cause, and, as it were, the source of our salvation, and he does so, that no doubt may remain; for our minds cannot find calm repose, until we arrive at the unmerited love of God. As the whole matter of our salvation must not be sought any where else than in Christ, so we must see whence Christ came to us, and why he was offered to be our Savior. Both points are distinctly stated to us: namely, that faith in Christ brings life to all, and that Christ brought life, because the Heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish. And this order ought to be carefully observed; for such is the wicked ambition which belongs to our nature, that when the question relates to the origin of our salvation, we quickly form diabolical imaginations about our own merits. Accordingly, we imagine that God is reconciled to us, because he has reckoned us worthy that he should look upon us. But Scripture everywhere extols his pure and unmingled mercy, which sets aside all merits.

And the words of Christ mean nothing else, when he declares the cause to be in the love of God. For if we wish to ascend higher, the Spirit shuts the door by the mouth of Paul, when he informs us that this love was founded on *the purpose of his will*, (Ephesians 1:5.) And, indeed, it is very evident that Christ spoke in this manner, in order to draw away men from the contemplation of themselves to look at the mercy of God alone. Nor does he say that God was moved to deliver us, because he perceived in us something that was worthy of so excellent a blessing, but ascribes the glory of our deliverance entirely to his love. And this is still more clear from what follows; for he adds, that *God gave his Son to men, that they may not perish*. Hence it follows that, until Christ bestow his aid in rescuing the lost, all are destined to eternal destruction. This is also demonstrated by Paul from a consideration of the time;

for he loved us while we were still enemies by sin,  
(Romans 5:8, 10.)

And, indeed, where sin reigns, we shall find nothing but the wrath of God, which draws death along with it. It is mercy, therefore, that reconciles us to God, that he may likewise restore us to life.

This mode of expression, however, may appear to be at variance with many passages of Scripture, which lay in Christ the first foundation of the love of God to us, and show that out of him we are hated by God. But we ought to remember — what I have already stated — that the secret love with which the Heavenly Father loved us in himself is higher than all other causes; but that the grace which he wishes to be made known to us, and by which we are excited to the hope of salvation, commences with the reconciliation which was procured through Christ. For since he necessarily hates sin, how shall we believe that we are loved by him, until atonement has been made for those sins on account of which he is justly offended at us? Thus, the love of Christ must intervene for the purpose of reconciling God to us, before we have any experience of his fatherly kindness. But as we are first informed that God, because he loved us, gave his Son to die for us, so it is immediately added, that it is Christ alone on whom, strictly speaking, faith ought to look.

*He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him may not perish.* This, he says, is the proper look of faith, to be fixed on Christ, in whom it beholds the breast of God filled with love: this is a firm and enduring support, to rely on the death of Christ as the only pledge of that love. The word *only-begotten* is emphatic, (ἐμφατικὸν) to magnify the fervor of the love of God towards us. For as men are not easily convinced that God loves them, in order to remove all doubt, he has expressly stated that we are so very dear to God that, on our account, he did not even spare his *only-begotten* Son. Since, therefore, God has most abundantly testified his love towards us, whoever is not satisfied with this testimony, and still remains in doubt, offers a high insult to Christ, as if he had been an ordinary man given up at random to death. But we ought rather to consider that, in proportion to the estimation in which God holds his *only-begotten Son*, so much the more precious did our salvation appear to him, for the ransom of which he chose that his *only-begotten Son* should die. To this name Christ has a right, because he is by nature *the only Son of God*; and he communicates this honor to us by adoption, when we are engrafted into his body.

*That whosoever believeth on him may not perish.* It is a remarkable commendation of faith, that it frees us from everlasting destruction. For he intended expressly to state that, though we appear to have been born to death, undoubted deliverance is offered to us by the faith of Christ; and, therefore, that we ought not to fear death, which otherwise hangs over us. And he has employed the universal term *whosoever*, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term *World*, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in *the world* that is worthy of the favor of God, yet he shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.

Let us remember, on the other hand, that while *life* is promised universally to *all who believe* in Christ, still faith is not common to all. For Christ is made known and held out to

the view of all, but the elect alone are they whose eyes God opens, that they may seek him by faith. Here, too, is displayed a wonderful effect of faith; for by it we receive Christ such as he is given to us by the Father — that is, as having freed us from the condemnation of eternal death, and made us heirs of eternal life, because, by the sacrifice of his death, he has atoned for our sins, that nothing may prevent God from acknowledging us as his sons. Since, therefore, faith embraces Christ, with the efficacy of his death and the fruit of his resurrection, we need not wonder if by it we obtain likewise the life of Christ.

Still it is not yet very evident why and how faith bestows life upon us. Is it because Christ renews us by his Spirit, that the righteousness of God may live and be vigorous in us; or is it because, having been cleansed by his blood, we are accounted righteous before God by a free pardon? It is indeed certain, that these two things are always joined together; but as the certainty of salvation is the subject now in hand, we ought chiefly to hold by this reason, that we live, because God loves us freely by not imputing to us our sins. For this reason sacrifice is expressly mentioned, by which, together with sins, the curse and death are destroyed. I have already explained the object of these two clauses,

which is, to inform us that in Christ we regain the possession of life, of which we are destitute in ourselves; for in this wretched condition of mankind, redemption, in the order of time, goes before salvation.

17. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.* It is a confirmation of the preceding statement; for it was not in vain that God sent his own Son to us. He came not to destroy; and therefore it follows, that it is the peculiar office of the Son of God, that *all who believe* may obtain salvation by him. There is now no reason why any man should be in a state of hesitation, or of distressing anxiety, as to the manner in which he may escape death, when we believe that it was the purpose of God that Christ should deliver us from it. The word *world* is again repeated, that no man may think himself wholly excluded, if he only keep the road of faith.

The word *judge* (πρίνω) is here put for condemn, as in many other passages. When he declares that *he did not come to condemn the world*, he thus points out the actual design of his coming; for what need was there that Christ should come to destroy us who were utterly ruined? We ought not, therefore, to look at any thing else in Christ, than that God, out of his boundless goodness chose to extend his aid for saving us who were lost; and whenever our sins press us — whenever Satan would drive us to despair — we ought to hold out this shield, that God is unwilling that we should be overwhelmed with everlasting destruction, because he has appointed his Son to be the salvation of the *world*.

When Christ says, in other passages, that *he is come to judgment*, ([John 9:39](#);) when he is called *a stone of offense*, ([1 Peter 2:7](#);) when he is said to be *set for the destruction of many*, ([Luke 2:34](#);) this may be regarded as accidental, or as arising from a different cause; for they who reject the grace offered in him deserve to find him the Judge and Avenger of contempt

so unworthy and base. A striking instance of this may be seen in the Gospel; for though it is strictly

the power of God for salvation to every one who believeth,

(Romans 1:16,)

the ingratitude of many causes it to become to them death. Both have been well expressed by Paul, when he boasts of

having vengeance at hand, by which he will punish all the adversaries of his doctrine after

that the obedience of the godly shall have been fulfilled,

(2 Corinthians 10:6)

The meaning amounts to this, that the Gospel is especially, and in the first instance, appointed for believers, that it may be salvation to them; but that afterwards believers will not escape unpunished who, despising the grace of Christ, chose to have him as the Author of death rather than of life.

18. *He who believeth in him is not condemned.* When he so frequently and so earnestly repeats, that all believers are beyond danger of death, we may infer from it the great necessity of firm and assured confidence, that the conscience may not be kept perpetually in a state of trembling and alarm. He again declares that, when we have *believed*, there is no remaining *condemnation*, which he will afterwards explain more fully in the Fifth Chapter. The present tense — *is not condemned* — is here used instead of the future tense — *shall not be condemned* — according to the custom of the Hebrew language; for he means that believers are safe from the fear of condemnation.

*But he who believeth not is condemned already* This means that there is no other remedy by which any human being can escape death; or, in other words, that for all who reject the life given to them in Christ, there remains nothing but death, since life consists in nothing else than in faith. The past tense of the verb, *is condemned already*, (ἤδη κέκριται,) was used by him emphatically, (ἐμφοτικῶς,) to express more strongly that all unbelievers are utterly ruined. But it ought to be observed that Christ speaks especially of those whose wickedness shall be displayed in open contempt of the Gospel. For though it is true that there never was any other remedy for escaping death than that men should betake themselves to Christ, yet as Christ here speaks of the preaching of the Gospel, which was to be spread throughout the whole world, he directs his discourse against those who deliberately and maliciously extinguish the light which God had kindled.

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### John 3:19-21

**19.** And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; and men loved darkness rather than light; for their works were evil. **20.** For whosoever doeth what is evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be discovered. **21.** But he who doeth truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they are done in God.<sup>63</sup>

**19.** *And this is the condemnation* He meets the murmurs and complaints, by which wicked men are wont to censure — what they imagine to be the excessive rigour of God, when he acts towards them with greater severity than they expected. All think it harsh that they who do not believe in Christ should be devoted to destruction. That no man may ascribe his *condemnation* to Christ, he shows that every man ought to impute the blame to himself. The reason is, that unbelief is a testimony of a bad conscience; and hence it is evident that it is their own wickedness which hinders unbelievers from approaching to Christ. Some think that he points out here nothing more than the mark of *condemnation*; but, the design of Christ is, to restrain the wickedness of men, that they may not, according to their custom, dispute or argue with God, as if he treated them unjustly, when he punishes unbelief with eternal death. He shows that such a *condemnation* is just, and is not liable to any reproaches, not only because those men act wickedly, who prefer *darkness to light*, and refuse the *light* which is freely offered to them, but because that *hatred of the light* arises only from a mind that is wicked and conscious of its guilt. A beautiful appearance and lustre of holiness may indeed be found in many, who, after all, oppose the Gospel; but, though they appear to be holier than the angels, there is no room to doubt that they are hypocrites, who reject the doctrine of Christ for no other reason than because they love their lurking-places by which their baseness may be concealed. Since, therefore, hypocrisy alone renders men hateful to God, all are held convicted, because were it not that, blinded by pride, they delight in their crimes, they would readily and willingly receive the doctrine of the Gospel.

**20.** *For whosoever doeth what is evil.* The meaning is, that *the light* is hateful to them for no other reason than because they are wicked and desire to conceal their sins, as far as lies in their power. Hence it follows that, by rejecting the remedy, they may be said purposely to cherish the ground of their condemnation. We are greatly mistaken, therefore, if we suppose that they who are enraged against the Gospel are actuated by godly zeal, when, on the contrary, they abhor and shun the light, that they may more freely flatter themselves in *darkness*.

<sup>63</sup> “Faites selon Dieu;” — “done according to God.”

21. *But he who doeth truth* This appears to be an improper and absurd statement, unless you choose to admit that some are upright and true, before they have been renewed by the Spirit of God, which does not at all agree with the uniform doctrine of Scripture; for we know that faith is the root from which the fruits of good works spring. To solve this difficulty, *Augustine* says, that *to do truth* means “to acknowledge that we are miserable and destitute of all power of doing good;” and, certainly, it is a true preparation for faith, when a conviction of our poverty compels us to flee to the grace of God. But all this is widely removed from Christ’s meaning, for he intended simply to say that those who act sincerely desire nothing more earnestly than *light, that their works may be tried*; because, when such a trial has been made, it becomes more evident that, in the sight of God, they speak the *truth* and are free from all deceit. Now it would be inconclusive reasoning, were we to infer from this, that men have a good conscience before they have faith; for Christ does not say that the elect believe, so as to deserve the praise of good works, but only what unbelievers would do, if they had not a bad conscience.

Christ employed the word *truth*, because, when we are deceived by the outward lustre of works, we do not consider what is concealed within. Accordingly, he says, that men who are upright and free from hypocrisy willingly go into the presence of God, who alone is the competent Judge of our works. For those *works* are said to be done *in God* or *according to God*, which are approved by Him, and which are good according to His rule. Hence let us learn that we must not judge of *works* in any other way than by bringing them to the *light* of the Gospel, because our reason is wholly blind.

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### John 3:22-28

22. After these things came Jesus, and his disciples, into the land of Judea, and there he remained with them and baptized. 23. And John also was baptizing in Enon, near Salim; because there were many waters there. They came therefore and were baptized. 24. For John was not yet cast into prison. 25. A question then arose between the disciples of John and the Jews about purifying. 26. And they came to John, and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou gavest testimony, lo, he baptizeth, and all men come to him. 27. John answered and said, A man cannot receive any thing, unless it be given to him from heaven. 28. Yourselves are witnesses to me, that I said, I am not Christ, but was sent before him.

22. *After these things came Jesus.* It is probable that Christ, when the feast was past, came into that part of Judea which was in the vicinity of the town *Enon*, which was situated in the tribe of Manasseh. The Evangelist says that *there were many waters there*, and these were not so abundant in Judea. Now geographers tell us, that these two towns, *Enon* and *Salim*, were not far from the confluence of the river Jordan and the brook Jabbok; and they add that Scythopolis was near them. From these words, we may infer that John and Christ administered baptism by plunging the whole body beneath the water; though we ought not to give ourselves any great uneasiness about the outward rite, provided that it agree with the spiritual truth, and with the Lord's appointment and rule. So far as we are able to conjecture, the vicinity of those places caused various reports to be circulated, and many discussions to arise, about the Law, about the worship of God, and about the condition of the Church, in consequence of two persons who administered baptism having arisen at the same time. For when the Evangelist says that *Christ baptized*, I refer this to the commencement of his ministry; namely, that he then began to exercise publicly the office which was appointed to him by the Father. And though Christ did this by his disciples, yet he is here named as the Author of the baptism, without mentioning his ministers, who did nothing but in his name and by his command. On this subject, we shall have something more to say in the beginning of the next Chapter.

25. *A question then arose.* Not without a good reason does the Evangelist relate that *a question arose from the disciples of John*; for just in proportion as they were ill-informed about doctrine, they are so much the more eager to enter into debate, as ignorance is always bold and presumptuous. If others had attacked them, they might have been excused; but when they themselves, though unfit to maintain the contest, voluntarily provoke the Jews, it is a rash and foolish proceeding. Now the words mean, that "the *question* was raised by them;" and not only were they to blame for taking up a matter which they did not understand, and speaking about it rashly and beyond the measure of their knowledge; but another fault



— not less than the former — was, that they did not so much intend to maintain the lawfulness of Baptism as to defend the cause of their master, that his authority might remain unimpaired. In both respects, they deserved reproof, because, not understanding what was the real nature of Baptism, they expose the holy ordinance of God to ridicule, and because, by sinful ambition, they undertake to defend the cause of their master against Christ.

It is evident, therefore, that they were astonished and confounded by a single word, when it was represented to them that *Christ also was baptizing*; for while their attention was directed to the person of a man, and to outward appearance,<sup>64</sup> they gave themselves less concern about the doctrine. We are taught, by their example, into what mistakes those men fall who are actuated by a sinful desire to please men rather than by a zeal for God; and we are likewise reminded that the single object which we ought to have in view and to promote by all means is, that Christ alone may have the pre-eminence.

*About purifying* The question was *about purifying*; for the Jews had various baptisms and washings<sup>65</sup> enjoined by the Law; and not satisfied with those which God had appointed,<sup>66</sup> they carefully observed many others which had been handed down from their ancestors. When they find that, in addition to so great a number and variety of *purifyings*, a new method of *purifying* is introduced by Christ and by John, they look upon it as absurd.

**26.** *To whom thou gavest testimony.* By this argument they endeavor either to make Christ inferior to John, or to show that John, by doing him honor, had laid him under obligations; for they reckon that John conferred a favor on Christ by adorning him with such honorable titles. As if it had not been the duty of John to make such a proclamation, or rather, as if it had not been John's highest dignity to be the herald of the Son of God. Nothing could have been more unreasonable than to make Christ inferior to John, because his testimony was highly favorable; for we know what John's testimony was. The expression which they use — *all men come to Christ* — is the language of envious persons,<sup>67</sup> and proceeds from sinful ambition; for they are afraid that the crowd will immediately forsake their master.

**27.** *A man cannot receive any thing.* Some refer these words to Christ, as if John accused the disciples of wicked presumption in opposition to God, by endeavoring to deprive Christ of what the Father had given to him. They suppose the meaning to be this: "That within so short a time he has risen to so great honor, is the work of God; and therefore it is in vain for you to attempt to degrade him whom God with his own hand has raised on high." Others think that it is an exclamation into which he indignantly breaks forth, because his disciples

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64 "Et apparence exterieure."

65 "De baptesmes et lavemens."

66 "Que Dieu avoit instituez."

67 "C'est une parole de gens envieux."

had hitherto made so little progress. And certainly it was excessively absurd that they should still endeavor to reduce to the rank of ordinary men him who, they had so often heard, was the Christ, that he might not rise above his own servants; and, therefore, John might justly have said that it is useless to spend time in instructing men, because they are dull and stupid, until they are renewed in mind.

But I rather agree with the opinion of those who explain it as applying to John, as asserting that it is not in his power, or in theirs, to make him great, because the measure of us all is to be what God intended us to be. For if even the Son of God *took not that honour to himself*, ([Hebrews 5:4](#);) what man of the ordinary rank would venture to desire more than what the Lord has given him? This single thought, if it were duly impressed on the minds of us all, would be abundantly sufficient for restraining ambition; and were ambition corrected and destroyed, the plague of contentions would likewise be removed. How comes it then, that every man exalts himself more than is proper, but because we do not depend on the Lord, so as to be satisfied with the rank which he assigns to us?

**28.** *You are witnesses to me.* John expostulates with his disciples that they did not give credit to his statements. He had often warned them that he was not the Christ; and, therefore, it only remained that he should be a servant and subject to the Son of God along with others. And this passage is worthy of notice; for, by affirming *that he is not the Christ*, he reserves nothing for himself but to be subject to the head, and to serve in the Church as one of the rest, and not to be so highly exalted as to obscure the honor of the Head. He says that *he was sent before*, to prepare the way for Christ, as kings are wont to have heralds or forerunners.

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### John 3:29-34

**29.** He who hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth, and heareth him, rejoiceth exceedingly on account of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. **30.** He must increase, but I must decrease. **31.** He who cometh from above is above all; he who is from the earth is of the earth, and speaketh <sup>68</sup> of the earth: he who cometh from heaven is above all. **32.** And what he hath seen and heard, this he testifieth, and no man receiveth his testimony. **33.** But he who receiveth his testimony hath sealed that God is true. **34.** For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure.

**29.** *He who hath the bride.* By this comparison, he confirms more fully the statement, that it is Christ alone who is excluded from the ordinary rank of men. For as he who marries a wife does not call and invite his friends to the marriage, in order to prostitute the bride to them, or, by giving up his own rights, to allow them to partake with him of the nuptial bed, but rather that the marriage, being honored by them, may be rendered more sacred; so Christ does not call his ministers to the office of teaching, in order that, by conquering the Church, they may claim dominion over it, but that he may make use of their faithful labors for associating them with himself. It is a great and lofty distinction, that men are appointed over the Church, to represent the person of the Son of God. They are, therefore, like *the friends* whom *the bridegroom* brings with him, that they may accompany him in celebrating the marriage; but we must attend to the distinction, that ministers, being mindful of their rank, may not appropriate to themselves what belongs exclusively to *the bridegroom*. The whole amounts to this, that all the eminence which teachers may possess among themselves ought not to hinder Christ from ruling alone in his Church, or from governing it alone by his word.

This comparison frequently occurs in Scripture, when the Lord intends to express the sacred bond of adoption, by which he binds us to himself. For as he offers himself to be truly enjoyed by us, that he may be ours, so he justly claims from us that mutual fidelity and love which the wife owes to her husband. This marriage is entirely fulfilled in Christ, *whose flesh and bones* we are, as Paul informs us, ([Ephesians 5:30](#).) The chastity demanded by him consists chiefly in the obedience of the Gospel, that we may not suffer ourselves to be led aside from its pure simplicity, as the same Apostle teaches us, ([2 Corinthians 11:2, 3](#).) We must, therefore, be subject to Christ alone, he must be our only Head, we must not turn

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<sup>68</sup> “Et parle de la terre, ou, comme issu de terre;” — “and speaketh of the earthy or, as having proceeded from the earth.”

aside a hair's-breadth from the simple doctrine of the Gospel, he alone must have the highest glory, that he may retain the right and authority of being a bridegroom to us.

But what are ministers to do? Certainly, the Son of God calls them, that they may perform their duty to him in conducting the sacred marriage; and, therefore, their duty is, to take care, in every way, that the *spouse* — who is committed to their charge — may be presented by them *as a chaste virgin* to her husband; which Paul, in the passage already quoted, boasts of having done. But they who draw the Church to themselves rather than to Christ are guilty of basely violating the marriage which they ought to have honored. And the greater the honor which Christ confers on us, by making us the guardians of his spouse, so much the more heinous is our want of fidelity, if we do not endeavor to maintain and defend his right.

*This my joy therefore is fulfilled.* He means that he has obtained the fulfillment of all his desires, and that he has nothing further to wish, when he sees Christ reigning, and men listening to him as he deserves. Whoever shall have such affections that, laying aside all regard to himself, he shall extol Christ and be satisfied with seeing Christ honored, will be faithful and successful in ruling the Church; but, whoever shall swerve from that end in the slightest degree will be a base adulterer, and will do nothing else than corrupt the spouse of Christ.

**30.** *He must increase.* John the Baptist proceeds farther; for, having formerly been raised by the Lord to the highest dignity, he shows that this was only for a time, but now that *the Sun of Righteousness*, ([Malachi 4:2](#)) has arisen, he must give way; and, therefore, he not only scatters and drives away the empty fumes of honor which had been rashly and ignorantly heaped upon him by men, but also is exceedingly careful that the true and lawful honor which the Lord had bestowed on him may not obscure the glory of Christ. Accordingly, he tells us that the reason why he had been hitherto accounted a great Prophet was, that for a time only he was placed in so lofty a station, until Christ came, to whom he must surrender his office. In the meantime, he declares that he will most willingly endure to be reduced to nothing, provided that Christ occupy and fill the whole world with his rays; and this zeal of John all pastors of the Church ought to imitate by stooping with the head and shoulders to elevate Christ.

**31.** *He who cometh from above.* By another comparison he shows how widely Christ differs from all the rest, and how far he is above them; for he compares him to a king or distinguished general, who, speaking from his lofty seat, ought to be heard with reverence for his authority, but shows that it is enough for himself to speak from the lowest footstool of Christ.<sup>69</sup> In the second clause the old Latin translation has only once the words, *is of the earth*; but the Greek manuscripts agree in repeating the words twice. I suspect that ignorant men considered the repetition to be superfluous, and therefore erased it; but the meaning is: *he who is of earth* gives evidence of his descent, and remains in an earthly rank according

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69 “Au marchepied de Christ.”

to the condition of his nature. He maintains that it is peculiar to Christ alone to speak *from above*, because *he came from heaven*

But it may be asked, Did not John also *come from heaven*, as to his calling and office, and was it not therefore the duty of men to hear the Lord speaking by his mouth? For he appears to do injustice to the heavenly doctrine which he delivers. I reply, this was not said absolutely, but by comparison. If ministers be separately considered, they speak as *from heaven*, with the highest authority, what God commanded them; but, as soon as they begin to be contrasted with Christ, they must no longer be anything. Thus the Apostle, comparing the Law with the Gospel, says,

Since they escaped not who despised him that spoke on earth, beware lest you despise him  
who is from heaven,  
([Hebrews 12:25](#).)

Christ, therefore, wishes to be acknowledged in his ministers, but in such a manner that he may remain the only Lord, and that they may be satisfied with the rank of servants; but especially when a comparison is made, he wishes to be so distinguished that he alone may be exalted.

**32.** *And what he hath seen and heard.* John proceeds in the discharge of his office; for, in order to procure disciples for Christ, he commends Christ's doctrine as certain, because he utters nothing but what he has received from the Father. *Seeing* and *hearing* are contrasted with doubtful opinions, unfounded rumors, and every kind of falsehoods; for he means that Christ teaches nothing but what has been fully ascertained. But some one will say that little credit is due to him who has nothing but *what he has heard*. I reply, this word denotes that Christ has been taught by the Father, so that he brings forward nothing but what is divine, or, in other words, what has been revealed to him by God.

Now this belongs to the whole person of Christ, so far as the Father sent him into the world as His ambassador and interpreter. He afterwards charges the world with ingratitude, in basely and wickedly rejecting such an undoubted and faithful interpreter of God. In this way he meets the offense which might cause many to turn aside from the faith, and might hinder or retard the progress of many; for, as we are accustomed to depend too much on the judgment of the world, a considerable number of persons judge of the Gospel by the contempt of the world, or at least, where they see it everywhere rejected, they are prejudiced by that event, and are rendered more unwilling and more slow to believe. And, therefore, whenever we see such obstinacy in the world, let this admonition hold us in constant obedience to the Gospel, that it is truth which came from God. When he says that NO-MAN, *receiveth his testimony*, he means that there are very few and almost no believers, when compared with the vast crowd of unbelievers.

**33.** *But he who receiveth his testimony.* Here he exhorts and encourages the godly to embrace boldly the doctrine of the Gospel, as if he had said that there was no reason why

they should be ashamed or uneasy on account of their small number, since they have God as the Author of their faith, who alone abundantly supplies to us the place of all the rest. And, therefore, though the whole world should refuse or withhold faith in the Gospel, this ought not to prevent good men from giving their assent to God. They have something on which they may safely rest, when they know that to believe the Gospel is nothing else than to assent to the truths which God has revealed. Meanwhile, we learn that it is peculiar to faith to rely on God, and to be confirmed by his words; for there can be no assent, unless God have, first of all, come forward and spoken. By this doctrine faith is not only distinguished from all human inventions, but likewise from doubtful and wavering opinions; for it must correspond to the truth of God, which is free from all doubt, and therefore, as God cannot lie, it would be absurd that faith should waver. Fortified by this defense, whatever contrivances Satan may employ in his attempts to disturb and shake us, we shall always remain victorious.

Hence, too, we are reminded how acceptable and precious a sacrifice in the sight of God faith is. As nothing is more dear to him than his truth, so we cannot render to him more acceptable worship than when we acknowledge by our faith that He is true, for then we ascribe that honor which truly belongs to him. On the other hand, we cannot offer to him a greater insult than not to believe the Gospel; for he cannot be deprived of his truth without taking away all his glory and majesty. His truth is in some sort closely linked with the Gospel, and it is his will that there it should be recognized. Unbelievers, therefore, as far as lies in their power, leave to God nothing whatever; not that their wickedness overthrows the faithfulness of God, but because they do not hesitate to charge God with falsehood. If we are not harder than stones, this lofty title by which faith is adorned ought to kindle in our minds the most ardent love of it; for how great is the honor which God confers on poor worthless men, when they, who by nature are nothing else than falsehood and vanity, are thought worthy of attesting by their signature the sacred truth of God?

**34.** *For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God.* He confirms the preceding statement, for he shows that we have actually to do with God, when we receive the doctrine of Christ; because Christ proceeded from none else than from the Heavenly Father. It is, therefore, God alone who speaks to us by him; and, indeed, we do not assign to the doctrine of Christ all that it deserves, unless we acknowledge it to be divine.

*For God giveth not the Spirit by measure.* This passage is explained in two ways. Some extend it to the ordinary dispensation in this manner: that God, who is the inexhaustible fountain of all benefits, does not in the least degree diminish his resources, when he largely and plentifully bestows his gifts on men. They who draw from any vessel what they give to others come at last to the bottom; but there is no danger that any thing of this sort can happen with God, nor will the abundance of his gifts ever be so large that he cannot go beyond it, whenever he shall be pleased to make a new exercise of liberality. This exposition

appears to have some plausibility, for the sentence is indefinite; that is, it does not expressly point out any person.<sup>70</sup>

But I am more disposed to follow Augustine, who explains that it was said concerning Christ. Nor is there any force in the objection, that no express mention is made of Christ in this clause, since all ambiguity is removed by the next clause, in which that which might seem to have been said indiscriminately about many is limited to Christ. For these words were unquestionably added for the sake of explanation, that *the Father hath given all things into the hand of his Son, because he loveth him*, and ought therefore to be read as placed in immediate connection. The verb in the present tense — *giveth* — denotes, as it were, a continued act; for though Christ was all at once endued with the Spirit in the highest perfection, yet, as he continually flows, as it were, from a source, and is widely diffused, there is no impropriety in saying that Christ now receives him from the Father. But if any one choose to interpret it more simply, it is no unusual thing that there should be a change of tenses in such verbs, and that *giveth* should be put for *hath given*<sup>71</sup>

The meaning is now plain, that *the Spirit was not given to Christ by measure*, as if the power of grace which he possesses were in any way limited; as Paul teaches that

to every one is given according to the measure of the gift,

(Ephesians 4:7,)

so that there is no one who alone has full abundance. For while this is the mutual bond of brotherly intercourse between us, that no man separately considered has every thing that he needs, but all require the aid of each other, Christ differs from us in this respect, that the Father has poured out upon him an unlimited abundance of his Spirit. And, certainly, it is proper that the Spirit should dwell without measure in him, *that we may all draw out of his fullness*, as we have seen in the first chapter. And to this relates what immediately follows, that *the Father hath given all things into his hand*; for by these words John the Baptist not only declares the excellence of Christ, but, at the same time, points out the end and use of the riches with which he is endued; namely, that Christ, having been appointed by the Father to be the administrator, he distributes to every one as he chooses, and as he finds to be necessary; as Paul explains more fully in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, which I lately quoted. Although God enriches his own people in a variety of ways, this is peculiar to Christ alone, that he has *all things in his hand*

70 “C’est a dire, ne determine point certaine personne.”

71 “Et que *Donne* soit mis pour *et donne*.”

### John 3:35-36

**35.** The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. **36.** He who believeth in the Son hath eternal life; but he who believeth not in the Son <sup>72</sup> shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

*35. The Father loveth the Son.* But what is the meaning of this reason? Does he regard all others with hatred? The answer is easy, that he does not speak of the common love with which God regards men whom he has created, or his other works, but of that peculiar love which, beginning with the Son, flows from him to all the creatures. For that love with which, embracing the Son, he embraces us also in him, leads him to communicate all his benefits to us by his hand.

*36. He who believeth in the Son.* This was added, not only to inform us that we ought to ask all good things from Christ, but likewise to make us, acquainted with the manner in which they are enjoyed. He shows that enjoyment consists in faith; and not without reason, since by means of it we possess Christ, who brings along with him both righteousness and *life*, which is the fruit of righteousness. When faith in Christ is declared to be the cause of *life*, we learn from it that *life* is to be found in Christ alone, and that in no other way do we become partakers of it than by the grace of Christ himself. But all are not agreed as to the way in which the *life* of Christ comes to us. Some understand it thus: “as by believing we receive the Spirit, who regenerates us in order to justification, by that very regeneration we obtain salvation.” For my own part, though I acknowledge it to be true, that we are renewed by faith, so that the Spirit of Christ governs us, yet I say that we ought first to take into consideration the free forgiveness of sins, through which we are accepted by God. Again, I say that on this all our confidence of salvation is founded, and in this it consists; because justification before God cannot be reckoned to us in any other way than when he does not impute to us our sins.

*But he who believeth not in the Son.* As he held out life in Christ, by the sweetness of which he might allure us, so now he adjudges to eternal death all who do not believe in Christ. And, in this way, he magnifies the kindness of God, when he warns us, that there is no other way of escaping death, unless Christ deliver us; for this sentence depends on the fact, that we are all accursed in Adam. Now if it be the office of Christ to save what was lost, they who reject the salvation offered in him are justly suffered to remain in death. We have just now said that this belongs peculiarly to those who reject the gospel which has been revealed to them; for though all mankind are involved in the same destruction, yet a heavier

<sup>72</sup> “Qui ne croit point au Fils, ou, qui desobeit au Fils;” — “who believeth not in the Son, or, who disobeyeth the Son.”



and double vengeance awaits those who refuse to have the Son of God as their deliverer. And, indeed, it cannot be doubted that the Baptist, when he denounced death against unbelievers, intended to excite us, by the dread of it, to the exercise of faith in Christ. It is also manifest; that all the righteousness which the world thinks that it has out of Christ is condemned and reduced to nothing. Nor is any one enabled to object that it is unjust that those who are otherwise devout and holy should perish, because they do not believe; for it is folly to imagine that there is any holiness in men, unless it have been given to them by Christ.

*To see life* is here put for “enjoying life.” But to express more clearly that no hope remains for us, unless we are delivered by Christ, he says that *the wrath of God abideth* on unbelievers. Though I am not dissatisfied with the view given by Augustine, that John the Baptist used the word *abideth*, in order to inform us that, from the womb we were appointed to death, because we are all born *the children of wrath*, ([Ephesians 2:3](#).) At least, I willingly admit an allusion of this sort, provided we hold the true and simple meaning to be what I have stated, that death hangs over all unbelievers, and keeps them oppressed and overwhelmed in such a manner that they can never escape. And, indeed, though already the reprobate are naturally condemned, yet by their unbelief they draw down on themselves a new death. And it is for this purpose that the power of binding was given to the ministers of the gospel; for it is a just vengeance on the obstinacy of men, that they who shake off the salutary yoke of God should bind themselves with the chains of death.

# CHAPTER 4

### John 4:1-9

1. When, therefore, the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (2. Though Jesus himself did not baptize, but his disciples,) 3. He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. 4. And it was necessary that he should pass through Samaria. 5. He came, therefore, into the city of Samaria, which is called Sichar, near a field which Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6. And Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, fatigued by the journey, was thus sitting on the well, for it was about the sixth hour. 7. A woman came from Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith to her, Give me to drink. 8. For the disciples had gone into the city to buy food. 9. The Samaritan woman saith to him, How dost thou, who art a Jew, ask drink from me, who am a Samaritan woman? For the Jews hold no intercourse with the Samaritans.

1. *When, therefore, the Lord knew.* The Evangelist, intending now to give an account of the conversation which Christ had with a Samaritan woman, begins with explaining the cause of his journey. Knowing that *the Pharisees* were ill-disposed towards him, he did not wish to expose himself to their anger before the proper time. This was his motive for setting out from Judea. The Evangelist thus informs us that Christ did not come into Samaria with the intention of dwelling there, but because he had to pass through it on his way from Judea to Galilee; for until, by his resurrection, he should open up the way for the gospel, it was necessary that he should be employed in gathering the sheep of Israel to which he had been sent. That he now favored the Samaritans with his instruction was an extraordinary and almost accidental occurrence, if we may be allowed the expression.

But why does he seek the retirement and lurking-places of Galilee, as if he were unwilling to be known, which was highly to be desired? I reply, he knew well the proper way to act, and made such use of the opportunities of usefulness that he did not allow a moment to be lost. He wished, therefore, to pursue his course with regularity, and in such a manner as he judged to be proper. Hence too we hear that our minds ought to be regulated in such a manner that, on the one hand, we may not be deterred by any fear from going forward in duty; and that, on the other hand, we may not too rashly throw ourselves into dangers. All who are earnestly desirous to pursue their calling will be careful to maintain this moderation, for which they will steadily follow the Lord even through the midst of deaths; they will not rush into them heedlessly, but will walk in their ways. Let us, therefore, remember that we must not advance farther than our calling demands.

*That the Pharisees had heard.* *The Pharisees* alone are mentioned by the Evangelist as having been hostile to Christ; not that the other scribes were friendly, but because this sect was at that time in the ascendant, and because they were filled with rage under the pretense of godly zeal. It may be asked, Did they envy Christ that he had *more disciples*, because their

stronger attachment to John led them to promote his honor and reputation? The meaning of the words is different; for though they were formerly dissatisfied at finding that John collected disciples, their minds were still more exasperated, when they saw that a still greater number of disciples came to Christ. From the time that John avowed himself to be nothing more than the herald of the Son of God, they began to flock to Christ in greater crowds, and already he had almost completed his ministry. Thus he gradually resigned to Christ the office of teaching and baptizing.

2. *Though Jesus himself baptized not.* He gives the designation of *Christ's Baptism* to that which he conferred by the hands of other, in order to inform us that Baptism ought not to be estimated by the person of the minister, but that its power depends entirely on its Author, in whose name, and by whose authority, it is conferred. Hence we derive a remarkable consolation, when we know that our baptism has no less efficacy to wash and renew us, than if it had been given by the hand of the Son of God. Nor can it be doubted that, so long as he lived in the world, he abstained from the outward administration of the sign, for the express purpose of testifying to all ages, that Baptism loses nothing of its value when it is administered by a mortal man. In short, not only does Christ baptize inwardly by his Spirit, but the very symbol which we receive from a mortal man ought to be viewed by us in the same light as if Christ himself displayed his hand from heaven, and stretched it out to us. Now if the Baptism administered by a man is Christ's Baptism, it will not cease to be Christ's Baptism whoever be the minister. And this is sufficient for refuting the Anabaptists, who maintain that, when the minister is a wicked man, the baptism is also vitiated, and, by means of this absurdity, disturb the Church; as Augustine has very properly employed the same argument against the Donatists.

5. *Which is called Sichar* Jerome, in his epitaph on Paula, thinks that this is an incorrect reading, and that it ought to have been written *Sichem*; and, indeed, the latter appears to have been the ancient and true name; but it is probable that, in the time of the Evangelist, the word *Sichar* was already in common use. As to the place, it is generally agreed that it was a city situated close to Mount Gerizzim, the inhabitants of which were treacherously slain by Simeon and Levi, ([Genesis 34:25](#)), and which Abimelech, a native of the place, afterwards razed to its foundations, ([Judges 9:45](#).) But the convenience of its situation was such that, a third time, a city was built there, which, in the age of Jerome, they called *Neapolis*. By adding so many circumstances, the Apostle removes all doubt; for we are clearly informed by Moses where that field was which Jacob assigned to the children of Joseph, ([Genesis 48:22](#).) It is universally acknowledged, also, that Mount Gerizzim was near to Shechem. We shall afterwards state that a temple was built there; and there can be no doubt that Jacob dwelt a long time in that place with his family.

*And Jesus, fatigued by the journey.* He did not pretend weariness, but was actually fatigued; for, in order that he might be better prepared for the exercise of sympathy and compassion towards us, he took upon him our weaknesses, as the Apostle shows that we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, ([Hebrews 4:15.](#))

With this agrees the circumstance of the time; for it is not wonderful that, being thirsty and *fatigued*, he rested at the well about noon; for as the day, from sunrise to sunset, had twelve hours, *the sixth hour* was *Noon*. When the Evangelist says that *he sat* thus, he means that it was the attitude of a man who was *fatigued*.

7. A woman came from Samaria. When he asks water from the woman, he does it not merely with the intention of obtaining an opportunity to teach her; for thirst prompted him to desire to drink. But this cannot hinder him from availing himself of the opportunity of instruction which he has obtained, for he prefers the salvation of the woman to his own wants. Thus, forgetting his own thirst, as if he were satisfied with obtaining leisure and opportunity for conversation, that he might instruct her in true godliness, he draws a comparison between the visible water and the spiritual, and waters with heavenly doctrine the mind of her who had refused him water to drink.

9. *How dost thou, who art a Jew?* This is a reproach, by which she retorts upon him the contempt which was generally entertained by his nation. The Samaritans are known to have been the scum of a people gathered from among foreigners. Having corrupted the worship of God, and introduced many spurious and wicked ceremonies, they were justly regarded by the Jews with detestation. Yet it cannot be doubted that the Jews, for the most part, held out their zeal for the law as a cloak for their carnal hatred; for many were actuated more by ambition and envy, and by displeasure at seeing the country which had been allotted to them occupied by the Samaritans, than by grief and uneasiness because the worship of God had been corrupted. There was just ground for the separation, provided that their feelings had been pure and well regulated. For this reason Christ, when he first sends the Apostles to proclaim the Gospel, forbids them to turn aside to the Samaritans, ([Matthew 10:5.](#))

But this woman does what is natural to almost all of us; for, being desirous to be held in esteem, we take very ill to be despised. This disease of human nature is so general, that every person wishes that his vices should please others. If any man disapproves of us, or of any thing that we do or say,<sup>73</sup> we are immediately offended without any good reason. Let any man examine himself, and he will find this seed of pride in his mind, until it has been eradicated by the Spirit of God. This woman, therefore, knowing that the superstitions of her nation were condemned by the Jews, now offers an insult to them in the person of Christ.

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73 “Et qui reprouve ce que nous disons ou faisons.”

*For the Jews hold no intercourse with the Samaritans.* These words I consider to have been uttered by the woman. Others suppose that the Evangelist added them for the sake of explanation, and, indeed, it is of little consequence which meaning you prefer. But I think it more natural to believe that the woman jeers at Christ in this manner: “What? Is it lawful for you to ask drink from me, when you hold us to be so profane?” If any prefer the other interpretation, I do not dispute the point. Besides, it is possible that the Jews carried their abhorrence of the Samaritans beyond proper bounds; for as we have said that they applied to an improper purpose a false pretense of zeal, so it was natural for them to go to excess, as almost always happens with those who give way to wicked passions.

### John 4:10-15

**10.** Jesus answered and said to her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. **11.** The woman saith to him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; whence, therefore, hast thou living water?<sup>74</sup> **12.** Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and himself drank of it, and his children, and his cattle? **13.** Jesus answered and said to her, Every one that drinketh of this water will thirst again; **14.** But he who drinketh of the water which I shall give him will never thirst; but the water, which I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life. **15.** The woman saith to him, Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, and may not come hither to draw.

**10.** *Jesus answered.* Christ now, availing himself of the opportunity, begins to preach about the grace and power of his Spirit, and that to a woman who did not at all deserve that he should speak a word to her. This is certainly an astonishing instance of his goodness. For what was there in this wretched woman, that, from being a prostitute, she suddenly became a disciple of the Son of God? Though in all of us he has displayed a similar instance of his compassion. All the women, indeed, are not prostitutes, nor are all the men stained by some heinous crime; but what excellence can any of us plead as a reason why he deigned to bestow on us the heavenly doctrine, and the honor of being admitted into his family? Nor was it by accident that the conversation with such a person occurred; for the Lord showed us, as in a model, that those to whom he imparts the doctrine of salvation are not selected on the ground of merit. And it appears at first sight a wonderful arrangement, that he passed by so many great men in Judea, and yet held familiar discourse with this woman. But it was necessary that, in his person, it should be explained how true is that saying of the Prophet, I was found by them that sought me not; I was made manifest to them that asked not after me. I said to those who sought me not, Behold, here I am,

(Isaiah 65:1.)

*If thou knewest the gift of God.* These two clauses, *If thou knewest the gift of God,* and, *who it is that talketh with thee,* I read separately, viewing the latter as an interpretation of the former. For it was a wonderful kindness of God to have Christ present, who brought with him eternal life. The meaning will be more plain if, instead of *and,* we put *namely,* or some other word of that kind,<sup>75</sup> thus: *If thou knewest the gift of God,* namely, *who it is that talketh with thee* By these words we are taught that then only do we know what Christ is,

<sup>74</sup> “Ceste eau vive;” — “this living water.”

<sup>75</sup> “Si en lieu de *Et,* nous mettons *A scavoir,* ou quelque autre mot semblable.”

when we understand what the Father hath given to us in him, and what benefits he brings to us. Now that knowledge begins with a conviction of our poverty; for, before any one desires a remedy, he must be previously affected with the view of his distresses. Thus the Lord invites not those who have drunk enough, but the thirsty, not those who are satiated, but the hungry, to eat and drink. And why would Christ be sent with the fullness of the Spirit, if we were not empty?

Again, as he has made great progress, who, feeling his deficiency, already acknowledges how much he needs the aid of another; so it would not be enough for him to groan under his distresses, if he had not also hope of aid ready and prepared. In this way we might do no more than waste ourselves with grief, or at least we might, like the Papists, run about in every direction, and oppress ourselves with useless and unprofitable weariness. But when Christ appears, we no longer wander in vain, seeking a remedy where none can be obtained, but we go straight to him. The only true and profitable knowledge of the grace of God is, when we know that it is exhibited to us in Christ, and that it is held out to us by his hand. In like manner does Christ remind us how efficacious is a knowledge of his blessings, since it excites us to seek them and kindles our hearts. *If thou knewest*, says he, *thou wouldst have asked*. The design of these words is not difficult to be perceived; for he intended to whet the desire of this woman, that she might not despise and reject the life which was offered to her.

*He would have given thee*. By these words Christ testifies that, if our prayers be addressed to him, they will not be fruitless; and, indeed, without this confidence, the earnestness of prayer would be entirely cooled. But when Christ meets those who come to him, and is ready to satisfy their desires, there is no more room for sluggishness or delay. And there is no man who would not feel that this is said to all of us, if he were not prevented by his unbelief.

*Living water*. Though the name *Water* is borrowed from the present occurrence, and applied to *the Spirit*, yet this metaphor is very frequent in Scripture, and rests on the best grounds. For we are like a dry and barren soil; there is no sap and no rigour in us, until the Lord water us by his Spirit. In another passage, the Spirit is likewise called *clean water*, ([Hebrews 10:22](#),) but in a different sense; namely, because he washes and cleanses us from the pollutions with which we are entirely covered. But in this and similar passages, the subject treated of is the secret energy by which he restores life in us, and maintains and brings it to perfection. There are some who explain this as referring to the doctrine of the Gospel, to which I own that this appellation is fully applicable; but I think that Christ includes here the whole grace of our renewal; for we know that he was sent for the purpose of bringing to us a new life. In my opinion, therefore, he intended to contrast *water* with that destitution of all blessings under which mankind groan and labor. Again, *living water* is not so called from its effect, as *life-giving*, but the allusion is to different kinds of waters. It is called *living*, because it flows from a *living fountain*.



11. *Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with.* As the Samaritans were despised by the Jews, so the Samaritans, on the other hand, held the Jews in contempt. Accordingly, this woman at first not only disdains Christ but even mocks at him. She understands quite well that Christ is speaking figuratively, but she throws out a jibe by a different figure, intending to say, that he promises more than he can accomplish.

12. *Art thou greater than our father Jacob?* She proceeds to charge him with arrogance in exalting himself above the holy patriarch *Jacob*. “*Jacob*,” she says, “was satisfied with this well for his own use and that of his whole family: and hast thou a more excellent water?” How faulty this comparison is, appears plainly enough from this consideration, that she compares the servant to the master, and a dead man to the living God; and yet how many in the present day fall into this very error? The more cautious ought we to be not to extol the persons of men so as to obscure the glory of God. We ought, indeed, to acknowledge with reverence the gifts of God, wherever they appear. It is, therefore, proper that we should honor men who are eminent in piety, or endued with other uncommon gifts; but it ought to be in such a manner that God may always remain eminent above all — that Christ, with his Gospel, may shine illustriously, for to him all the splendor of the world must yield.

It ought also to be observed that the Samaritans falsely boasted of being descended from the holy Fathers. In like manner do the Papists, though they are a bastard seed, arrogantly boast of the Fathers, and despise the true children of God. Although the Samaritans had been descended from Jacob according to the flesh, yet, as they were altogether degenerated and estranged from true godliness, this boasting would have been ridiculous. But now that they are Cutheans by descent, ([2 Kings 17:24](#);) or at least collected out of the profane Gentiles, they still do not fail to make false pretensions to the name of the holy Patriarch. But this is of no avail to them; and such must be the case with all who wickedly exult in the light of men, so as to deprive themselves of the light of God, and who have nothing in common with the holy Fathers, whose name they have abused.

13. *Every one that drinketh of this water.* Though Christ perceives that he is doing little good, and even that his instruction is treated with mockery, he proceeds to explain more clearly what he had said. He distinguishes between the use of the two kinds of water; that the one serves the body, and only for a time, while the power of the other gives perpetual vigor to the soul. For, as the body is liable to decay, so the aids by which it is supported must be frail and transitory. That which quickens the soul cannot but be eternal. Again, the words of Christ are not at variance with the fact, that believers, to the very end of life, burn with desire of more abundant grace. For he does not say that, from the very first day, we drink so as to be fully satisfied, but only means that the Holy Spirit is a continually flowing fountain; and that, therefore, there is no danger that they who have been renewed by spiritual grace shall be dried up. And, therefore, although we thirst throughout our whole life, yet it is certain that we have not received the Holy Spirit for a single day, or for any short period,

but as a perennial fountain, which will never fail us. Thus believers thirst, and keenly thirst, throughout their whole life; and yet they have abundance of quickening moisture; for however small may have been the measure of grace which they have received, it gives them perpetual vigor, so that they are never entirely dry. When, therefore, he says that they shall be satisfied, he contrasts not with *Desire* but only with *Drought*

*Shall be a fountain of water springing up into eternal life.* These words express still more clearly the preceding statement; for they denote a continual watering, which maintains in them a heavenly eternity during this mortal and perishing life. The grace of Christ, therefore, does not flow to us for a short time, but overflows into a blessed immortality; for it does not cease to flow until the incorruptible life which it commences be brought to perfection.,

**15. Give me this water.** This woman undoubtedly is sufficiently aware that Christ is speaking of spiritual water; but because she despises him, she sets at naught all his promises; for so long as the authority of him who speaks is not acknowledged by us, his doctrine is not permitted to enter. Indirectly, therefore, the woman taunted Christ, saying, “Thou boastest much, but I see nothing; show it in reality, if thou canst.”

### John 4:16-21

**16.** Jesus saith to her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. **17.** The woman answered, and said to him, I have not a husband. Jesus said to her, Thou hast well said, I have not a husband; **18.** For thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband; in this thou hast told the truth. **19.** The woman saith to him, Sir, I see that thou art a Prophet. **20.** Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you say that Jerusalem is the place where we ought to worship. **21.** Jesus saith to her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when you shall not worship the Father either in this mountain or in Jerusalem.

**16. *Call thy husband.*** This appears to have no connection with the subject; and, indeed, one might suppose that Christ, annoyed and put to shame by the impudence of the woman, changes the discourse. But this is not the case; for when he perceived that jeers and scoffs were her only reply to what he had said, he applied an appropriate remedy to this disease, by striking the woman's conscience with a conviction of her sin. And it is also a remarkable proof of his compassion that, when the woman was unwilling of her own accord to come to him, he draws her, as it were, against her will. But we ought chiefly to observe what I have mentioned, that they who are utterly careless and almost stupid must be deeply wounded by a conviction of sin; for such persons will regard the doctrine of Christ as a fable, until, being summoned to the judgment-seat of God, they are compelled to dread as a Judge him whom they formerly despised. All who do not scruple to rise against the doctrine of Christ with their scoffing jests must be treated in this manner, that they may be made to feel that they will not pass unpunished. Such too is the obstinacy of many, that they will never listen to Christ until they have been subdued by violence. Whenever then we perceive that the oil of Christ has no flavour, it ought to be mixed with wine, that its taste may begin to be felt. Nay more, this is necessary for all of us; for we are not seriously affected by Christ speaking, unless we have been aroused by repentance. So then, in order that any one may profit in the school of Christ, his hardness must be subdued by the demonstration of his misery, as the earth, in order that it may become fruitful, is prepared and softened by the ploughshare,<sup>76</sup> for this knowledge alone shakes off all our flatteries, so that we no longer dare to mock God. Whenever, therefore, a neglect of the word of God steals upon us, no remedy will be more appropriate than that each of us should arouse himself to the consideration of his sins, that he may be ashamed of himself, and, trembling before the judgment-seat of God, may be humbled to obey Him whom he had wantonly despised.

**17. *I have not a husband.*** We do not yet fully perceive the fruit of this advice, by which Christ intended to pierce the heart of this woman, to lead her to repentance. And, indeed,

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<sup>76</sup> "Tout ainsi que la terre, pour apporter fruit, sera menuissee et amollie par le soc de la charrue."

we are so intoxicated, or rather stupified, by our self-love, that we are not at all moved by the first wounds that are inflicted. But Christ applies an appropriate cure for this sluggishness, by pressing the ulcer more sharply, for he openly reproaches her with her wickedness; though I do not think that it is a single case of fornication that is here pointed out, for when he says that *she has had five husbands*, the reason of this probably was, that, being a froward and disobedient wife, she constrained her husbands to divorce her. I interpret the words thus: “Though God joined thee to lawful husbands, thou didst not cease to sin, until, rendered infamous by numerous divorces, thou prostitutedst thyself to fornication.”

**19.** *Sir, I perceive that thou art a Prophet.* The fruit of the reproof now becomes evident; for not only does the woman modestly acknowledge her fault, but, being ready and prepared to listen to the doctrine of Christ, which she had formerly disdained, she now desires and requests it of her own accord. Repentance, therefore, is the commencement of true docility, as I have already said, and opens the gate for entering into the school of Christ. Again, the woman teaches us by her example, that when we meet with any teacher, we ought to avail ourselves of this opportunity, that we may not be ungrateful to God, who never sends *Prophets* to us without, as it were, stretching out the hand to invite us to himself. But we must remember what Paul teaches, that they who have grace given to them to teach well<sup>77</sup> are sent to us by God; for

how shall they preach unless they are sent? ([Romans 10:15](#).)

**20.** *Our fathers.* It is a mistaken opinion which some hold, that the woman, finding the reproof to be disagreeable and hateful, cunningly changes the subject. On the contrary, she passes from what is particular to what is general, and, having been informed of her sin, wishes to be generally instructed concerning the pure *worship* of God. She takes a proper and regular course, when she consults a *Prophet*, that she may not fall into a mistake in the *worship* of God. It is as if she inquired at God himself in what manner he chooses to be *worshipped*; for nothing is more wicked than to contrive various modes of *worship* without the authority of the word of God.

It is well known that there was a constant dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans about the true rule of worshipping God. Although the Cutheans and other foreigners, who had been brought into Samaria, when the ten tribes were led into captivity, were constrained by the plagues and punishments of God<sup>78</sup> to adopt the ceremonies of the Law, and to profess the worship of the God of Israel, (as we read, [2 Kings 17:27](#);) yet the religion which they had was imperfect and corrupted in many ways; which the Jews could not all endure. But the dispute was still more inflamed after that Manasseh, son of the high priest John, and brother of Jaddus, had built the temple on mount Gerizzim, when Darius, the last king of

<sup>77</sup> “Qui ont la grace de bien enseigner.”

<sup>78</sup> “Par les playes et punitions de Dieu.”

the Persians, held the government of Judea by the hand of Sanballat, whom he had placed there as his lieutenant. For Manasseh, having married a daughter of the governor, that he might not be inferior to his brother, made himself a priest there, and procured for himself by bribes as many apostles as he could, as Josephus relates, (Ant. 11:7:2, and 8:2.)

*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.* The Samaritans at that time did, as we learn from the words of the woman, what is customary with those who have revolted from true godliness, to seek to shield themselves by the examples of the *Fathers*. It is certain that this was not the reason which induced them to offer sacrifices there, but after that they had framed a false and perverse worship, obstinacy followed, which was ingenious in contriving excuses. I acknowledge, indeed, that unsteady and thoughtless men are sometimes excited by foolish zeal, as if they had been bitten by a gad-fly, so that when they learn that any thing has been done by the Saints, they instantly seize on the example without any exercise of judgment.

A second fault is still more common, that they borrow the deeds of the *Fathers* as a cloak to their errors, — and this may be easily seen in Popery. But as this passage is a remarkable proof how absurdly they act who, disregarding the command of God, conform to the examples of *the Fathers*, we ought to observe in how many ways the world commonly sins in this respect. For it frequently happens that the majority, without discrimination, follow those persons as *Fathers* who are least of all entitled to be accounted *Fathers*. Thus in the present day we perceive that the Papists, while with open mouth they declaim about *the Fathers*, allow no place for Prophets and Apostles, but, when they have mentioned a few persons who deserve to be honored, collect a vast group of men like themselves, or at least come down to more corrupt ages in which, though there did not yet prevail so gross a barbarism as now exists, yet religion and the purity of doctrine had greatly declined. We ought, therefore, carefully to attend to the distinction, that none may be reckoned *Fathers* but those who were manifestly the sons of God; and who also, by the eminence of their piety, were entitled to this honorable rank. Frequently, too, we err in this respect, that by the actions of *the Fathers* we rashly lay down a common law; for the multitude do not imagine that they confer sufficient honor on *the Fathers*, if they do not exclude them from the ordinary rank of men. Thus, when we do not remember that they were fallible men, we indiscriminately mingle their vices with their virtues. Hence arises the worst confusion in the conduct of life; for while all the actions of men ought to be tried by the rule of the Law, we subject the balance to those things which ought to be weighed by it; and, in short, where so much importance is attached to the imitation of *the Fathers*, the world thinks that there can be no danger in sinning after their example.

A third fault is — a false, and ill-regulated, or thoughtless imitation;<sup>79</sup> that is, when we, though not endued with the same spirit, or authorized by the same command, plead as our

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79 “Une fausse imitation, et mal reiglee, ou inconsideree.”

example what any of *the Fathers* did; as for instance, if any private individual resolved to revenge the injuries done to brethren, because Moses did this, ([Exodus 2:12](#);) or if any one were to put fornicators to death, because this was done by Phinehas, ([Numbers 25:7](#).) That savage fury in slaying their own children originated, as many think, in the wish of the Jews to be like their father Abraham, as if the command, *Offer up thy son Isaac*, ([Genesis 22:2](#);) were a general command, and not rather a remarkable trial of a single man. Such a false imitation (κακοζηλία) is generally produced by pride and excessive confidence, when men claim more for themselves than they have a right to do; and when each person does not measure himself by his own standard. Yet none of these are true imitators of *the Fathers*, most of them are apes. That a considerable portion of ancient monachism flowed from the same source will be acknowledged by those who shall carefully examine the writings of the ancients. And, therefore, unless we choose to err of our own accord, we ought always to see what spirit each person has received, what his calling requires, what is suitable to his condition, and what he is commanded to do.

Closely allied to this third fault is another, namely, the confounding of times, when men, devoting their whole attention to the examples of *the Fathers*, do not consider that the Lord has since enjoined a different rule of conduct, which they ought to follow.<sup>80</sup> To this ignorance ought to be ascribed that huge mass of ceremonies by which the Church has been buried under Popery. Immediately after the commencement of the Christian Church, it began to err in this respect, because a foolish affectation of copying Jewish ceremonies had an undue influence. The Jews had their sacrifices; and that Christians might not be inferior to them in splendor, the ceremony of sacrificing Christ was invented: as if the condition of the Christian Church would be worse when there would be an end of all those shadows by which the brightness of Christ might be obscured. But afterwards this fury broke out more forcibly, and spread beyond all bounds.

That we may not fall into this error, we ought always to be attentive to the present rule. Formerly incense, candles, holy garments, an altar, vessels, and ceremonies of this nature, pleased God; and the reason was, that nothing is more precious or acceptable to Him than obedience. Now, since the coming of Christ, matters are entirely changed. We ought, therefore, to consider what he enjoins on us under the Gospel, that we may not follow at random what *the Fathers* observed under the Law; for what was at that time a holy observation of the worship of God would now be a shocking sacrilege.

The Samaritans were led astray by not considering, in the example of Jacob, how widely it differed from the condition of their own time. The Patriarchs were permitted to erect altars everywhere, because the place had not yet been fixed which the Lord afterwards selected;

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80 “A depuis ordonne et commande une autre conduite et maniere de faire, qu'ils ont a suyvre.”

but from the time that God ordered the temple to be built on mount Zion, the freedom which they formerly enjoyed ceased. For this reason Moses said,

Hereafter you shall not do every one what appears right in his own eyes, but only what I command you,

(Deuteronomy 12:8, 14;)

for, from the time that the Lord gave the Law, he restricted the true worship of himself to the requirements of that Law, though formerly a greater degree of liberty was enjoyed. A similar pretense was offered by those who worshipped in Bethel; for there Jacob had offered a solemn sacrifice to God, but after that the Lord had fixed the place of sacrifice at Jerusalem, it was no longer Bethel, *the house of God*, but Bethaven, *the house of wickedness*.

We now see what was the state of the question. The Samaritans had the example of the Fathers for their rule: the Jews rested on the commandment of God. This woman, though hitherto she had followed the custom of her nation, was not altogether satisfied with it. By worship we are to understand here not any kind of worship, (for daily prayers might be offered in any place,) but that which was joined with sacrifices, and which constituted a public and solemn profession of religion.

**21.** *Woman, believe me.* In the first part of this reply, he briefly sets aside the ceremonial worship which had been appointed under the Law; for when he says that the hour is at hand when there shall be no peculiar and fixed place for worship, he means that what Moses delivered was only for a time, and that the time was now approaching when the partition-wall ([Ephesians 2:14](#)) should be thrown down. In this manner he extends the worship of God far beyond its former narrow limits, that the Samaritans might become partakers of it.

*The hour cometh.* He uses the present tense instead of the future; but the meaning is, that the repeal of the Law is already at hand, so far as relates to the Temple, and Priesthood, and other outward ceremonies. By calling God Father, he seems indirectly to contrast Him with the Fathers whom the woman had mentioned, and to convey this instruction, that God will be a common Father to all, so that he will be generally worshipped without distinction of places or nations.

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## John 4:22-26

**22.** You worship what you know not, we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23.** But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. **24.** God is a Spirit, and they who worship him ought to worship in spirit and in truth. **25.** The woman saith to him, I know that the Messiah will come, who is called Christ; therefore, when he shall come, he will tell you all things. **26.** Jesus saith to her, It is I who talk with thee.

He now explains more largely what he had briefly glanced at about the abolition of the Law; but he divides the substance of his discourse into two parts. In the former, he charges with superstition and error the form of worshipping God which had been used by the Samaritans, but testifies that the true and lawful form was observed by the Jews. And he assigns the cause of the difference, that from the word of God the Jews obtained certainty as to his worship, while the Samaritans received nothing certain from the mouth of God. In the second part, he declares that the ceremonies hitherto observed by the Jews would soon be at an end.

*22. You worship what you know not, we worship what we know.* This is a sentence worthy of being remembered, and teaches us that we ought not to attempt any thing in religion rashly or at random; because, unless there be knowledge, it is not God that we worship, but a phantom or idol. All good intentions, as they are called, are struck by this sentence, as by a thunderbolt; for we learn from it, that men can do nothing but err, when they are guided by their own opinion without the word or command of God. For Christ, defending the person and cause of his nation, shows that the Jews are widely different from the Samaritans. And why?

*Because salvation is from the Jews.* By these words he means that they have the superiority in this respect, that God had made with them a covenant of eternal salvation. Some restrict it to Christ, who was descended from the Jews; and, indeed, since

all the promises of God were confirmed and ratified in him,

(2 Corinthians 1:20,)

there is no salvation but in him. But as there can be no doubt that Christ gives the preference to the Jews on this ground, that they do not worship some unknown deity, but God alone, who revealed himself to them, and by whom they were adopted as his people; by the word *salvation* we ought to understand that saving manifestation which had been made to them concerning the heavenly doctrine.

But why does he say that it was *from the Jews*, when it was rather deposited with them, that they alone might enjoy it? He alludes, in my opinion, to what had been predicted by the Prophets, *that the Law would go forth from Zion*, (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2,) for they were



separated for a time from the rest of the nations on the express condition, that the pure knowledge of God should flow out from them to the whole world. It amounts to this, that God is not properly worshipped but by the certainty of faith, which cannot be produced in any other way than by the word of God. Hence it follows that all who forsake the word fall into idolatry; for Christ plainly testifies that an idol, or an imagination of their own brain, is substituted for God, when men are ignorant of the true God; and he charges with ignorance all to whom God has not revealed himself, for as soon as we are deprived of the light of his word, darkness and blindness reign.

It ought to be observed that the Jews, when they had treacherously set aside the covenant of eternal life which God had made with their fathers, were deprived of the treasure which they had till that time enjoyed; for they had not yet been driven out of the Church of God. Now that they deny the Son, they have nothing in common with the Father;

for whosoever denieth the Son hath not the Father,

(1 John 2:23.)

The same judgment must be formed concerning all who have turned aside from the pure faith of the Gospel to their own inventions and the traditions of men. Although they who worship God according to their own judgment or human traditions flatter and applaud themselves in their obstinacy, this single word, thundering from heaven, lays prostrate all that they imagine to be divine and holy, *You worship what you do not know*. It follows from this that, if we wish our religion to be approved by God, it must rest on knowledge obtained from His word.

23. *But the hour cometh.* Now follows the latter clause, about repealing the worship, or ceremonies,<sup>81</sup> prescribed by the Law. When he says that *the hour cometh*, or *will come*, he shows that the order laid down by Moses will not be perpetual. When he says that *the hour is now come*, he puts an end to the ceremonies, and declares that *the time of reformation*, of which the Apostle speaks, (Hebrews 9:10,) has thus been fulfilled. Yet he approves of the Temple, the Priesthood, and all the ceremonies connected with them, so far as relates to the past time. Again, to show that God does not choose to be worshipped either in Jerusalem or in mount Gerizzim, he takes a higher principle, that the true worship of Him consists *in the spirit*; for hence it follows that in all places He may be properly worshipped.

But the first inquiry which presents itself here is, Why, and in what sense, is the worship of God called *spiritual*? To understand this, we must attend to the contrast between the spirit and outward emblems, as between the shadows and the truth. The worship of God is said to consist *in the spirit*, because it is nothing else than that inward faith of the heart which produces prayer, and, next, purity of conscience and self-denial, that we may be dedicated to obedience to God as holy sacrifices.

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81 "C'est a dire, des ceremonies."

Hence arises another question, Did not the Fathers worship Him *spiritually* under the Law? I reply, as God is always like himself, he did not from the beginning of the world approve of any other worship than that which is spiritual, and which agrees with his own nature. This is abundantly attested by Moses himself, who declares in many passages that the Law has no other object than that the people may cleave to God with faith and a pure conscience. But it is still more plainly declared by the Prophets when they attack with severity the hypocrisy of the people, because they thought that they had satisfied God, when they had performed the sacrifices and made an outward display. It is unnecessary to quote here many proofs which are to be found everywhere, but the most remarkable passages are the following: — [Psalm 50](#); [Isaiah 1, 58, 66](#); [Micah 5](#); [Amos 7](#). But while the worship of God under the Law was spiritual, it was enveloped in so many outward ceremonies, that it resembled something carnal and earthly. For this reason Paul calls the ceremonies *flesh and the beggarly elements of the world*, ([Galatians 4:9](#).) In like manner, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that the ancient *sanctuary*, with its appendages, was *earthly*, ([Hebrews 9:1](#).) Thus we may justly say that the worship of the Law was spiritual in its substance, but, in respect of its form, it was somewhat earthly and carnal; for the whole of that economy, the reality of which is now fully manifested, consisted of shadows.

We now see what the Jews had in common with us, and in what respect they differed from us. In all ages God wished to be worshipped by faith, prayer, thanksgiving, purity of heart, and innocence of life; and at no time did he delight in any other sacrifices. But under the Law there were various additions, so that the *spirit and truth* were concealed under forms and shadows, whereas, now that *the vail of the temple has been rent*, ([Matthew 27:51](#).) nothing is hidden or obscure. There are indeed among ourselves, in the present day, some outward exercises of godliness, which our weakness renders necessary, but such is the moderation and sobriety of them, that they do not obscure the plain truth of Christ. In short, what was exhibited to the fathers under figures and shadows is now openly displayed.

Now in Popery this distinction is not only confounded, but altogether overturned; for there the shadows are not less thick than they formerly were under the Jewish religion. It cannot be denied that Christ here lays down an obvious distinction between us and the Jews. Whatever may be the subterfuges by which the Papists attempt to escape, it is evident that we differ from the gathers in nothing more than outward form, because while they worshipped God spiritually, they were bound to perform ceremonies, which were abolished by the coming of Christ. Thus all who oppress the Church with an excessive multitude of ceremonies, do what is in their power to deprive the Church of the presence of Christ. I do not stop to examine the vain excuses which they plead, that many persons in the present day have as much need of those aids as the Jews had in ancient times. It is always our duty to inquire by what order the Lord wished his Church to be governed, for He alone knows thoroughly what is expedient for us. Now it is certain that nothing is more at variance with

the order appointed by God than the gross and singularly carnal pomp which prevails in Popery. The *spirit* was indeed concealed by the shadows of the Law, but the masks of Popery disfigure it altogether; and, therefore, we must not wink at such gross and shameful corruptions. Whatever arguments may be employed by ingenious men, or by those who have not sufficient courage to correct vices — that they are doubtful matters, and ought to be held as indifferent — certainly it cannot be endured that the rule laid down by Christ shall be violated.

*The true worshippers.* Christ appears indirectly to reprove the obstinacy of many, which was afterwards displayed; for we know how obstinate and contentious the Jews were, when the Gospel was revealed, in defending the ceremonies to which they had been accustomed. But this statement has a still more extensive meaning; for, knowing that the world would never be entirely free from superstitions, he thus separates the devout and upright *worshippers* from those who were false and hypocritical. Armed with this testimony, let us not hesitate to condemn the Papists in all their inventions, and boldly to despise their reproaches. For what reason have we to fear, when we learn that God is pleased with this plain and simple worship, which is disdained by the Papists, because it is not attended by a cumbrous mass of ceremonies? And of what use to them is the idle splendor of the flesh, by which Christ declares that the Spirit is quenched? What it is *to worship God in spirit and truth* appears clearly from what has been already said. It is to lay aside the entanglements of ancient ceremonies, and to retain merely what is spiritual in the worship of God; for the *truth* of the worship of God consists in *the spirit*, and ceremonies are but a sort of appendage. And here again it must be observed, that *truth* is not compared with *falsehood*, but with the outward addition of the figures of the Law;<sup>82</sup> so that — to use a common expression — it is the pure and simple substance of spiritual worship.

24. *God is a Spirit.* This is a confirmation drawn from the very nature of God. Since men are flesh, we ought not to wonder, if they take delight in those things which correspond to their own disposition. Hence it arises, that they contrive many things in the worship of God which are full of display, but have no solidity. But they ought first of all to consider that they have to do with God, who can no more agree with the flesh than fire with water. This single consideration, when the inquiry relates to the worship of God, ought to be sufficient for restraining the wantonness of our mind, that God is so far from being like us, that those things which please us most are the objects of his loathing and abhorrence. And if hypocrites are so blinded by their own pride, that they are not afraid to subject God to their opinion, or rather to their unlawful desires, let us know that this modesty does not hold the lowest place in the true worship of God, to regard with suspicion whatever is gratifying according to the flesh. Besides, as we cannot ascend to the height of God, let us remember

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82 “Des figures de la Loy.”

that we ought to seek from His word the rule by which we are governed. This passage is frequently quoted by the Fathers against the Arians, to prove the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, but it is improper to strain it for such a purpose; for Christ simply declares here that his Father is of a spiritual nature, and, therefore, is not moved by frivolous matters, as men, through the lightness and unsteadiness of their character, are wont to be.

25. *The Messiah is about to come.* Although religion among the Samaritans was corrupted and mixed up with many errors, yet some principles taken from the Law were impressed on their minds, such as that which related to the Messiah. Now it is probable that, when the woman ascertained from Christ's discourse that a very extraordinary change was about to take place in the Church of God, her mind instantly recurred to the recollection of Christ, under whom she hoped that all things would be fully restored. When she says that *the Messiah is about to come*, she seems to speak of the time as near at hand; and, indeed, it is sufficiently evident from many arguments, that the minds of men were everywhere aroused by the expectation of the Messiah, who would restore the affairs which were wretchedly decayed, or rather, which were utterly ruined.

This, at least, is beyond all controversy, that the woman prefers Christ to Moses and to all the Prophets in the office of teaching; for she comprehends three things in a few words. First, that the doctrine of the Law was not absolutely perfect, and that nothing more than first principles was delivered in it; for if there had not been some farther progress to be made, she would not have said that *the Messiah will tell us all things*. There is an implied contrast between him and the Prophets, that it is his peculiar office to conduct his disciples to the goal, while the Prophets had only given them the earliest instructions, and, as it were, led them into the course. Secondly, the woman declares that she expects such a *Christ* as will be the interpreter of his Father, and the teacher and instructor of all the godly. Lastly, she expresses her belief that we ought not to desire any thing better or more perfect than his doctrine, but that, on the contrary, this is the farthest object of wisdom, beyond which it is unlawful to proceed.

I wish that those who now boast of being the pillars of the Christian Church, would at least imitate this poor woman, so as to be satisfied with the simple doctrine of Christ, rather than claim I know not what power of superintendence for putting forth their inventions. For whence was the religion of the Pope and Mahomet collected but from the wicked additions, by which they imagined that they brought the doctrine of the Gospel to a state of perfection? As if it would have been incomplete without such fooleries. But whoever shall be well taught in the school of Christ will ask no other instructors, and indeed will not receive them.

26. *It is I who talk with thee.* When he acknowledges to the woman that; he is the Messiah, he unquestionably presents himself as her Teacher, in compliance with the expectation which she had formed; and, therefore, I think it probable, that he proceeded to give more

full instruction, in order to satisfy her thirst. Such a proof of his grace he intended to give in the case of this poor woman, that he might testify to all that he never fails to discharge his office, when we desire to have him for our Teacher. There is, therefore, no danger that he will disappoint one of those whom he finds ready to become his disciples. But they who refuse to submit to him, as we see done by many haughty and irreligious men, or who hope to find elsewhere a wisdom more perfect — as the Mahometans and Papists do — deserve to be driven about by innumerable enchantments, and at length to be plunged in an abyss of errors. Again, by these words, “*I who talk with thee am the Messiah, the Son of God,*” he employs the name *Messiah* as a seal to ratify the doctrine of his Gospel; for we must remember that he was anointed by the Father, and that *the Spirit of God rested on him*, that he might bring to us the message of salvation, as Isaiah declares, ([Isaiah 61:1.](#))

### John 4:27-34

27. And, in the meantime, his disciples came, and wondered that he talked with the woman. But no man said, What seekest thou, or why talkest thou with her? 28. The woman, therefore, left her pitcher, and went away into the city, and said to the men, 29. Come, and see a man who hath told me all things that I ever did: is not this the Christ? 30. They went out of the city, therefore, and came to him. 31. In the meantime his disciples asked him, saying, Master, eat. 32. But he said to them, I have food to eat which you know not. 33. The disciples, therefore, said among themselves, Hath any man brought him any thing to eat? 34. Jesus saith to them, My food is, to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work.

27. *His disciples came, and wondered.* That *the disciples wondered*, as the Evangelist relates, might arise from one of two causes; either that they were offended at the mean condition of the woman, or that they reckoned the Jews to be polluted, if they entered into conversation with the Samaritans. Now though both of these feelings proceeded from a devout reverence for their Master, yet they are wrong in *wondering* at it as an improper thing, that he deigns to bestow so great honor on a woman who was utterly despised. For why do they not rather look at themselves? They would certainly have found no less reason to be astonished, that they who were men of no note, and almost the offscourings of the people, were raised to the highest rank of honor. And yet it is useful to observe what the Evangelist says — that they did not venture to put a question; for we are taught by their example that, if any thing in the works or words of God and of Christ be disagreeable to our feelings, we ought not to give ourselves a loose rein so as to have the boldness to murmur, but ought to preserve a modest silence, until what is hidden from us be revealed from heaven. The foundation of such modesty lies in the fear of God and in reverence for Christ.

28. *Therefore the woman left her pitcher.* This circumstance is related by the Evangelist to express the ardor of her zeal; for it is an indication of haste, that she leaves her pitcher, and returns to the city. And this is the nature of faith, that when we have become partakers of eternal life, we wish to bring others to share with us; nor is it possible that the knowledge of God shall lie buried and inactive in our hearts without being manifested before men, for that saying must be true:

I believed, and therefore I will speak, ([Psalm 116:10.](#))

The earnestness and promptitude of the woman are so much the more worthy of attention, that it was only a small spark of faith that kindled them; for scarcely had she tasted Christ when she spreads his game throughout the whole city. In those who have already made moderate progress in his school, sluggishness will be highly disgraceful. But she may appear to deserve blame on this account, that while she is still ignorant and imperfectly

taught, she goes beyond the limits of her faith. I reply, she would have acted inconsiderately, if she had assumed the office of a teacher, but when she desires nothing more than to excite her fellow-citizens to hear Christ speaking, we will not say that she forgot herself, or proceeded farther than she had a right to do. She merely does the office of a trumpet or a bell to invite others to come to Christ.

29. *See a man.* As she here speaks doubtfully, she might appear not to have been greatly moved by the authority of Christ. I reply, as she was not qualified to discourse about such high mysteries, she endeavors, according to her feeble capacity, to bring her fellow-citizens to permit themselves to be taught by Christ. It was a very powerful stimulant which she employed to excite them, when she knew, by a sign which was not obscure or doubtful, that he was a *prophet*; for, since they could not form a judgment from his doctrine, this lower preparation was useful and well adapted to them. Having, therefore, learned that Christ had revealed to the woman things which were hidden, they infer from it that he is a *Prophet* of God. This having been ascertained, they begin to attend to his doctrine. But the woman goes farther; for she bids them inquire if he be not the Messiah, being satisfied if she could only persuade them to seek, of their own accord, what she had already found in Christ; for she knew that they would find more than she promised.

*Who told me all things that ever I did.* Why does she tell a lie, by saying that Christ told her *all things*? I have already shown that Christ did not reprove her for a single instance of fornication, but that he placed before her, in a few words, many sins of her whole life. For the Evangelist has not minutely recorded every sentence, but states generally that Christ, in order to repress the woman's talkativeness, brought forward her former and present life. Yet we see that the woman, kindled by a holy zeal, does not spare herself, or her reputation, to magnify the name of Christ: for she does not scruple to relate the disgraceful passages of her life.

32. *I have food to eat which you know not.* It is wonderful that, when he is fatigued and hungry, he refuses to eat; for if it be said that he does this for the purpose of instructing us, by his example, to endure hunger, why then did he not do so always? But he had another object than to say that we ought simply to refuse food; for we must attend to this circumstance, that his anxiety about the present business urges him so strongly, and absorbs his whole mind, so that it gives him no uneasiness to despise food. And yet he does not say that he is so eager to obey the commands of *his Father*, that he neither eats nor drinks. He only points out what he must do first, and what must be done afterwards; and thus he shows, by his example, that the kingdom of God ought to be preferred to all the comforts of the body. God allows us, indeed, to eat and drink, provided that we are not withdrawn from what is of the highest importance; that is, that every man attend to his own calling.

It will perhaps be said, that eating and drinking cannot but be avocations which withdraw some portion of our time that might be better employed. This I acknowledge to be true, but

as the Lord kindly permits us to take care of our body, so far as necessity requires, he who endeavors to nourish his body with sobriety and moderation does not fail to give that preference which he ought to give to obedience to God. But we must also take care not to adhere so firmly to our fixed hours, as not to be prepared to deprive ourselves of food, when God holds out to us any opportunity, and, as it were, fixes the present hour. Christ, having now in his hands such an opportunity which might pass away, embraces it with open arms, and holds it fast. When the present duty enjoined on him by the Father presses him so hard that he finds it necessary to lay aside every thing else, he does not scruple to delay taking food; and, indeed, it would have been unreasonable that, when the woman left her pitcher and ran to call the people, Christ should display less zeal. In short, if we propose it as our object not to lose the causes of life on account of life itself, it will not be difficult to preserve the proper medium; for he who shall place it before him as the end of life to serve the Lord, from which we are not at liberty to turn aside even for the immediate danger of death, will certainly reckon it to be of more value than eating and drinking. The metaphor of eating and drinking is so much the more graceful on this occasion, that it was drawn seasonably from the present discourse.

**34.** *My food is to do the will of him who sent me.* He means not only that he esteems it very highly, but that there is nothing in which he takes greater delight, or in which he is more cheerfully or more eagerly employed; as David, in order to magnify the Law of God, says not only that he values it highly, but that it is *sweeter than honey*, ([Psalm 19:10.](#)) If, therefore, we would follow Christ, it is proper not only that we devote ourselves diligently to the service of God, but that we be so cheerful in complying with its injunctions that the labor shall not be at all oppressive or disagreeable.

*That I may finish his work.* By adding these words, Christ fully explains what is that *will of the Father* to which he is devoted; namely, to fulfill the commission which had been given to him. Thus every man ought to consider his own calling, that he may not consider as done to God what he has rashly undertaken at his own suggestion. What was the office of Christ is well known. It was to advance the kingdom of God, to restore to life lost souls, to spread the light of the Gospel, and, in short, to bring salvation to the world. The excellence of these things caused him, when fatigued and hungry, to forget meat and drink. Yet we derive from this no ordinary consolation, when we learn that Christ was so anxious about the salvation of men, that it gave him the highest delight to procure it; for we cannot doubt that he is now actuated by similar feelings towards us.



### John 4:35-38

**35.** Do you not say, There are yet four months, and harvest will come? Lo, I say to you, Lift up your eyes, and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest. **36.** And he who reapeth receiveth reward, and gathereth fruit into life eternal; that both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, may rejoice together. **37.** For in this is the saying true, That there is one who soweth, and another who reapeth. **38.** I sent you to reap that on which you did not labor; other men labored, and you have entered into their labors.

**35.** *Do you not say?* He follows out the preceding statement; for, having said that nothing was more dear to him than *to finish the work* of the Father, he now shows how *ripe* it is for execution; and he does so by a comparison with *the harvest*. When the corn is ripe, the harvest cannot bear delay, for otherwise the grain would fall to the ground and be lost; and, in like manner, the spiritual corn being now ripe, he declares that there must be no delay, because delay is injurious. We see for what purpose the comparison is employed; it is to explain the reason why he hastens to perform his work.<sup>83</sup> By this expression, *Do you not say?* he intended indirectly to point out how much more attentive the minds of men are to earthly than to heavenly things; for they burn with so intense a desire of *harvest* that they carefully reckon up months and days, but it is astonishing how drowsy and indolent they are in gathering the heavenly wheat. And daily experience proves that this wickedness not only is natural to us, but can scarcely be torn from our hearts; for while all provide for the earthly life to a distant period, how indolent are we in thinking about heavenly things? Thus Christ says on another occasion, Hypocrites, you discern by the face of the sky what sort of day to-morrow will be, but you do not acknowledge the time of my visitation, ([Matthew 16:3](#).)

**36.** *And he who reapeth receiveth reward.* How diligently we ought to devote ourselves to the work of God, he proves by another argument; namely, because a large and most excellent reward is reserved for our labor; for he promises that there will be *fruit*, and *fruit* not corruptible or fading. What he adds about *fruit* may be explained in two ways; either it is an announcement of the *reward*, and on that supposition he would say the same thing twice in different words; or, he applauds the labors of those who enrich the kingdom of God, as we shall afterwards find him repeating,

I have chosen you, that you may go and bear fruit, and that your fruit may remain, ([John 15:16](#).)

And certainly both considerations ought greatly to encourage the ministers of the word, that they may never sink under the toil, when they hear that a crown of glory is prepared

<sup>83</sup> “Pour exprimer la cause pourquoy il se haste de faire la besogne.”

for them in heaven, and know that the *fruit* of their *harvest* will not only be precious in the sight of God, but will also be eternal. It is for this purpose that Scripture everywhere mentions *reward*, and not for the purpose of leading us to judge from it as to the merits of works; for which of us, if we come to a reckoning, will not be found more worthy of being punished for slothfulness than of being *rewarded* for diligence? To the best laborers nothing else will be left than to approach to God in all humility to implore forgiveness. But the Lord, who acts towards us with the kindness of a father, in order to correct our sloth, and to encourage us who would otherwise be dismayed, deigns to bestow upon us an undeserved reward.

This is so far from overturning justification by faith that it rather confirms it. For, in the first place, how comes it that God finds in us any thing to *reward*, but because He has bestowed it upon us by his Spirit? Now we know that the Spirit is the earnest and pledge of adoption, ([Ephesians 1:14](#).) Secondly, how comes it that God confers so great honor on imperfect and sinful works but because, after having by free grace reconciled us to himself, He accepts our works without any regard to merit, by not imputing the sins which cleave to them? The amount of this passage is, that the labor which the Apostles bestow on teaching ought not to be reckoned by them hard and unpleasant, since they know that it is so useful and so advantageous to Christ and to the Church.

*That he who soweth, and he who reapeth, may rejoice together.* By these words Christ shows that the *fruit* which the Apostles will derive from *the labors of others* cannot give just ground of complaint to any person. And this additional statement deserves notice; for if in the world the groans of those who complain that the *fruit* of their labor has been conveyed to another do not hinder the new possessor from cheerfully *reaping* what another has *sown*, how much more cheerful ought the *reapers* to be, when there is mutual consent and mutual joy and congratulation?

But, in order that this passage may be properly understood, we must comprehend the contrast between *sowing* and *reaping*. The *sowing* was the doctrine of the Law and the Prophets; for at that time the seed thrown into the soil remained, as it were, in the blade; but the doctrine of the Gospel, which brings men to proper maturity, is on that account justly compared to the *harvest*. For the Law was very far from that perfection which has at length been exhibited to us in Christ. To the same purpose is the well-known comparison between infancy and manhood which Paul employs, when he says, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth not from a servant, though he be lord of all, but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the father,

([Galatians 4:1, 2](#).)

In short, since the coming of Christ brought along with it present salvation, we need not wonder if the Gospel, by which the door of the heavenly kingdom is opened, be called the *harvest* of the doctrine of the Prophets. And yet it is not at all inconsistent with this statement, that the Fathers under the Law were gathered into God's barn; but this compar-

ison must be referred to the manner of teaching; for, as the infancy of the Church lasted to the end of the Law, but, as soon as the Gospel had been preached, it immediately arrived at manhood, so at that time the salvation began to ripen, of which the *sowing* only had been accomplished by the Prophets.

But, as Christ delivered this discourse in Samaria, he appears to extend the *sowing* more widely than to the Law and the Prophets; and there are some who interpret these words as applying equally to the Jews and to the Gentiles. I acknowledge, indeed, that some grains of piety were always scattered throughout the whole world, and there can be no doubt that — if we may be allowed the expression — God *sowed*, by the hand of philosophers and profane writers, the excellent sentiments which are to be found in their writings. But, as that seed was degenerated from the very root, and as the corn which could spring from it, though not good or natural, was choked by a huge mass of errors, it is unreasonable to suppose that such destructive corruption is compared to *sowing*. Besides, what is here said about uniting in joy cannot at all apply to philosophers or any persons of that class.

Still, the difficulty is not yet solved, for Christ makes special reference to the Samaritans. I reply, though everything among them was infected by corruptions, there still was some hidden seed of piety. For whence does it arise that, as soon as they hear a word about Christ, they are so eager to seek him, but because they had learned, from the Law and the Prophets, that the Redeemer would come? Judea was indeed the Lord's peculiar field, which he had cultivated by the Prophets, but, as some small portion of seed had been carried into Samaria, it is not without reason that Christ says that there also it reached maturity. If it be objected that the Apostles were chosen to publish the Gospel throughout the whole world, the reply is easy, that Christ spoke in a manner suited to the time, with this exception, that, on account of the expectation of the fruit which already was nearly ripe, he commends in the Samaritans the seed of prophetic doctrine, though mixed and blended with many weeds or corruptions.

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37. *For in this is the saying true.* This was a common proverb, by which he showed that many men frequently receive the fruit of the labor of others, though there was this difference, that he who has *labored* is displeased at seeing the fruit carried away by another, whereas the Apostles have the Prophets for the companions of their joy. And yet it cannot be inferred from this, that the Prophets themselves are witnesses, or are aware, of what is now going on in the Church; for Christ means nothing more than that the Prophets, so long as they lived, taught under the influence of such feelings, that they already rejoiced on account of the fruit which they were not permitted to gather. The comparison which Peter employs (1 Peter 1:12) is not unlike; except that he addresses his exhortation generally to all believers, but Christ here speaks to the disciples alone, and, in their person, to the ministers of the

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84 “C'est a dire, de corruptions.”

Gospel. By these words he enjoins them to throw their labors into a common stock, so that there may be no wicked envy among them; that those who are first sent to the work ought to be so attentive to the present cultivation as not to envy a greater blessing to those who are afterwards to follow them; and that they who are sent, as it were, to gather the ripe fruit, ought to be employed with equal cheerfulness in their office; for the comparison which is here made between the teachers of the Law and of the Gospel may likewise be applied to the latter, when viewed in reference to each other.

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### John 4:39-45

**39.** And many Samaritans out of that city believed in him on account of the saying of the woman, who testified, I told you all things that ever I did. **40.** When the Samaritans, therefore, came to him, they entreated him to remain with them; and he remained two days. **41.** And many more believed on account of his word; **42.** And said to the woman, We no longer believe on account of thy speech; for we ourselves have heard, and know, that this is actually the Christ, the Savior of the world. **43.** And after two days he departed, and went away into Galilee. **44.** For Jesus himself testified,<sup>85</sup> that a Prophet hath no honor in his own country. **45.** And when he came into Galilee, the Galileans received him, who had seen<sup>86</sup> all that he did in Jerusalem on the feast-day; for they had also come to the feast-day.

**39.** *And many Samaritans out of that city believed.* The Evangelist here relates what was the success of the woman's announcement to her citizens, from which it is evident that the expectation and desire of the promised Messiah had no small vigor among them. Now, the word *believe* is here used inaccurately, and means that they were induced by the woman's statement to acknowledge Christ to be a Prophet. It is, in some respects, a commencement of *faith*, when minds are prepared to receive the doctrine. Such an entrance to *faith* receives here the honorable appellation of *faith*, in order to inform us how highly God esteems reverence for his word, when he confers so great honor on the docility of those who have not yet been taught. Now, their *faith* manifests itself in this respect, that they are seized with a desire to profit, and, for that reason, desire that Christ *should remain with them*

**41.** *And many more believed.* From what followed it is evident that Christ's compliance with their wish was highly proper; for we see how much fruit was reaped from the *two days* which he granted to their request. By this example we are taught that we ought never to refrain from working, when we have it in our power to advance the kingdom of God; and if we are afraid that our readiness in complying may be liable to unfavorable reports, or may often prove to be useless, let us ask from Christ the Spirit of counsel to direct us. The word *believe* is now used in a different sense; for it means not only that they were prepared for *faith*, but that they actually had a proper *faith*

**42.** *On account of thy speech.* Though I have followed Erasmus in rendering this word by *oratio*, (*speech*), because *loquela*, which the ancient interpreter uses, is a barbarous term; yet I wish to warn my readers that the Greek word *λαλία* has the same meaning with the Latin word *loquentia*, that is, *talk*, or *talkativeness*; and the Samaritans appear to boast that

85 "Ou, Jesus avoit rendu tesmoignage;" — "or, Jesus had testified."

86 "Après qu'ils eussent veu;" — "after that they had seen."

they have now a stronger foundation than a woman's tongue, which is, for the most part, light and trivial.

*We believe.* This expresses more fully the nature of their faith, that it has been drawn from the word of God itself, so that they can boast of having the Son of God as their Teacher; as, indeed, it is on his authority alone that we can safely rely. True, indeed, he is not now visibly present, so as to speak to us mouth to mouth; but, by whomsoever we happen to hear him, our faith cannot rest on any other than on himself. And from no other source proceeds that *knowledge* which is likewise mentioned; for the speech which comes from the mouth of a mortal man may indeed fill and satisfy the ears, but will never confirm the soul in calm confidence of salvation, so that he who has heard may be entitled to boast that he *knows*. In *faith*, therefore, the first thing necessary is, to *know* that it is Christ who speaks by his ministers; and the next is, to give him the honor which is due; that is, not to doubt that he is true and faithful, so that, relying on so undoubted a guarantee, we may rely safely on his doctrine.

Again, when they affirm that Jesus is *the Christ* and *the Savior of the world*, they undoubtedly have learned this from hearing him. Hence we infer that, within *two days*, the sum of the Gospel was more plainly taught by Christ than he had hitherto taught it in Jerusalem. And Christ testified that the salvation, which he had brought, was common to the whole world, that they might understand more fully that it belonged to them also; for he did not call them on the ground of their being lawful heirs, as the Jews were,<sup>87</sup> but taught that he had come to admit *strangers* into the family of God, and to bring *peace to those who were far off*, ([Ephesians 2:17](#).)

**44.** *For Jesus himself testified.* The apparent contradiction which strikes us here at first sight, has given rise to various interpretations. There is an excess of subtlety in the explanation given by Augustine, that Christ was *without honor among his own countrymen*, because he had done more good among the Samaritans in *two days* only than he had done, in a long time, among the Galileans; and because, without miracles, he gained more disciples in Samaria than a great number of miracles had gained him in Galilee. Nor am I satisfied with the view of Chrysostom, who understands Christ's *country* to be Capernaum, because he dwelt there more frequently than in any other place. I rather agree with Cyril, who says that he left the city of Nazareth, and departed into a different part of Galilee; for the other three Evangelists mention Nazareth, when they relate this testimony of Christ. The meaning might indeed be that, while the time of full manifestation was not yet come, he chose to remain concealed in his native country, as in a more obscure retreat. Some, too, explain it to mean, that *he remained two days* in Samaria, because there was no reason why he should hasten to go to a place where contempt awaited him. Others think that he went straight to Nazareth,

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87 "Ainsi qu'estoyent les, Juifs."

and immediately left it; but, as John relates nothing of this sort, I do not venture to yield to that conjecture. A more correct view of it is, that when he saw himself despised in his native city Nazareth, he rather withdrew to another place. And, therefore, it immediately follows (verse 46) that *he came into the town of Cana*. What is next added — that *the Galileans received him* — was a token of reverence, not of contempt.

*A Prophet hath no honour in his own country*. I have no doubt that this saying was common, and had passed into a proverb;<sup>88</sup> and we know that proverbs are intended to be a graceful expression of what commonly and most frequently (ἐπὶ τὸ πολλὸν) happens. In such cases, therefore, it is not necessary that we should rigidly demand uniform accuracy, as if what is stated in a proverb were always true. It is certain that *prophets* are usually more admired elsewhere than in their own country. Sometimes, too, it may happen, and in reality does happen, that *a prophet* is not less honored by his countrymen than by strangers; but the proverb states what is common and ordinary, that *prophets* receive *honor* more readily in any other place than among their own countrymen.

Now this proverb, and the meaning of it, may have a twofold origin; for it is a universal fault, that those whom we have heard crying in the cradle, and whom we have seen acting foolishly in their boyhood, are despised by us throughout their whole life, as if they had made no progress, since they were boys. To this is added another evil — envy, which prevails more among acquaintances. But I think it probable that the proverb arose from this circumstance, that *Prophets* were so ill-treated by their own nation; for good and holy men, when they perceived that there was in Judea so great ingratitude towards God, so great contempt of his word, so great obstinacy, might justly utter this complaint, that nowhere are the Prophets of God less honored than in their own country. If the former meaning be preferred, the name *Prophet* must be understood generally to denote any teacher, as Paul calls Epimenides *a prophet of the Cretians*, (Titus 1:12.)

45. *The Galileans received him*. Whether or not this honor was of long duration we have not the means of determining; for there is nothing to which men are more prone than forgetfulness of the gifts of God. Nor does John relate this with any other design than to inform us that Christ performed miracles in presence of many witnesses, so that the report of them was spread far and wide. Again, this points out one advantage of miracles, that they prepare the way for doctrine; for they cause reverence to be paid to Christ.

88 “Commune, et qui etoit passee en proverbe.”

### John 4:46-54

**46.** Jesus therefore came again into Cana of Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain courtier, whose son was diseased, in Capernaum. **47.** When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went away to him, and entreated him to go down and cure his son; for he was near death. **48.** Jesus therefore said to him, Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. **49.** The courtier himself said to him, Sir, come down ere my child die. **50.** Jesus said to him, Go, thy son liveth. The man believed the word which Jesus had spoken to him, and went away. **51.** And while he was still going down, his servants met and informed him, saying, Thy son liveth. **52.** Then he asked them at what hour he recovered; and they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. **53.** The father therefore knew that it was the same hour at which Jesus had said to him, Thy son liveth. And he believed, and all his house. **54.** This second miracle did Jesus again, when he had come out of Judea into Galilee.

**46.** *And there was a certain courtier.* This is a more correct rendering, though Erasmus thinks differently, who has translated βασιλικός by a Latin word, *Regulus*, which means a little king.<sup>89</sup> I acknowledge indeed that, at that time, they gave the name of *Reguli* (or, *little kings*) to those who are now called Dukes, or Barons, or Earls; but the state of Galilee at that time was such that there could be no person of that rank dwelling in Capernaum. I think that he was some nobleman<sup>90</sup> of the court of Herod; for there is some plausibility in the opinion of those who think that he was sent by Caesar.<sup>91</sup> This is expressly mentioned by the Evangelist, because the rank of this personage made the miracle the more illustrious.

**47.** *When he had heard that Jesus had come.* When he applies to Christ for aid, this is some evidence of his faith; but, when he limits Christ's manner of granting assistance, that shows how ignorant he was. For he views the power of Christ as inseparably connected with his bodily presence, from which it is evident, that he had formed no other view concerning Christ than this, — that he was a Prophet sent by God with such authority and power as to prove, by the performance of miracles, that he was a minister of God. This fault, though it deserved censure, Christ overlooks, but severely upbraids him, and, indeed, all the Jews in general, on another ground, that they were too eager to behold miracles.

But how comes it that Christ is now so harsh, who is wont to receive kindly others who desire miracles? There must have been at that time some particular reason, though unknown to us, why he treated this man with a degree of severity which was not usual with him; and

89 “Lequel l’a traduit par un mot Latin *Regulus*, qui signifie un petit Roy.”

90 “Quelque gentil-homme.”

91 “Par l’Empereur;” — “by the Emperor.”



perhaps he looked not so much to the person as to the whole nation. He saw that his doctrine had no great authority, and was not only neglected but altogether despised; and, on the other hand, that all had their eyes fixed on miracles, and that their whole senses were seized with stupidity rather than with admiration. Thus, the wicked contempt of the word of God, which at that time prevailed, constrained him to make this complaint.

True, indeed, some even of the saints sometimes wished to be confirmed by miracles, that they might not entertain any doubt as to the truth of the promises; and we see how God, by kindly granting their requests, showed that he was not offended at them. But Christ describes here far greater wickedness; for the Jews depended so much on miracles, that they left no room for the word. And first, it was exceedingly wicked that they were so stupid and carnal as to have no reverence for doctrine, unless they had been aroused by miracles; for they must have been well acquainted with the word of God, in which they had been educated from their infancy. Secondly, when miracles were performed, they were so far from profiting aright, that they remained in a state of stupidity and amazement. Thus they had no religion, no knowledge of God, no practice of godliness, except what consisted in miracles.

To the same purpose is that reproach which Paul brings against them, *the Jews demand signs*, (1 Corinthians 1:22.) For he means that they were unreasonably and immoderately attached to signs, and cared little about the grace of Christ, or the promises of eternal life, or the secret power of the Spirit, but, on the contrary, rejected the Gospel with haughty disdain, because they had no relish for any thing but miracles. I wish there were not many persons in the present day affected by the same disease; but nothing is more common than this saying, "Let them first perform miracles,"<sup>92</sup> and then we will lend an ear to their doctrine;" as if we ought to despise and disdain the truth of Christ, unless it derive support from some other quarter. But though God were to overwhelm them by a huge mass of miracles, still they speak falsely when they say that they would believe. Some outward astonishment would be produced, but they would not be a whit more attentive to doctrine.

49. *Sir, come down, ere my child die.* Since he perseveres in asking, and at length obtains what he wished, we may conclude that Christ did not reprove him in such a manner as if he intended altogether to reject him, and refused his prayers; but that he rather did so for the purpose of correcting that fault which obstructed the entrance of true faith. And we ought to remember — what I have formerly stated — that this was a general reproof of a whole people, and was not peculiarly addressed to one individual. In this manner, whatever is improper, or distorted, or superfluous, in our prayers, must be corrected or removed, that dangerous obstructions may be taken out of the way. Now courtiers are usually fastidious and haughty, and do not willingly submit to be treated with harshness; but it deserves notice, that this man, humbled by his necessitous case, and by the dread of losing his son, does not

92 "Qu'ils facent premierement des miracles?"

burst into a passion, or murmur, when Christ speaks to him roughly, but passes by that reproof in modest silence. We find the same things in ourselves; for we are astonishingly delicate, impatient, and fretful until, subdued by adversities, we are constrained to lay aside our pride and disdain.

**50.** *Thy son liveth.* The first thing that strikes us here is, the astonishing kindness and condescension of Christ, that he bears with the man's ignorance, and stretches his power beyond what had been expected. He requested that Christ would come to the place and cure his son. He thought it possible that his son could be freed from sickness and disease, but not that he could be raised up after he was dead; and therefore he urges Christ to make haste, that his son's recovery may not be prevented by his death. Accordingly, when Christ pardons both, we may conclude from it how highly he values even a small measure of faith. It is worthy of observation that Christ, while he does not comply with his desire, grants much more than he had requested; for he testifies as to the present health of his son. Thus it frequently happens that our Heavenly Father, while he does not comply with our wishes in every particular, proceeds to relieve us by unexpected methods, that we may learn not to prescribe to him in anything. When he says, *Thy son liveth*, he means that he has been rescued from the danger of death.

*The man believed the word which Jesus had spoken to him.* Having come with the conviction that Christ was a prophet of God, he was on that account so much disposed to believe, that, as soon as he had heard a single word, he seized it and fixed it in his heart. Though he did not entertain all the respect that he ought for the power of Christ, yet a short promise suddenly awoke new confidence in his mind, so that he believed the life of his son to be contained in a single word of Christ. And such is the promptitude with which we ought to receive the word of God, but it is very far from producing always so immediate an effect on the hearers. For how many will you find that profit as much by many sermons as this man, who was half a heathen, profited by hearing a single word? So much the more ought we to labor with zeal to arouse our sluggishness, and, above all, to pray that God would touch our hearts in such a manner, that we may not be less willing to believe than He is ready and gracious to promise.

**51.** *While he was still going down.* Here is described the effect of faith, together with the efficacy of the word; for as Christ, by a word, restores to life this child who was just dying, so in one moment the father, by his faith, regains his son safe and sound. Let us therefore know that, whenever the Lord offers his benefits to us, his power will always be ready to accomplish whatever he promises, provided that the door be not shut against him by our unbelief. It does not always happen, I acknowledge, and even is not frequent or ordinary, that God instantly displays his arm for giving us assistance; but whenever he delays, he has always a good reason, and one that is highly advantageous to us. This at least is certain, that so far is he from delaying unnecessarily, that he rather contends with the obstacles which

we throw in the way; and, therefore, when we do not see his immediate aid, let us consider how much of concealed distrust there is in us, or at least how small and limited our faith is. And we ought not to wonder if He is unwilling to allow his benefits to be lost, or to throw them at random on the ground, but chooses to bestow them on those who, by opening the bosom of their faith, are ready to receive them. And though he does not always assist his people in the same manner, yet in no instance will the faith of any one be fruitless, or hinder us from experiencing the truth of what the Prophet says, that the promises of God, even when they seem to delay, are in reality making great haste.

Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come,  
it will not tarry, ([Habakkuk 2:3.](#))

52. *Therefore he inquired at them.* That this courtier asked his servants at what time his son began to recover, was done by a secret impulse from God, that the truth of the miracle might be rendered more conspicuous. For by nature we have an exceedingly wicked disposition to extinguish the light of the power of God, and Satan labors, by various means, to hide the works of God from our view; and, therefore, in order that they may obtain from us that praise which is due to them, they must be made so manifest that no room is left for doubt. Whatever then may be the ingratitude of men, still this circumstance does not permit so illustrious a work of Christ to be ascribed to chance.

53. *And he believed, and his whole house.* It may appear absurd that the Evangelist should mention this as the commencement of faith in that man, whose faith he has already commended. Nor can it be supposed that the word *believe* — at least in this passage — relates to the progress of faith. But it must be understood that this man, being a Jew and educated in the doctrine of the Law, had already obtained some taste of faith when he came to Christ; and that he afterwards *believed in the saying of Christ* was a particular faith, which extended no farther than to expect the life of his son. But now he began to *believe* in a different manner; that is, because, embracing the doctrine of Christ, he openly professed to be one of his disciples. Thus not only does he now *believe* that his son will be cured through the kindness of Christ, but he acknowledges Christ to be the Son of God, and makes a profession of faith in his Gospel. His whole family joins him, which was an evidence of the miracle; nor can it be doubted that he did his utmost to bring others along with him to embrace the Christian religion.

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# CHAPTER 5

### John 5:1-9

1. After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2. And there was in Jerusalem, at the sheep-market, a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches. 3. In these lay a great multitude of diseased, blind, lame, withered,<sup>93</sup> waiting for the motion of the water. 4. For an angel went down, at intervals,<sup>94</sup> into the pool, and troubled the water. Whosoever went down first after the troubling of the water was cured of whatever disease he formerly had. 5. Now there was a man there, who had passed thirty and eight years in infirmity. 6. When Jesus saw this man lying, and knew that he had now been a long time diseased, he saith to him, Dost thou wish to be cured? 7. The diseased man answered him, Sir, I have no man to let me down into the pool, when the water is troubled; but while I am coming, another goeth down before me. 8. Jesus saith to him, Arise, carry thy bed, and walk. 9. And immediately that man was cured, and carried his bed, and walked. And the Sabbath was on that day.

1. *There was a feast of the Jews.* Though the Evangelist does not expressly state what *feast* this was, yet the probable conjecture is that he means Pentecost, at least if what is here related took place immediately after that Christ came into Galilee. For immediately after the Passover he set out from Jerusalem, and, as he was passing through Samaria, he reckoned *four months to the harvest*; having entered Galilee he cured the courtier's son. The Evangelist adds that the *feast* came afterwards; and, therefore, the order of time leads us to conclude that we ought to understand it to be Pentecost; though I do not dispute about that matter. Now Christ *came to Jerusalem to the feast*, partly because at that time, on account of the great multitude of people who were assembled, he had the opportunity of publishing his doctrine more extensively, and partly because it was necessary that he should be subject to the Law, that he might redeem us from the bondage of the Law, as we have already explained on former occasions.

2. *There was in Jerusalem, at the sheep-market, a pool.* The circumstance of the place is added, from which we learn that the miracle was not concealed or known to a few persons only; for the *five porches* show that the place was celebrated for the great number of persons who resorted to it, and this was also implied in its vicinity to the temple. Besides, the Evangelist expressly says that *many diseased persons lay there*. With respect to the meaning of the name, the learned justly reject the fanciful opinion of Jerome, who, instead of *Bethesda*, makes it *Betheder*, and interprets it to mean *the house of the flock*; for here mention is made *of a pool*, which was *near the sheep-market*. Those who read it *Bethesda*, as meaning *a place*

93 "Et qui avoyent les membres secs;" — "and who had the limbs withered."

94 "Par intervalles, ou, en certain temps;" — "at intervals, or, at a certain time."

of fishing, have no reason on their side. There is greater probability in the opinion of those who explain it to be a *place of pouring out*; for the Hebrew word (עֶשְׂדָּא) (*Eshed*) signifies *flowing out*; but the Evangelist, as was then the ordinary way of speaking, pronounced it *Esda*. For I think that the water was conveyed into it by conduits, that the priests might draw out of it; unless perhaps the place received its name from the circumstance that the water was poured into it by means of tubes. It was called *the sheep-market*, in my opinion, because the beasts which were to be offered in sacrifice were taken there.

3. *In these lay a great multitude.* It is possible that diseased persons lay in the porches to ask alms when the people were passing there who were going into the temple to worship; and there, too, it was customary to purchase the beasts which were to be offered in sacrifice. Yet at each feast God cured a certain number, that, in this way, he might recommend the worship prescribed in the Law and the holiness of the temple. But might it not appear foolish to believe, while we read of nothing of this kind having been done at a time when religion was in the most flourishing condition, and even since in the age of the Prophets miracles were not performed but on extraordinary occasions, that when the affairs of the nation were so decayed and almost ruinous, the power and grace of God were displayed with more than ordinary lustre? I reply, there were, in my opinion, two reasons. As the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Prophets, was a sufficient witness of the divine presence, religion at that time needed no other confirmation; for the Law had been sanctioned by abundantly sufficient miracles, and God ceased not to express, by innumerable testimonies, his approbation of the worship which he had enjoined. But about the time of Christ's coming, as they were deprived of the Prophets and their condition was very wretched, and as various temptations pressed upon them on every hand, they needed this extraordinary aid, that they might not think that God had entirely left them, and thus might be discouraged and fall away. For we know that Malachi was the last of the Prophets, and, therefore, he closes his doctrine with this admonition, that the Jews may

remember the Law delivered by Moses, ([Malachi 4:4](#)),

until Christ appear. God saw it to be advantageous to deprive them of the Prophets, and to keep them in suspense for a time, that they might be inflamed with a stronger desire for Christ, and might receive him with greater reverence, when he should be manifested to them. Yet, that testimonies might not be wanting to the temple and sacrifices, and to the whole of that worship by which salvation should be made known to the world, the Lord retained among the Jews this gift of healing, that they might know that there was a good reason why God separated them from the other nations. For God, by curing the diseased, showed plainly — as by an arm stretched out from heaven — that he approved of this kind of worship which they derived from the injunction of the Law. Secondly, I have no doubt that God intended to remind them by these signs that the time of redemption was approaching, and that Christ, the Author of salvation, was already at hand, that the minds of all might

be the better aroused. I think that signs, in that age, served this twofold purpose; first, that the Jews might know that God was present with them, and thus might remain steady in their obedience to the Law; and, secondly, that they might earnestly hope for a new and unthought condition.

*Of lame, blind, withered.* For the purpose of informing us that the diseases cured by our Lord were not of an ordinary kind, the Evangelist enumerates some classes of them; for human remedies could be of no avail to *the lame, blind, and withered*. It was indeed a mournful spectacle, to see in so large a body of men so many kinds of deformities in the members; but yet the glory of God shone more brightly there than in the sight of the most numerous and best disciplined army. For nothing is more magnificent than when an unthought power of God corrects and restores the defects of nature; and nothing is more beautiful or more delightful than when, through his boundless goodness, he relieves the distresses of men. For this reason the Lord intended that this should be a splendid theater, in which not only the inhabitants of the country, but strangers also, might perceive and contemplate His majesty; and, as I have already suggested, it was no small ornament and glory of the temple, when God, by stretching out his hand, clearly showed that He was present.

4. *For an angel went down.* It was, no doubt, a work peculiar to God to cure the sick; but, as He was accustomed to employ the ministration and agency of *angels*, so He commanded *an angel* to perform this duty. For this reason the *angels* are called *principalities* or *powers*, ([Colossians 1:16](#);) not that God gives up his *power* to them, and remains unemployed in heaven, but because, by acting powerfully in them, he magnificently shows and displays his power. It is, therefore, wicked and shameful to imagine any thing as belonging to the *angels*, or to constitute them the medium of communication between us and God, so as to obscure the glory of God, as if it were at a great distance from us, while, on the contrary, he employs them as the manifestations of his presence. We ought to guard against the foolish speculations of Plato, for the distance between us and God is too great to allow us to go to the angels, that they may obtain favor for us; but, on the contrary, we ought to come direct to Christ, that, by his guidance, protection, and command, we may have the angels as assistants and ministers of our salvation.

*At intervals.* God might have at once, in a single moment, cured them all; but, as his miracles have their design, so they ought also to have their limit; as Christ also reminds them that, though there were so many that died in the time of Elisha, not more than one child was raised from the dead, ([2 Kings 4:32](#);) <sup>95</sup> and that, though so many widows were

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95 The French version runs thus: “combien que du temps d’Elisee il y eust plusieurs de ladres, toutesfois nul d’eux ne fut nettoye sinon Naaman Syrien;” — “*though in the time of Elisha there were many lepers, yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman a Syrian,*” ([2 Kings 5:14](#); [Luke 4:27](#).)

famished during the time of drought, there was but one whose poverty was relieved by Elijah, (1 Kings 17:9; Luke 4:25.) Thus the Lord reckoned it enough to give a demonstration of his presence in the case of a few diseased persons. But the manner of curing, which is here described, shows plainly enough that nothing is more unreasonable than that men should subject the works of God to their own judgment; for pray, what assistance or relief could be expected from *troubled water*? But in this manner, by depriving us of our own senses, the Lord accustoms us to the obedience of faith. We too eagerly follow what pleases our reason, though contrary to the word of God; and, therefore, in order to render us more obedient to him, he often presents to us those things which contradict our reason. Then only do we show our submissive obedience, when we shut our eyes, and follow the plain word, though our own opinion be that what we are doing will be of no avail. We have an instance of this kind in Naaman a Syrian, whom the prophet sends to Jordan, that he may be cured of his leprosy, (2 Kings 5:10.) At first, no doubt, he despises it as a piece of mockery, but afterwards he comes actually to perceive that, while God acts contrary to human reason, he never mocks or disappoints us.

*And troubled the water* Yet the *troubling of the water* was a manifest proof that God freely uses the elements according to his own pleasure, and that He claims for himself the result of the work. For it is an exceedingly common fault to ascribe to creatures what belongs to God alone; but it would be the height of folly to seek, in the *troubled water*, the cause of the cure. He therefore holds out the outward symbol in such a manner that, by looking at the symbol, the diseased persons may be constrained to raise their eyes to Him who alone is the Author of grace.

5. *And there was a man there.* The Evangelist collects various circumstances, which prove that the miracle may be relied on as certain. The long duration of the disease had taken away all hope of its being cured. This man complains that he is deprived of the remedy of the water. He had frequently attempted to throw himself into the water, but without success; there was no man to assist him, and this causes the power of Christ to be more strikingly displayed. Such, too, was the import of the command *to carry his bed*, that all might plainly see that he was cured in no other way than by the agency of Christ; for when he suddenly rises up healthy and strong in all the members in which he was formerly impotent, so sudden a change is the more fitted to arouse and strike the minds of all who beheld it.

6. *Wilt thou be made whole?* He does not inquire about it, as if it were a doubtful matter, but partly in order to kindle in the man a desire of the favor which was offered to him, and partly to quicken the attention of the witnesses who were present, and who, if they had been thinking of something else, might not have perceived the miracle, as frequently happens in sudden occurrences. For these two reasons, therefore, this preparation was necessary.



7. *I have no man.* This diseased man does what almost all of us are wont to do; for he limits the assistance of God according to his own thought, and does not venture to promise to himself any thing more than he conceives in his mind. Christ forgives his weakness, and in this we have a mirror of that forbearance of which every one of us has daily experience, when, on the one hand, we keep our attention fixed on the means which are within our reach, and when, on the other hand, contrary to expectation, he displays his hand from hidden places, and thus shows how far his goodness goes beyond the narrow limits of our faith. Besides, this example ought to teach us patience. *Thirty-eight years* were a long period, during which God had delayed to render to this poor man that favor which, from the beginning, He had determined to confer upon him. However long, therefore, we may be held in suspense, though we groan under our distresses, let us never be discouraged by the tediousness of the lengthened period; for, when our afflictions are long continued, though we discover no termination of them, still we ought always to believe that God is a wonderful deliverer, who, by His power, easily removes every obstacle out of the way.

9. *And it was the Sabbath.* Christ was well aware how great offense would immediately arise, when they saw a man walk along laden with burdens; for the Law expressly forbids to carry any burden whatever on the Sabbath-day,

([Jeremiah 17:21.](#))

But there were two reasons why Christ, disregarding this danger, chose to make such an exhibition; first, that the miracle might be more extensively known; and, secondly, that he might give occasion, and, as it were, open up the way for the beautiful discourse which he delivered immediately afterwards. Of so great importance was the knowledge of that miracle, that he found it to be his duty to despise boldly the offense taken by the people, particularly because he had at hand a just defense, by which, though he did not pacify the ungodly, he abundantly refuted their calumnies. We ought therefore to observe this rule, that though the whole world kindle into rage, we ought to proclaim the glory of God and celebrate His works, so far as His glory requires that they should be made known. Nor ought we to be uneasy or discouraged, though our labors should not be immediately successful, provided that we keep in view the object which I have stated, and do not go beyond the limits of our office.

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### John 5:10-15

**10.** The Jews therefore said to him who had been cured, It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. **11.** He answered them, He who made me whole said to me, Carry thy bed and walk. **12.** They therefore asked him, Who is that man who said to thee, Carry thy bed and walk? **13.** And he who had been cured knew not who he was; for Jesus had withdrawn himself, because there was a crowd in that place.<sup>96</sup> **14.** After these things, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, Lo, thou art made whole, sin no more, lest something worse befall thee. **15.** The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole. **16.** And for that reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he did these things on the Sabbath-day.

**10.** *It is the Sabbath.* It was the duty of all to maintain the sanctity of the Sabbath, and, therefore, they justly and properly accuse the man. But, when the excuse offered by the man does not satisfy them, they already begin to be in fault; for, when the reason was known, he ought to have been acquitted. It was a violation of the Sabbath, as we have said, to carry a burden; but Christ, who laid the burden on his shoulders, discharges him by his own authority. We are therefore taught by this example to avoid every rash judgment, until the reason of each action be fully known. Whatever contradicts the word of God deserves to be condemned without hesitation; but, as it frequently happens that there are mistakes in this matter, we ought first to inquire modestly and calmly, that our decision may be sound and sober. For since the Jews, prejudiced by wicked dispositions, have not patience to inquire, they shut the door against judgment and moderation; but, if they had allowed themselves to be taught, not only would the offense have been removed, but they would have been conducted still farther, with great advantage, to the knowledge of the Gospel.

We now see how far the Jews were in the wrong. It is, because they do not admit a reasonable defense. The defense is, that he who had been cured replies that he does nothing but by the command of him who had power and authority to command; for, though he did not yet know who Christ was, yet he was convinced that he had been sent by God, because he had received a proof of his divine power, and learns from it that Christ is endued with authority, so that it must be his duty to obey him. But this appears to be worthy of reproof, that a miracle turns him aside from obedience to the Law. I confess, indeed, that the argument which the man employs in contending with them is not sufficiently strong, but the others are faulty on two accounts, that they neither consider that this is an extraordinary work of

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<sup>96</sup> “Car Jesus s'estoit escoule de la multitude qui estoit en ce lieu-la;” — “for Jesus had withdrawn from the multitude which was in that place.”

God, nor suspend their judgment until they have heard a Prophet of God who is furnished with the word.

13. *And he who had been cured knew not who he was.* Christ certainly did not intend that the glory of so great a work should pass away, but he intended that it should become generally known before that he acknowledged himself to be the Author of it. He therefore withdrew for a little, that the Jews might have it in their power to judge of the fact itself, without reference to any person. And hence we learn that the cure of this man cannot be ascribed to his faith, since, even after having been cured, he does not acknowledge his Physician; and yet, when he was ordered, he carried his bed, which appears to have been done by the guidance of faith. For my own part, as I do not deny that there was in him some secret movement of faith, so I say that it is clear from what follows, that he had no solid doctrine or clear light on which he could rely.

14. *After these things Jesus found him.* These words show still more clearly that, when Christ concealed himself for a time, it was not in order that the remembrance of the kindness which he had conferred might perish, for he now appears in public of his own accord; only he intended that the work should first be known, and that he should afterwards be declared to be the Author of it. This passage contains a highly useful doctrine; for when Christ says, *lo, thou art made whole*, his meaning is, that we make an improper use of the gifts of God, if we are not excited to gratitude. Christ does not reproach the man with what he had given him, but only reminds him that he had been cured in order that, remembering the favor which he had received, he might all his life serve God his Deliverer. Thus, as God by stripes instructs and spurs us on to repentance, so he invites us to it by his goodness and forbearance; and, indeed, it is the universal design both of our redemption and of all the gifts of God, to keep us entirely devoted to Him. Now this cannot be done, unless the remembrance of the past punishment remain impressed on the mind, and unless he who has obtained pardon be employed in this meditation throughout his whole life.

This admonition teaches us also, that all the evils which we endure ought to be imputed to our sins; for the afflictions of men are not accidental, but are so many stripes for our chastisement. First, then, we ought to acknowledge the hand of God which strikes us, and not to imagine that our distresses arise from a blind impetuosity of fortune; and next we ascribe this honor to God, that, since He is a Father full of goodness, He does not take pleasure in our sufferings, and therefore does not treat us more harshly than he has been offended by our sins. When he charges him, *sin no more*, he does not enjoin him to be free from all sin, but speaks comparatively as to his former life; for Christ exhorts him henceforth to repent, and not to do as he had done before.

*Lest something worse befall thee.* If God does not succeed in doing us good by the stripes with which he gently chastises us, as the kindest father would chastise his tender and delicate children, He is constrained to assume a new character, and a character which, so to speak,

is not natural to Him. He therefore seizes the whip to subdue our obstinacy, as He threatens in the Law, ([Leviticus 26:14](#); [Deuteronomy 28:15](#); [Psalm 32:9](#);) and indeed throughout the Scriptures passages of the same kind are to be found. Thus, when we are incessantly pressed down by new afflictions, we ought to trace this to our obstinacy; for not only do we resemble restive horses and mules, but we are like wild beasts that cannot be tamed. There is no reason to wonder, therefore, if God make use of severer punishment to bruise us, as it were, by mallets, when moderate punishment is of no avail; for it is proper that they who will not endure to be corrected should be bruised by strokes. In short, the use of punishments is, to render us more cautious for the future. If, after the first and second strokes, we maintain obstinate hardness of heart, he will strike us seven times more severely. If, after having showed signs of repentance for a time, we immediately return to our natural disposition, he chastises more sharply this levity which proves us to be forgetful, and which is full of sloth.

Again, in the person of this man it is of importance for us to observe with what gentleness and condescension the Lord bears with us. Let us suppose that the man was approaching old age, in which case he must have been visited by disease in the very prime of life, and perhaps had been attacked by it from his earliest infancy; and now let us consider how grievous to him must have been this punishment continued through so many years. It is certain that we cannot reproach God with excessive severity in causing this man to languish, and to be half-dead, for so long a period; and, therefore, when we are punished more lightly, let us learn that it is because the Lord, in his infinite goodness, moderates the extreme rigour of the punishments which we would have well deserved.<sup>97</sup> Let us also learn that no punishments are so rigorous and severe, that the Lord cannot make additions to them whenever he pleases. Nor can it be doubted that wretched men by their wicked complaints, often draw down upon themselves dreadful and shocking tortures, when they assert that it is not possible to endure heavier distresses, and that God cannot send them any thing more.<sup>98</sup> *Are not these things hidden among my treasures?* saith the Lord, ([Deuteronomy 32:34](#).) We ought also to observe how slow we are in deriving benefit from God's chastisements; for if Christ's exhortation was not superfluous, we may learn from it that the soul of this man was not yet fully purified from every vice. Indeed, the roots of vices are too deep in us to be capable of being torn out in a single day, or in a few days; and the cure of the diseases of the soul is too difficult to be effected by remedies applied for a short time.

**15. *The man went away*** Nothing was farther from his intention than to make Christ an object of their hatred, and nothing was farther from his expectation than that they would

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97 "Que nous aurions bien meritee."

98 "Quand ils disent qu'il n'est pas possible d'endurer plus grand mal, et que Dieu ne leur en scauroit envoyer davantage."

rage so furiously against Christ. His intention, therefore, was pious; for he wished to render to his Physician the honor which was justly due to him. The Jews, on the other hand, show their venom, not only in accusing Christ of having violated the Sabbath, but in breaking out into extreme cruelty.

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### John 5:17-19

17. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. 18. For this reason, therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but likewise called God his Father, making himself equal with God. 19. Jesus then answered, and said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, The Son cannot do any thing of himself but what he hath seen the Father do; for whatsoever things he doeth, those also doeth the Son likewise.

17. *My Father worketh hitherto.* We must see what kind of defense Christ employs. He does not reply that the Law about keeping the Sabbath was temporary, and that it ought now to be abolished; but, on the contrary, maintains that he has not violated the Law, because this is a divine work. It is true that the ceremony of the Sabbath was a part of the shadows of the Law,<sup>99</sup> and that Christ put an end to it by his coming, as Paul shows, ([Colossians 2:16](#);) but the present question does not turn on that point. For it is only from their own works that men are commanded to abstain; and, accordingly, circumcision — which is a work of God, and not of men — is not at variance with the Sabbath.

What Christ insists upon is this, that the holy rest which was enjoined by the Law of Moses is not disturbed when we are employed in works of God.<sup>100</sup> And for this reason he excuses not only his own action, but also the action of the man who carried his bed; for it was an appendage, and — as we might say — a part of the miracle, for it was nothing else than an approbation of it. Besides, if thanksgiving and the publication of the divine glory be reckoned among the works of God, it was not a profanation of the Sabbath to testify the grace of God by feet and hands. But it is chiefly concerning himself that Christ speaks, to whom the Jews were more hostile. He declares that the soundness of body which he has restored to the diseased man is a demonstration of his divine power. He asserts that he is the Son of God, and that he acts in the same manner as his Father.

What is the use of the Sabbath, and for what reasons it was enjoined, I do not now argue at greater length. It is enough for the present passage, that the keeping of the Sabbath is so far from interrupting or hindering the works of God, that, on the contrary, it gives way to them alone. For why does the Law enjoin men to abstain from their own works, but in order to keep all their senses free and occupied for considering the works of God? Consequently, he who does not, on the Sabbath, allow a free course and reign to the works of God, is not only a false expounder of the Law, but wickedly overturns it.

99 “Il est bien vray que la ceremonie du Sabbath estoit une partie des ombres de la Loy.”

100 “Quand on s’employe a oeuvres de Dieu.”

If it be objected, that the example of God is held out to men, that they may rest on the seventh day, the answer is easy. Men are not conformed to God in this respect, that He ceased to work, but by abstaining from the troublesome actions of this world and aspiring to the heavenly rest. The *Sabbath* or *rest* of God,<sup>101</sup> therefore, is not idleness, but true perfection, which brings along with it a calm state of peace. Nor is this inconsistent with what Moses says, that *God put an end to his works*, ([Genesis 2:2](#);) for he means that, after having completed the formation of the world, God consecrated that day, that men might employ it in meditating on his works. Yet He did not cease to sustain by this power the world which he had made, to govern it by his wisdom, to support it by his goodness, and to regulate all things according to his pleasure, both in heaven and on earth. In six days, therefore, the creation of the world was completed, but the administration of it is still continued, and God incessantly *worketh* in maintaining and preserving the order of it; as Paul informs us, that *in him we live, and move, and are*, ([Acts 17:28](#);) and David informs us, that all things stand so long as the Spirit of God upholds them, and that they fail as soon as he withdraws his support, ([Psalm 104:29](#).) Nor is it only by a general Providence that the Lord maintains the world which He has created, but He arranges and regulates every part of it, and more especially, by his protection, he keeps and guards believers whom he has received under his care and guardianship.

*And I work.* Leaving the defense of the present cause, Christ now explains the end and use of the miracle, namely, that by means of it he may be acknowledged to be the Son of God; for the object which he had in view in all his words and actions was, to show that he was the Author of salvation. What he now claims for himself belongs to his Divinity, as the Apostle also says, that

he upholdeth all things by his powerful will, ([Hebrews 1:3](#).)

But when he testifies that he is God, it is that, being manifested in the flesh, he may perform the office of Christ; and when he affirms that he came from heaven, it is chiefly for the purpose of informing us for what purpose he came down to earth.

**18.** *For this reason, therefore, the Jews sought the more to slay him.* This defense was so far from allaying their fury that it even enraged them the more. Nor was he unacquainted with their malignity and wickedness and hardened obstinacy, but he intended first to profit a few of his disciples who were then present, and next to make a public display of their incurable malice. By his example he has taught us that we ought never to yield to the fury of wicked men, but should endeavor to maintain the truth of God, so far as necessity demands it, though the whole world should oppose and murmur. Nor is there any reason why the servants of Christ should take it ill that they do not profit all men according to their wish, since Christ himself did not always succeed; and we need not wonder if, in proportion as

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101 "Le Repos de Dieu."

the glory of God is more fully displayed, Satan rages the more violently in his members and instruments.

*Because he not only had broken the Sabbath.* When the Evangelist says that the Jews were hostile to Christ, *because he had broken the Sabbath*, he speaks according to the opinion which they had formed; for I have already showed that the state of the case was quite the contrary. The principal cause of their wrath was, that *he called God his Father*. And certainly Christ intended that it should be understood *that God was his Father* in a peculiar sense, so as to distinguish himself from the ordinary rank of other men. *He made himself equal to God*, when he claimed for himself continuance in *working*; and Christ is so far from denying this, that he confirms it more distinctly. This refutes the madness of the Arians, who acknowledged that Christ is God, but did not think *that he is equal* to the Father, as if in the one and simple essence of God there could be any inequality.

**19.** *Jesus therefore answered.* We see what I have said, that Christ is so far from vindicating himself from what the Jews asserted, though they intended it as a calumny, that he maintains more openly that it is true. And first he insists on this point, that the work which the Jews cavilled at was a divine work, to make them understand that they must fight with God himself, if they persist in condemning what must necessarily be ascribed to him. This passage was anciently debated in various ways between the orthodox Fathers and the Arians. Arius inferred from it that the Son is inferior to the Father, because *he can do nothing of himself*. The Fathers replied that these words denote nothing more than the distinction of the person, so that it might be known that Christ is from the Father, and yet that he is not deprived of intrinsic power to act. But both parties were in the wrong. For the discourse does not relate to the simple Divinity of Christ, and those statements which we shall immediately see do not simply and of themselves relate to the eternal Word of God, but apply only to the Son of God, so far as he is manifested in the flesh.

Let us therefore keep Christ before our eyes, as he was sent into the world by the Father to be a Redeemer. The Jews beheld in him nothing higher than human nature, and, therefore, he argues that, when he cured the diseased man, he did it not by human power, but by a Divine power which was concealed under his visible flesh. The state of the case is this. As they, confining their attention to the appearance of the flesh, despised Christ, he bids them rise higher and look at God. The whole discourse must be referred to this contrast, that they err egregiously who think that they have to do with a mortal man, when they accuse Christ of works which are truly divine. This is his reason for affirming so strongly that in this work, there is no difference between him and his Father.

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### John 5:20-24

**20.** For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things which he doeth; and he will show him greater works than these, that you may wonder. **21.** For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; so also the Son quickeneth whom he will. **22.** For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son; **23.** That all men may honor the Son, as they honor the Father: he who honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father who sent him. **24.** Verily, verily, I say to you, That he who heareth my word, and believeth in him who sent me, hath eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation, but hath passed from death to life.

**20.** *For the Father loveth the Son.* Every body sees how harsh and far-fetched is the exposition of this passage which is given by the Fathers. "God," they say, "loves himself in the Son." But this statement applies beautifully to Christ as clothed with flesh, that he is beloved by the Father. What is more, we know that it is by this excellent title that he is distinguished both from angels and from men, *This is my beloved Son*, ([Matthew 3:17](#).) For we know that Christ was chosen, that the whole love of God might dwell in him, and might flow from him to us as from a full fountain. Christ is loved by the Father, as he is the Head of the Church. He shows that this love is the cause why the Father does all things by his hand. For when he says that the Father SHOWETH *to him* this word must be understood to denote communication, as if he had said, "As the Father hath given to me his heart, so he hath poured out his power on me, that the Divine glory may shine in my works, and — what is more — that men may seek nothing Divine but what they find in me." And, indeed, out of Christ it will be in vain to seek the power of God.

*He will show him greater works than these.* By these words he means that the miracle, which he had performed in curing the man, was not the greatest of the works enjoined on him by the Father; for he had only given in it a slight taste of that grace of which he is properly both minister and Author; namely, to restore life to the world.

*That you may wonder.* By adding these words, he indirectly charges them with ingratitude in despising so illustrious a demonstration of the power of God; as if he had said, "Though you are dull and stupid, yet the works which God shall afterwards perform by me will draw you, however reluctantly, into admiration." Yet this appears not to have been fulfilled, for we know that *seeing, they saw not*; as Isaiah also says that the reprobate are blind amidst the light of God. I reply, Christ did not now speak of their disposition, but only threw out a suggestion as to the splendor of the demonstration which he would soon afterwards give that he was the Son of God.

**21.** *For as the Father raiseth up the dead.* Here he gives a summary view of the nature of the office which had been given to him by the Father; for though he appears to specify

one class, yet it is a general doctrine in which he declares himself to be the Author of *life*. Now *life* contains within itself not only righteousness, but all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and every part of our salvation. And certainly this miracle must have been so remarkable a proof of the power of Christ, as to yield this common fruit; that is, to open a door to the Gospel. We ought also to observe in what manner Christ bestows *life* upon us; for he found us all dead, and therefore it was necessary to begin with a *resurrection*. Yet, when he joins the two words, *raiseth up* and *quickeneth*, he does not use superfluous language; for it would not have been enough that we were rescued from death, if Christ did not fully and perfectly restore *life* to us. Again, he does not speak of this life as bestowed indiscriminately on all; for he says that *he giveth life to whom he will*; by which he means that he specially confers this grace on none but certain men, that is, on the elect.

22. *For the Father judgeth no man.* He now states more clearly the general truth, that the Father governs the world in the person of the Son, and exercises dominion by his hand; for the Evangelist employs the word *judgment*, agreeably to the idiom of the Hebrew language, as denoting *authority* and *power*. We now perceive the amount of what is stated here, that the Father hath given to the Son a kingdom, that he may govern heaven and earth according to his pleasure. But this might appear to be very absurd, that the Father, surrendering his right to govern, should remain unemployed in heaven, like a private person. The answer is easy. This is said both in regard to God and to men; for no change took place in the Father, when he appointed Christ to be supreme King and Lord of heaven and earth; for he is in the Son, and works in him. But since, when we wish to rise to God, all our senses immediately fail, Christ is placed before our eyes as a lively image of the invisible God. There is no reason, therefore, why we should toil to no purpose in exploring the secrets of heaven, since God provides for our weakness by showing himself to be near in the person of Christ; but, on the other hand, whenever the inquiry relates to the government of the world, to our own condition, to the heavenly guardianship of our salvation, let us learn to direct our eyes to Christ alone, as all power is committed to him, ([Matthew 28:18](#)), and in his face God the Father, who would otherwise have been hidden and at a distance, appears to us so that the unveiled majesty of God does not swallow us up by its inconceivable brightness.

23. *That all men may honor the Son.* This clause sufficiently confirms the suggestion which I threw out a little ago, that when it is said that God reigns in the person of Christ, this does not mean that he reposes in heaven, as indolent kings are wont to do, but because in Christ he manifests his power and shows himself to be present. For what else is the meaning of these words, *that all men may honor the Son*, but that the Father wishes to be acknowledged and worshipped in the Son? Our duty, therefore, is to seek God the Father in Christ, to behold his power in Christ, and to worship him in Christ. For, as immediately follows, *he who honoureth not the Son* deprives God of the honor which is due to him. All admit that we ought to worship God, and this sentiment, which is natural to us, is deeply

rooted in our hearts, so that no man dares absolutely to refuse to God the honor which is due to him; yet the minds of men lose themselves in going out of the way to seek God. Hence so many pretended deities, hence so many perverse modes of worship. We shall never, therefore, find the true God but in Christ, nor shall we ever worship Him aright but by *kissing the Son*, as David tells us, ([Psalm 2:12](#);) for, as John elsewhere declares,

He who hath not the Son hath not the Father,

(1 John 2:23.)

Mahometans and Jews do indeed adorn with beautiful and magnificent titles the God whom they worship; but we ought to remember that the name of God, when it is separated from Christ, is nothing else than a vain imagination. Whoever then desires to have his worship approved by the true God, let him not turn aside from Christ. Nor was it otherwise with the Fathers under the Law; for though they beheld Christ darkly under shadows, yet never did God reveal himself out of Christ. But now, since Christ has been manifested in the flesh and appointed to be King over us, the whole world must bend the knee to him, in order to obey God; for the Father having made him sit at his right hand, he who forms a conception of God without Christ takes away the half of him.

**24.** *He that heareth my word.* Here is described the way and manner of honoring God, that no one may think that it consists solely in any outward performance, or in frivolous ceremonies. For the doctrine of the Gospel seems as a scepter to Christ, by which he governs believers whom the Father has made his subjects. And this definition is eminently worthy of notice. Nothing is more common than a false profession of Christianity; for even the Papists, who are most inveterate enemies of Christ, do in the most presumptuous manner boast of his name. But here Christ demands from us no other honor than to obey his Gospel. Hence it follows, that all the honor which hypocrites bestow on Christ is but the kiss of Judas, by which he betrayed his Lord. Though they may a hundred times call him King, yet they deprive him of his kingdom and of all power, when they do not exercise faith in the Gospel.

*Hath eternal life.* By these words he likewise commends the fruit of obedience, that we may be more willing to render it. For who ought to be so hardened as not to submit willingly to Christ, when the reward of eternal life is held out to him? And yet we see how few there are whom Christ gains to himself by so great goodness. So great is our depravity that we choose rather to perish of our own accord than to surrender ourselves to obey the Son of God, that we may be saved by his grace. Both, therefore, are here included by Christ — the robe of devout and sincere worship which he requires from us, and the method by which he restores us to life. For it would not be sufficient to understand what he formerly taught, that he came *to raise the dead*, unless we also knew the manner in which he restores us to life. Now he affirms that life is obtained by *hearing* his word, and by the word *hearing* he means *faith*, as he immediately afterwards declares. But faith has its seat not in the ears, but in the heart. Whence faith derives so great power, we have formerly explained. We ought

always to consider what it is that the Gospel offers to us; for we need not wonder that he who receives Christ with all his merits is reconciled to God, and acquitted of the condemnation of death; and that he who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit is clothed with a heavenly righteousness, that he may *walk in newness of life*, ([Romans 6:6](#).) The clause which is added, *believeth on him who sent him*, serves to confirm the authority of the Gospel: when Christ testifies that it came from God, and was not invented by men, as he elsewhere says that what he speaks *is not from himself*, but was delivered to him by the Father, ([John 7:16; 14:10](#).)

*And shall not come into condemnation.* There is here an implied contrast between the guilt to which we are all naturally liable, and the unconditional acquittal which we obtain through Christ; for if all were not liable to condemnation, what purpose would it serve to free from it those who believe in Christ? The meaning therefore is, that we are beyond the danger of death, because we are acquitted through the grace of Christ; and, therefore, though Christ sanctifies and regenerates us, by his Spirit, to newness of life, yet here he specially mentions the unconditional forgiveness of sins, in which alone the happiness of men consists. For then does a man begin to live when he has God reconciled to him; and how would God love us, if he did not pardon our sins?

*But hath passed.* Some Latin copies have this verb in the future tense, will pass *from death to life*; but this has arisen from the ignorance and rashness of some person who, not understanding the meaning of the Evangelist, has taken more liberty than he ought to have taken; for the Greek word μεταβέβηκε (*hath passed*) has no ambiguity whatever. There is no impropriety in saying that we have already *passed from death to life*; for the *incorruptible seed of life* ([1 Peter 1:23](#)) resides in the children of God, and they already sit in the heavenly glory with Christ by hope, ([Colossians 3:3](#)), and they have *the kingdom of God* already established *within them*, ([Luke 17:21](#).) For though their *life be hidden*, they do not on that account cease to possess it by faith; and though they are besieged on every side by faith, they do not cease to be calm on this account, that they know that they are in perfect safety through the protection of Christ. Yet let us remember that believers are now in life in such a manner that they always carry about with them the cause of death; but the Spirit, who dwells in us, is *life*, which will at length destroy the remains of *death*; for it is a true saying of Paul, that death is the last enemy that shall be destroyed,

([1 Corinthians 15:26](#).)

And, indeed, this passage contains nothing that relates to the complete destruction of death, or the entire manifestation of life. But though life be only begun in us, Christ declares that believers are so certain of obtaining it, that they ought not to fear *death*; and we need not wonder at this, since they are united to him who is the inexhaustible fountain of *life*.

### John 5:25-29

25. Verily, verily, I say to you, That the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. 26. For as the Father hath life in himself, so also hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. 27. And he hath given him power to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.<sup>102</sup> 28. Wonder not at this; for the hour cometh when all who are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29. And they who have done good shall go forth to the resurrection of life; and they who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

25. *Verily, verily* When the Evangelist represents the Son of God as swearing so frequently in reference to our salvation, hence we perceive, first, how eagerly he desires our welfare, and next, of how great importance it is that the faith of the Gospel should be deeply fixed and thoroughly confirmed. The statement has indeed some appearance of being incredible, when we are told that this is the effect of the faith of which Christ speaks; and therefore he confirms by an oath that the voice of his Gospel has such power of giving life that it is powerful to *raise the dead* It is generally agreed that he speaks of spiritual death; for those who refer it to Lazarus, ([John 11:44](#)), and to the widow's son at Nain, ([Luke 7:15](#)), and similar instances, are refuted by what follows. First, Christ shows that we are all *dead* before he quickens us; and hence it is evident what the whole nature of man can accomplish towards procuring salvation.

When the Papists wish to set up their free-will, they compare it to the Samaritan whom the robbers had left half-dead on the road, ([Luke 10:30](#);) as if by the smoke of an allegory they could darken a clear statement, by which Christ declares that we are fully condemned to death. And indeed as we have been, since the revolt of the first man, alienated from God through sin, all who do not acknowledge that they are overwhelmed with everlasting destruction do nothing else than deceive themselves by empty flatteries. I readily acknowledge that in the soul of man there remains some remnant of life; for understanding, and judgment, and will, and all our senses, are so many parts of life; but as there is no part which rises to the desire of the heavenly life, we need not wonder if the whole man, so far as relates to the kingdom of God, is accounted dead. And this death Paul explains more fully when he says, that we are alienated from the pure and sound reason of the understanding, that we are enemies to God, and opposed to his righteousness, in every affection of our heart; that we wander in darkness like blind persons, and are given up to wicked lusts, ([Ephesians 2:1](#);

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102 “Pource qu'il est (ou, *entant qu'il est*) le Fils de l'homme;” — “because he is (*or, in so far as he is*) the Son of man.”

4:17.) If a nature so corrupted has no power to desire righteousness, it follows that the life of God is extinguished in us.

Thus the grace of Christ is a true resurrection from the dead. Now this grace is conferred on us by the Gospel; not that so much energy is possessed by the external voice, which in many cases strikes the ears to no purpose, but because Christ speaks to our hearts within by his Spirit, that we may receive by faith the life which is offered to us. For he does not speak indiscriminately of all the *dead*, but means the elect only, whose ears God pierces and opens, that they may receive the voice of his Son, which restores them to life. This twofold grace, indeed, Christ expressly holds out to us by his words, when he says, *The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who hear shall live*; for it is not less contrary to nature that *the dead should hear*, than that they should be brought back to the life which they had lost; and therefore both proceed from the secret power of God.

*The hour cometh, and now is.* He thus speaks of it as a thing which had never before happened; and, indeed, the publication of the Gospel was a new and sudden resurrection of the world. But did not the word of God always give life to men? This question may be easily answered. The doctrine of the Law and the Prophets was addressed to the people of God, and consequently must have been rather intended to preserve in life those who were the children of God than to bring them back from death. But it was otherwise with the Gospel, by which nations formerly estranged from the kingdom of God, separated from God, and deprived of all hope of salvation, were invited to become partakers of life.

26. *For as the Father hath life in himself.* He shows whence his voice derives such efficacy; namely, that he is the fountain of *life*, and by his voice pours it out on men; for *life* would not flow to us from his mouth, if he had not in himself the cause and source of it. God is said to *have life in himself*, not only because he alone lives by his own inherent power, but because, containing in himself the fullness of *life*, he communicates *life* to all things. And this, indeed, belongs peculiarly to God, as it is said, *With thee is the fountain of life*, ([Psalm 36:9](#).) But because the majesty of God, being far removed from us, would resemble an unknown and hidden source, for this reason it has been openly manifested in Christ. We have thus an open fountain placed before us, from which we may draw. The meaning of the words is this: "God did not choose to have life hidden, and, as it were, buried within himself, and therefore he poured it into his Son, that it might flow to us." Hence we conclude, that this title is strictly applied to Christ, so far as he was manifested in the flesh.

27. *And hath given him power.* He again repeats that the Father hath given him dominion, that he may have full power over all things in heaven and in the earth. The word ( $\epsilon\xi\theta\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ ) here denotes *authority Judgment* is here put for rule and government, as if he had said, that the Father had appointed him to be King, to govern the world, and exercise the power of the Father himself.

*Because he is the Son of man.* This reason, which is immediately added, deserves particularly to be observed, for it means that he comes forth to men, adorned with such magnificence of power, that he may impart to them what he has received from the Father. Some think that this passage contains nothing else than what is said by Paul, that Christ, having been in the form of God emptied himself by taking upon him the form of a servant, and humbled himself even to the death of the cross; and therefore God hath exalted him, and given him a name more illustrious than any name, that every knee may bow before him  
([Philippians 2:7-10.](#))

But for my own part, I regard the meaning as more extensive: that Christ, so far as he is man, was appointed by the Father to be the Author of life, that it may not be necessary for us to go far to seek it; for Christ did not receive it for himself, as if he needed it, but in order to enrich us by his wealth. It may be summed up thus: “What had been hidden in God is revealed to us in Christ as man, and *life*, which was formerly inaccessible, is now placed before our eyes.” There are some who separate this argument from its immediate connection, and join it to the following clause; but this is a forced interpretation, and is at variance with Christ’s meaning.

**28.** *Wonder not at this.* We may be apt to think that he reasons inconclusively, in drawing from the last resurrection a confirmation of what he had said; for it is not an instance of greater power to raise up bodies than to raise up minds. I reply, it is not from the fact itself that he makes a comparison between the greater and the less, but from the opinion of men; for, being carnal, they admire nothing but what is outward and visible. Hence it arises that they pass by the resurrection of the soul with little concern, while the resurrection of the body excites in them greater admiration. Another effect produced by this gross stupidity of ours is, that those things which are perceived by the eyes have a more powerful influence in producing faith than those which can be received by faith alone. As he mentions the last day, that limitation — -and *now is* — is not again added, but he simply declares that the time will one day arrive.

But another objection springs up; for though believers expect the resurrection of bodies, yet they cannot rely on their knowledge of it, so as to conclude that souls are now rescued from death, because bodies will one day rise out of the graves. And among ungodly men,<sup>103</sup> what would be reckoned more ridiculous than to prove a thing unknown (to use a common phrase) by a thing less known? I reply, Christ here boasts of his power over the reprobate, so as to testify that the Father has committed to him the full restoration of all things; as if he had said, “What I now tell you that I have commenced, I will one day finish before your eyes.” And, indeed, when Christ now, by the voice of his Gospel, quickens souls which had been sunk in perdition, it is a sort of preparation for the last resurrection. Again,

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103 “Des contempteurs de Dieu et incredules;” “with despisers of God and unbelievers.”

as he includes the whole human race, he immediately makes a distinction between the elect and the reprobate. This division shows that the reprobate, as they are now summoned by the voice of Christ to come to judgment, will also, by the same voice, be dragged and brought to appear at his tribunal.

But why does he mention those only who are shut up *in graves*, as if others would not be partakers of the resurrection, whether they have been drowned, or devoured by wild beasts, or reduced to ashes? The answer is, that as the dead are commonly buried, by the figure of speech called *synecdoche*, he employs a part to denote all who are already dead. And this is more emphatic than if he had said simply, *the dead*; for those whom death already deprived of life and light the grave withdraws, as it were, from the world.

*Shall hear his voice.* The *voice of the Son* means *the sound of the trumpet*, which will sound at the command by the power of Christ, ([Matthew 24:31](#); [1 Corinthians 15:52](#).) For though an *angel* will be a herald or forerunner, ([1 Thessalonians 4:16](#),) this does not hinder what is done by the authority of the Judge, and as it were in his own person, from being ascribed to himself.

**29.** *And they who have done good.* He points out believers by good works, as he elsewhere teaches that *a tree is known by its fruit*, ([Matthew 7:16](#); [Luke 6:44](#).) He praises their *good works*, to which they have begun to devote themselves since they were called. For the robber, to whom Christ on the cross ([Luke 23:42](#)) promised life, and who had all his life been given up to crimes, expresses a desire to do good with his latest breath; but as he is born again a new man, and from being the slave of sin begins to be a servant of righteousness, the whole course of his past life is not taken into account before God. Besides, the sins themselves, on account of which believers every day subject themselves to condemnation, are not imputed to them. For without the pardon which God grants to those who believe in Him,<sup>104</sup> there never was a man in the world of whom we can say that he has lived well; nor is there even a single work that will be reckoned altogether good, unless God pardon the sins which belong to it, for all are imperfect and corrupted. Those persons, therefore, are here called *doers of good works* whom Paul calls earnestly desirous or *zealous of them*, ([Titus 2:14](#).) But this estimate depends on the fatherly kindness of God, who by free grace approves what deserved to be rejected.

The inference which the Papists draw from those passages — that eternal life is suspended on the merits of works — may be refuted without any difficulty. For Christ does not now treat of the cause of salvation, but merely distinguishes the elect from the reprobate by their own mark; and he does so in order to invite and exhort his own people to a holy and blameless life. And indeed we do not deny that the faith which justifies us is accompanied

104 “Sans le pardon que Dieu fait a ses fideles.”



by an earnest desire to live well and righteously; but we only maintain that our confidence cannot rest on any thing else than on the mercy of God alone.

### John 5:30-32

**30.** I can do nothing of myself; as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me. **31.** If I testify concerning myself, my testimony is not true. **32.** There is another who testifieth concerning me, and I know that the testimony which he testifieth concerning me is true.

**30.** *I can do nothing of myself.* It would be superfluous here to enter into abstruse reasonings, whether the Son of God *can do any thing of himself* or otherwise, so far as relates to his eternal Divinity; for he did not intend to keep our minds employed about such trifles. Consequently there was no reason why the ancients should have given themselves so much anxiety and distress about refuting the calumny of Arius. That scoundrel gave out that the Son is not equal to the Father because *he can do nothing of himself*. The holy men reply, that the Son justly claims for himself all that can be ascribed to the Father, from whom he takes his commencement, with respect to his person. But, in the first place, Christ does not speak of his Divinity simply, but warns us that, so far as he is clothed with our flesh, we ought not to judge of him from the outward appearance, because he has something higher than man. Again, we ought to consider with whom he has to deal. His intention was, to refute the Jews who were endeavoring to contrast him with God. He therefore affirms that he does nothing by human power, because he has for his guide and director God who dwells in him.

We ought always to keep in remembrance that, whenever Christ speaks concerning himself, he claims only that which belongs to man; for he keeps his eye upon the Jews, who erroneously said that he was merely one of the ordinary rank of men. For the same reason, he ascribes to the Father whatever is higher than man. The word *judge* belongs properly to doctrine, but is intended also to apply to the whole of his administration, as if he had said, that he acts by the Father's direction in all things, that the Father's will is his rule, and therefore that He will defend him against all adversaries.<sup>105</sup>

*And my judgment is just.* He concludes that his actions and sayings are beyond the risk of blame, because he does not allow himself to attempt anything but by the command and direction of the Father; for it ought to be regarded as beyond all controversy that whatever proceeds from God must be right. This modesty ought to be held by us as the first maxim of piety, to entertain such reverence for the word and works of God, that the name of God would alone be sufficient to prove their justice and rectitude; but how few are to be found who are ready to acknowledge that God is just, unless they are compelled to do so! I acknowledge, indeed, that God demonstrates his righteousness by experience; but to limit it to the perception of our flesh, so as to have no opinion respecting it but what our own mind sug-

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105 "Il sera son protecteur et garent contre tous adversaires."

gests, is wicked and daring impiety. Let us, therefore, set it down as certain and undoubted, that whatever is from God is right and true, and that it is impossible for God not to be true in all his words, just and right in all his actions. We are likewise reminded that the only rule for acting well is, to undertake nothing but by the direction and commandment of God. And if after this the whole world should rise against us, we shall still have this invincible defense, that he who follows God cannot go astray.

*Because I seek not my own will.* He does not here make his own will and that of his Father to clash with each other, as if they were contrary things, but only refutes the false opinion which they entertained, that he was impelled by human presumption rather than guided by the authority of God. He affirms, therefore, that he has no disposition which is peculiar to himself and separate from the command of the Father.

**31.** *If I testify concerning myself.* He does not here take any thing away from the credit due to his testimony, which he elsewhere asserts in strong terms, but he speaks by way of concession; for Christ, having been in other respects most abundantly supported, consents that they should not believe his word. "If my testimony concerning myself," says he, "is suspected by you according to the ordinary custom of men, let it go for nothing." Now we know that what any man asserts about himself is not reckoned to be true and authentic, although in other respects he speak truth, because no man is a competent witness in his own cause. Though it would be unjust to reduce the Son of God to this rank, yet he prefers to surrender his right, that he may convince his enemies by the authority of God.

<b>John 5:33-36</b>
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**33.** You sent to John, and he gave testimony to the truth. **34.** But I receive not testimony from man; but these things I say that you may be saved. **35.** He was a burning and shining lamp, and for a time you were willing to amuse yourselves in his light. **36.** But I have greater testimony than that of John; for the works which my Father gave me to perform, the very works which I do, testify concerning me that the Father hath sent me.

**33.** *You sent to John.* Before producing the testimony of God, he presses them with the answer of *John*, from which they could not honorably withhold their belief. For of what use was it to *send to him*, if they did not intend to abide by his words? They *send to him* as a Prophet of God, and thus they pretend that his word will be regarded by them as an oracle. Now, though this implies another admission in their favor, still Christ openly brings against them this charge, that nothing but their own malice <sup>106</sup> hinders them from believing. And, therefore, we see that this circumstance is highly appropriate to the matter in hand, namely, that they sent to John, and — as if their motive had been a desire to learn — inquired at him who was the Messiah, and yet paid no attention to his reply.

**34.** *I receive not testimony from men.* Yet it was not in vain that God chose Christ to be a witness to him, and Christ himself declares, on another occasion, that the disciples will be his witnesses. You shall be witnesses to me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth,

(Acts 1:8.)

I reply, Christ avails himself of the *testimony* of John, not because he needs it, but so far as it is advantageous to us to receive from it some confirmation. Men borrow *testimony* from one another, because they cannot dispense with that assistance. The case is different with God and Christ. For if philosophers assert that virtue has no need of foreign aid, what has man in himself to lend support to the truth of God? And Christ immediately adds, that he produces the testimony of John on their account: *these things I say that you may be saved.* By this statement he means that it is not so much from a regard to himself as from a desire to promote the advantage of men, that he raises up the heralds of his Gospel by whom he testifies to us concerning his will. In this we see also a striking proof of his wonderful goodness, by which he regulates all things for our salvation. It is therefore our duty, on the other hand, to strive that the great care which he bestows in *saving* us may not be fruitless.

**35.** *He was a burning and shining lamp.* When he calls John *a burning lamp*, this proves their ingratitude; for it follows that they are only blind, because they choose to be so, since God kindled a *lamp* before their eyes. The meaning of the words therefore is, “God did not

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106 “Rien que leur propre malice.”

intend that you should go astray; for he appointed John to be a *lamp*, that he might direct you by his brightness; and, therefore, when you do not acknowledge me to be the Son of God, this arises from voluntary error.” This is followed by another reproach, that not only did they shut their eyes, and thus obstruct the entrance of the *light* which was offered to them, but they intentionally abused it for the purpose of crushing Christ. For when they were ready to applaud John beyond what he justly deserved, this arose from a wicked and treacherous design not to give way to the Son of God.

*And you were willing to amuse yourselves in his light.* This wicked abuse of the heavenly *light* Christ elegantly compares to foolish mirth; as if the head of a family were to light a *lamp* for his servants by night, that they might perform the duties which he had enjoined on them, but they, instead of doing so, employed it for debauchery and every kind of licentiousness. By these words Christ accuses the Jews, and at the same time conveys to all of us a warning that, when God sends faithful teachers to guide us in the right way, we should take care not to abuse them by wandering in every direction. How useful this warning is, the experience of all ages shows. God undertakes to direct men, throughout the whole course of their life, to the final goal, and sends his prophets to be their guides. Yet such is the madness of the folly of men that, instead of walking, they prefer to indulge in wanton dancing, without making any progress; so light and unsteady are they that, despising and rejecting his continued guidance, they are hurried away by the sudden impulses of their passions.

*For a time, or, for an hour.* By this term he reproves them for their folly in thinking that wickedness of a transitory nature and short duration can extinguish the light of God. Thus in our own day all those faithful teachers whom God has given to his Church as *burning lamps* are applied by the Papists to a contrary purpose; as if their intention were, by looking at the light, to dazzle their eyes. And not only do they abuse the *lamps* for extinguishing the light of God, but they often indulge in foolish gaiety amidst the darkness, as when they rise against the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and glory in the foolish sayings of their noisy declaimers. But what Christ here asserts concerning John, Paul declares to be common to all believers, because, having the word of life, they ought to give light to the world, like torches. But Christ shows that it belongs strictly to the Apostles and ministers of the Gospel to go before others and hold out the torch to guide them;<sup>107</sup> for though we are all blind, and in the midst of darkness, God shines upon us by the light of his word. But here he peculiarly adorns John the Baptist with this honorable designation, because by his ministry God shone on his Church with much greater brightness.

**36.** *But I have greater testimony than that of John.* After having showed that, in the person of John, the Jews had wickedly corrupted the gift of God, he now repeats a second time what he had said, that he has no need of the *testimony* of man, as if he had not enough

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107 “Pource qu’ils marchent les premiers, portans le flambe au devant les autres pour les guider.”

of himself; although, perceiving that they held his person in contempt, he sent them to his Father, according to his custom.

*For the works which the Father hath given me to do.* He holds out to view two things, by which he was proved to be the Son of God. “*My Father,*” says he, “attests by miracles that I am his Son; and before I came into the world, he gave abundant testimony to me in the sacred writings.” Let us always remember what object he has in view. He wishes to be recognized as the Messiah promised by God, that he may be heard, and, therefore, he maintains that he is now manifested to be such a person as Scripture describes him. It may be asked, Are miracles sufficient to prove this; for similar miracles had been already performed by the Prophets? I reply, those miracles which God performed by the agency of the Prophets did not go beyond the purpose for which they were intended, namely, to show that they were the ministers of God, because they could in no other way obtain the authority due to their office. But God intended to exalt his Son more highly, and this purpose of God ought to be regarded by us as the design of miracles. Therefore, if the Jews had not been prejudiced by malice and voluntarily shut their eyes, Christ might easily have proved to them by his miracles who and what he was.

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### John 5:37-40

37. And the Father who hath sent me, himself hath testified concerning me; you have never heard his voice, or seen his shape. 38. And you have not his word abiding in you; for whom he hath sent, him you believe not. 39. Search the Scriptures; for you think that you have eternal life in them: and they are they which testify concerning me. 40. And you will not come to me, that you may have life.

37. *And the Father who hath sent me.* To limit this statement, as some have done, <sup>108</sup> to the voice which was heard at his baptism, ([Matthew 3:17](#),) is a mistake; for he says in the past tense, that the Father (μεμαρτύρηκε) *testified*, in order to show that he did not come forward as an unknown person, because the Father had long ago distinguished him by such peculiar marks that, bringing them along with him, he might be recognized. I explain, therefore, that God testified concerning his Son, whenever in past times he held out to the ancient people the hope of salvation, or promised that the kingdom of Israel would be fully restored. In this manner the Jews must have formed an idea of Christ from the Prophets, before he was manifested in the flesh. When having him before their eyes, they despise and therefore reject him, they show plainly that they have no relish for the Law, with which Christ also reproaches them; and yet they boasted of their knowledge of the Law, as if they had been brought up in the bosom of God.

*You have never heard his voice.* After having complained that they do not receive him, Christ breaks out in still more severe language against their blindness. When he says that *they had never heard the voice of God, or seen his shape*, these are metaphorical expressions, by which he intends to state generally that they are utterly estranged from the knowledge of God. For as men are made known by the countenance and speech, so God utters *his voice* to us by the voice of the Prophets, and, in the sacraments, takes, as it were, a visible form, from which he may be known by us according to our feeble capacity. But he who does not recognize God in his lively image, plainly shows by this very fact that he worships no Deity but what he has himself contrived. For this reason Paul says, that the Jews had *a vail placed before their eyes*, that they might not perceive the glory of God in the face of Christ, ([2 Corinthians 3:14](#).)

38. *And you have not his word abiding in you.* This is the true way of profiting, when the word of God takes root in us, so that, being impressed on our hearts, it has its fixed abode there. Christ affirms that the heavenly doctrine has no place among the Jews, because they do not receive the Son of God, on whom it everywhere bestows commendation. And justly does he bring this reproach against them; for it was not in vain that God spake by

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108 “Aucuns s’abusent.”

Moses and the Prophets. Moses had no other intention than to invite all men to go straight to Christ; and hence it is evident that they who reject Christ are not the disciples of Moses. Besides, how can that man have *the word of life abiding in him* who drives from him the life itself? How can that man keep the doctrine of the Law who destroys the soul of the Law, as far as lies in his power? For the Law without Christ is empty and has no solidity. Just in proportion, therefore, as any man knows Christ, is the proficiency which he has made in the word of God.

**39. Search the Scriptures.** We have said that the statement which Christ formerly made — that he has the Father for a witness in heaven — refers to Moses and the Prophets. Now follows a clearer explanation; for he says that that testimony is to be found in *the Scriptures*. He again reproves them for their foolish boasting, because, while they acknowledged *that they had life in the Scriptures*, they perceived nothing in them but the dead letter. For he does not absolutely blame them for seeking life in *the Scriptures*, since they were given to us for that end and use, but because the Jews thought that *the Scriptures* gave them *life*, while they were widely opposed to its natural meaning, and — what is worse — while they quenched the light of *life* which was contained in them; for how can the Law bestow life without Christ, who alone gives life to it?

Again, we are taught by this passage, that if we wish to obtain the knowledge of Christ, <sup>109</sup> we must seek it from *the Scriptures*; for they who imagine whatever they choose concerning Christ will ultimately have nothing instead of him but a shadowy phantom. First, then, we ought to believe that Christ cannot be properly known in any other way than from *the Scriptures*; and if it be so, it follows that we ought to read *the Scriptures* with the express design of finding Christ in them. Whoever shall turn aside from this object, though he may weary himself throughout his whole life in learning, will never attain the knowledge of the truth; for what wisdom can we have without the wisdom of God? Next, as we are commanded to seek Christ *in the Scriptures*, so he declares in this passage that our labors shall not be fruitless; for the Father testifies in them concerning his Son in such a manner that He will manifest him to us beyond all doubt. But what hinders the greater part of men from profiting is, that they give to the subject nothing more than a superficial and cursory glance. Yet it requires the utmost attention, and, therefore, Christ enjoins us to *search* diligently for this hidden treasure. Consequently, the deep abhorrence of Christ which is entertained by the Jews, who have the Law constantly in their hands, must be imputed to their indolence. For the lustre of the glory of God shines brightly in Moses, but they choose to have a vail to obscure that lustre. By *the Scriptures*, it is well known, is here meant the Old Testament; for it was not in the Gospel that Christ first began to be manifested, but, having received testimony from the Law and the Prophets, he was openly exhibited in the Gospel.

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109 “Si nous voulons avoir connoissance de Christ.”



**40.** *And you will not come to me.* He again reproaches them that it is nothing but their own malice that hinders them from becoming partakers of the life offered in the Scriptures; for when he says that they *will not*, he imputes the cause of their ignorance and blindness to wickedness and obstinacy. And, indeed, since he offered himself to them so graciously, they must have been willfully blind; but when they intentionally fled from the light, and even desired to extinguish the sun by the darkness of their unbelief, Christ justly reproves them with greater severity.

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### John 5:41-47

41. I receive not glory from men. 42. But I know you, that you have not the love of God in you. 43. I come in the name of my Father, and you do not receive me; if another come in his own name, him you will receive. 44. How can you believe, who receive glory from each other, and seek not the glory which cometh from God alone? 45. Think not that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses in whom you trust, that accuseth you. 46. For if you believed Moses, you would also believe me; for he wrote concerning me. 47. But if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe my words?

41. *I receive not glory from men.* He proceeds in his reproof; but that he may not be suspected of pleading his own cause, he begins by saying that he does not care for *the glory of men*, and that it gives him no concern or uneasiness to see himself despised; and, indeed, he is too great to depend on the opinions of men, for the malignity of the whole world can take nothing from him, or make the slightest infringement on his high rank. He is so eager to refute their calumny that he exalts himself above men. Afterwards, he enters freely into invectives against them, and charges them with contempt and hatred of God. And though, in regard to honorable rank, there is an immense distance between Christ and us, still we ought boldly to despise the opinions of men. We ought, at least, to guard most zealously against being excited to anger, when we are, despised; but, on the contrary, let us learn never to kindle into indignation, except when men do not render to God the honor due to Him. Let our souls be burned and tortured by this holy jealousy, whenever we see that the world is so ungrateful as to reject God.

42. *That you have not the love of God in you.* *The love of God* is here put for all religious feelings; for no man can *love God* without beholding him with admiration and submitting entirely to his authority; as, on the other hand, when *the love of God* does not prevail, there can be no desire to obey him. That is the reason why Moses gives this as the summary or recapitulation (ἀνακεφαλαίωσις) of the Law:

thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy  
might,

(Deuteronomy 6:5.)

43. *I have come in my Father's name* The false prophets do indeed boast of this title, as the Pope, in the present day, boasts with open mouth that he is Christ's *Deputy* or *Vicar*; and under this very disguise has Satan deceived wretched men from the beginning. But Christ here means the reality, and not a hypocritical pretense; for when he testifies that he has come *in his Father's name*, he means not only that the *Father* has sent him, but that he faithfully executes the commission which he has received. By this mark he distinguishes the lawful teachers of the Church from spurious and pretended teachers. This passage, therefore,

teaches that we ought boldly to reject all who exalt themselves, and, in their own name, claim authority over souls; for he who is desirous to be reckoned a servant of God ought to have nothing separate from God. Now, if the whole doctrine of the Pope be examined, even the blind will see that he has come in his own name.<sup>110</sup>

*If another come in his own name, him you will receive.* That the Jews *do not love God*, and have no reverence for him, Christ proves by this argument, that they will eagerly receive the false prophets, while they refuse to obey God; for he takes for granted, that it is a sign of a wicked and ungodly mind, when men disregard truth and willingly assent to falsehoods. If it be objected that this is generally done rather through ignorance than through malice, the answer is easy. No man is exposed to the impostures of Satan, except so far as, through some wicked disposition, he prefers falsehood to truth. For how comes it that we are deaf when God speaks,<sup>111</sup> and that Satan finds us ready and active, but because we are averse to righteousness, and of our own accord desire iniquity? Though it ought to be observed that here Christ speaks chiefly of those whom God peculiarly enlightened, as he bestowed on the Jews this privilege, that, having been instructed in his Law, they might keep the right way of salvation. It is certain that such persons lend an ear to false teachers for no other reason than because they wish to be deceived. Accordingly, Moses says that, when false prophets arise, this is intended to prove and try the people *if they love the Lord their God*, ([Deuteronomy 13:3](#).) In many persons, no doubt, there appears to be an innocent and guileless simplicity,<sup>112</sup> but their eyes are undoubtedly blinded by the hypocrisy which lurks within their minds. For it is certain that God never shuts the door to those who knock, ([Matthew 7:8](#).) never disappoints those who sincerely pray to him, ([Isaiah 45:19](#).) Justly, therefore, does Paul ascribe it to the vengeance of God, when the power of deceiving is given to Satan,

that they who have rejected the truth, and taken pleasure in unrighteousness, may believe a lie, and says that they perish who did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved,

([2 Thessalonians 2:9, 12](#).)

In this manner is discovered the hypocrisy of many who, devoted to the impostures and wicked superstitions of the Pope, burn with envenomed rage against the Gospel; for if they had hearts disposed to the fear of God, that fear would likewise produce obedience.

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110 In transposing the two portions of the exposition of this verse, I have followed the French version of our Author, who, having observed that his observations on the first clause of this verse were placed last, restored the clauses to their natural order. — *Ed.*

111 “Que nous sommes sourds quand Dieu parle.”

112 “Une simplicité innocente et sans malice.”

44. *How can you believe?* As it might be thought harsh to say that those who were from their childhood the trained disciples of the Law and the Prophets, should be charged with such gross ignorance and declared to be enemies of the truth, and as this might even be thought to be incredible, Christ shows what it is that hinders them from believing. It is because ambition has deprived them of sound judgment; for he speaks, in a peculiar manner, to the priests and scribes, who, swelled with pride, could not obey God. This is a remarkable passage, which teaches that the gate of faith is shut against all whose hearts are preoccupied by a vain desire of earthly glory. For he who wishes to be somebody in the world must become wandering and unsteady, so that he will have no inclination towards God. Never is a man prepared to obey the heavenly doctrine, until he is convinced that his principal object, throughout his whole life, ought to be, that he may be approved by God.

But it may be thought that the wicked confidence, by which hypocrites exalt themselves in the presence of God, is a greater obstacle than worldly ambition; and we know that this was also a disease with which the scribes were deeply infected. The answer is easy; for Christ intended to tear from them the false mask of sanctity, by which they deceived the ignorant multitude. He therefore points, as with the finger, to the grosser vice, by which it may be made manifest to all that nothing is farther from their true character than what they wished to be reckoned. Besides, though hypocrisy exalts itself against God, still, in the world and before men, it is always ambitious; nay, more, it is this vanity alone that swells us with false presumption, when we rely more on our own judgment, and that of others, than on the judgment of God. He who in reality presents himself before God as his Judge, must, of necessity, fall down humbled and dismayed, and finding nothing in himself on which he can place reliance.<sup>113</sup> So, then, in order that any man may seek glory from God alone, he must be overwhelmed with shame, and flee to the undeserved mercy of God. And, indeed, they who look to God see that they are condemned and ruined, and that nothing is left to them in which they can glory but the grace of Christ. The desire of such glory will always be attended by humility.

So far as relates to the present passage, Christ's meaning is, that there is no other way in which men can be prepared for receiving the doctrine of the Gospel, than by withdrawing all their senses from the world, and turning them to God alone, and seriously considering that it is with God that they have to do, that, forgetting the flatteries by which they are accustomed to deceive themselves, they may descend into their own consciences. We need not wonder, therefore, if the Gospel in the present day find so few persons willing to be taught, since all are carried away by ambition. Nor need we wonder if many apostatize from the profession of the Gospel, for they are hurried away by their own vanity and fly off. So much the more earnestly ought we to seek this one thing, that, while we are mean and des-

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113 "Et ne sentant rien en soy-mesme sur quoy il se puisse appuyer."

pised in the eyes of the world, and even overwhelmed within ourselves, we may be reckoned among the children of God.

45. *Think not that I shall accuse you to the Father.* This is the way in which we ought to deal with obstinate and hardened persons, when they learn nothing by instruction and friendly warnings. They must be summoned to the judgment-seat of God. There are few persons, indeed, who openly mock God, but there are very many who, believing that God, whom they oppose as enemies, is gracious to them, amuse themselves at their ease with empty flatteries. Thus, in the present day, our *Giants*,<sup>114</sup> though they wickedly trample under foot the whole doctrine of Christ, haughtily plume themselves on being the intimate friends of God. For who will persuade the Papists that Christianity exists anywhere else than among them? Such were the scribes, with whom Christ is here disputing. Though they were the greatest despisers of the Law, yet they boasted of Moses in lofty terms, so that they did not hesitate to make use of him as a shield in opposing Christ. If he had threatened that he would be a powerful and formidable adversary to them, he knew that this would have been treated with the utmost contempt; and, therefore, he threatens that an accusation, drawn up by Moses, will be preferred against them.

*Moses, in whom you trust.* There are some who think, that Christ here points out the distinction between his own office and that of Moses, because it belongs to the Law to convict men of being unbelievers. But this is a mistake; for Christ did not intend that, but only intended to shake off the confidence of hypocrites, who falsely boasted of entertaining reverence for Moses; just as if a person in the present day, in order to foil the Papists with their own weapon,<sup>115</sup> were to say, that they will find no enemies more decidedly opposed to them than the holy doctors of the Church, under whose authority they falsely and wickedly take shelter.<sup>116</sup> Let us also learn from it, that we ought not to glory in the Scriptures without a good reason; for if we do not honor the Son of God by the true obedience of faith, all whom

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114 The wars of the *Giants* held a conspicuous place in the ancient mythology, and in the popular belief. Not to mention the poets, whose imaginations were kindled by such topics, they are formally introduced by Cicero, in a philosophical treatise, though only for the purpose of instructing his readers to “despise and reject these fables.” “The gods,” says he, “as the fables relate, were not without wars and battles; and that not only as in those described by Homer, when some of the gods were ranged on the one side, and some on the other side, of two opposing armies; but even, as in the case of the *Titans* and *Giants*, they carried on their own battles. Such things (he adds) are said, and are very foolishly believed, and are full of absurdity and downright silliness.” — (De Nat. Deorum, lib. 2.) The daring presumption and utter discomfiture of the *Giants*, in their fabulous wars, are sometimes alluded to by Calvin, and other Christian writers, in describing the wickedness and folly of man, who *stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty*, (Job 15:25.) — Ed.

115 “Pour rembarrer les Papistes de leur baston mesme.”

116 “Du titre desquels ils se couvrent faussement et meschamment.”

God hath raised up to be his witnesses will rise up against us as accusers at the last day. When he says, that they *trust in Moses*, he does not accuse them of superstition, as if they ascribed to Moses the cause of their salvation; but his meaning is, that they do wrong in relying on the protection of Moses, as if they had him to defend their wicked obstinacy.

**46.** *For if you believed Moses, you would also believe me.* He shows why Moses will be their accuser. It is because they do not reject his doctrine. We know that it is impossible to offer a greater insult to the servants of God than when their doctrine is despised or reproached. Besides, those whom the Lord has appointed to be ministers of his word, ought to be ready to defend it against despisers;<sup>117</sup> and therefore, he gave to all his prophets a twofold commission, that they might teach and instruct for the salvation of believers, and that, one day, they might confound the reprobate by their testimony.

*For he wrote concerning me.* When Christ says, that *Moses wrote concerning him*, this needs no long proof with those who acknowledge that Christ is the end and soul of the Law. But if any person be not satisfied with this, and desire to have the passages pointed out to him, I would advise him, first, to read carefully the Epistle to the Hebrews, with which also agrees Stephen's sermon, in the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles; and, next, to observe the quotations which Paul applies to his purpose. I acknowledge, indeed, that there are few in which Moses expressly mentions Christ; but what was the use of the tabernacle, and sacrifices, and all the ceremonies, but to be figures drawn in conformity to that first *pattern which was showed to him in the mountain?* ([Exodus 25:40](#); [Hebrews 8:5](#).) Thus, without Christ, the whole ministry of Christ vanishes. Again, we see how he continually reminds the people of the covenant of the Fathers which had been ratified in Christ, and even how he makes Christ to be the principal subject and foundation of the covenant. Nor was this unknown to the holy Fathers, who had always their eyes fixed on the Mediator. To treat the subject more largely, would be inconsistent with the brevity at which I aim.

**47.** *But if you do not believe his writings.* Christ appears here to claim less authority for himself than for Moses; and yet we know that *heaven and earth have been shaken by the voice* of the Gospel, ([Hebrews 12:26](#).) But Christ accommodates his discourse to those to whom he speaks; for the authority of the Law was, beyond all controversy, held sacred among the Jews; and thus it was impossible that Christ should be inferior to Moses. To the same purpose is the contrast between *writings* and *words*; for he shows their unbelief to be more aggravated, because the truth of God, recorded in an authentic form, has no authority with them.

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117 "Contre contempteurs."

# CHAPTER 6

### John 6:1-13

1. Afterwards, Jesus went across the sea of Galilee, which is called (the sea) of Tiberias. 2. And a great multitude followed him, because they had seen his miracles, which he performed on those who were diseased. 3. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. 4. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was at hand. 5. Jesus therefore, lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude came to him, saith to Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that those men may eat? 6. (Now he said this, trying him; for he himself knew what he would do.) 7. Philip answered him, Two hundred denarii of bread is not sufficient for them, that each of them may take a little. 8. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith to him, 9. There is here a boy, who hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are these among so many? 10. And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. (Now there was much grass in that place.) The men therefore sat down, in number about five thousand. 11. And Jesus took the loaves, and, having given thanks, distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those who had sat down, and likewise of the fishes, as much as they wished. 12. And after they were satisfied, he said to his disciples, Gather the fragments which are left, that nothing may be lost. 13. They therefore gathered, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five loaves which were left by those who had eaten.

1. *Afterwards, Jesus went.* Although John was accustomed to collect those actions and sayings of Christ, which the other three Evangelists had omitted, yet in this passage, contrary to his custom, he repeats the history of a miracle which they had related. But he does so for the express purpose of passing from them to Christ's sermon, which was delivered next day at Capernaum, because the two things were connected; and therefore this narrative, though the other three Evangelists have it in common with him, has this peculiarity, that it is directed to another object, as we shall see. The other Evangelists ([Matthew 14:13](#); [Mark 6:32](#); [Luke 9:10](#)) state that this happened shortly after the death of John the Baptist, by which circumstance of time they point out the cause of Christ's departure; for when tyrants have once imbrued their hands in the blood of the godly, they kindle into greater cruelty, in the same manner as intemperate drinking aggravates the thirst of drunkards. Christ therefore intended to abate the rage of Herod by his absence. He uses the term, *Sea of Galilee*, as meaning the lake of Gennesareth. When he adds that it was called the *Sea of Tiberias*, he explains more fully the place to which Christ withdrew; for the whole lake did not bear that name, but only that part of it which lay contiguous to the bank on which *Tiberias* was situated.

2. *And a great multitude followed him.* So great ardor in following Christ arose from this, that, having beheld his power in miracles, they were convinced that he was some great prophet, and that he had been sent by God. But the Evangelist here omits what the other



three relate, that Christ employed a part of the day in teaching and in healing the sick, and that, when the sun was setting, his disciples requested him to *send away the multitudes*, ([Matthew 14:13, 14](#); [Mark 6:34, 35](#); [Luke 9:11, 12](#);) for he reckoned it enough to give the substance of it in a few words, that he might take this opportunity of leading us on to the remaining statements which immediately follow.

Here we see, in the first place, how eager was the desire of the people to hear Christ, since all of them, forgetting themselves, take no concern about spending the night *in a desert place*. So much the less excusable is our indifference, or rather our sloth, when we are so far from preferring the heavenly doctrine to the gnawings of hunger, that the slightest interruptions immediately lead us away from meditation on the heavenly life. Very rarely does it happen that Christ finds us free and disengaged from the entanglements of the world. So far is every one of us from being ready to follow him to a desert mountain, that scarcely one in ten can endure to receive him, when he presents himself at home in the midst of comforts. And though this disease prevails nearly throughout the whole world, yet it is certain that no man will be fit for the kingdom of God until, laying aside such delicacy, he learn to desire the food of the soul so earnestly that his belly shall not hinder him.

But as the flesh solicits us to attend to its conveniences, we ought likewise to observe that Christ, of his own accord, takes care of those who neglect themselves in order to follow him.<sup>118</sup> For he does not wait till they are famished, and cry out that they are perishing of hunger, and have nothing to eat, but he provides food for them before they have asked it. We shall perhaps be told that this does not always happen, for we often see that godly persons, though they have been entirely devoted to the kingdom of God, are exhausted and almost fainting with hunger. I reply, though Christ is pleased to try our faith and patience in this manner, yet from heaven he beholds our wants, and is careful to relieve them, as far as is necessary for our welfare; and when assistance is not immediately granted, it is done for the best reason, though that reason is concealed from us.

3. *Jesus therefore went up into a mountain.* Christ unquestionably sought a place of retirement till *the feast of the Passover*; and therefore it is said that he *sat down on a mountain with his disciples*. Such was undoubtedly the purpose which he formed as man; but the purpose of God was different, which he willingly obeyed. Although, therefore, he avoided the sight of men, yet he permits himself to be led by the hand of God as into a crowded theater; for there was a larger assembly of men *in a desert mountain* than in any populous city, and greater celebrity arose from the miracle than if it had happened in the open market-place of *Tiberias*. We are therefore taught by this example to form our plans in conformity to the course of events, but in such a manner that, if the result be different from what we

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118 "Pour le suyvre."

expected, we may not be displeased that God is above us, and regulates everything according to his pleasure.

5. *He saith to Philip.* What we here read as having been *said to Philip* alone, the other Evangelists tell us, was said to all. But there is no inconsistency in this; for it is probable that *Philip* spoke according to the opinion entertained by all, and, therefore, Christ replies to him in particular; just as John, immediately afterwards, introduces Andrew as speaking, where the other Evangelists attribute the discourse to all alike. Perceiving that they have no conception of an extraordinary remedy, he then arouses their minds, which may be said to be asleep, so that they may, at least, have their eyes open to behold what shall be immediately exhibited to them. The design of all that is alleged by the disciples is, to persuade Christ not to detain the people; and, perhaps, in this respect they consult their private advantage, that a part of the inconvenience may not fall upon themselves. Accordingly, Christ disregards their objections, and proceeds in his design.

7. *Two hundred denarii.* As the *denarius*, according to the computation of *Budaeus*, is equal to four times the value of a *carolus* and two *deniers* of *Tours*, this sum amounts to thirty-five *francs*, or thereby.<sup>119</sup> If you divide this sum among *five thousand men*, each hundred of them will have less than *seventeenpence sterling*<sup>120</sup> If we now add about a thousand of *women and children*, it will be found that *Philip* allots to each person about the sixth part of an English penny,<sup>121</sup> *to buy a little bread* But, as usually happens in a great crowd, he probably thought that there was a greater number of people present; and as the disciples were poor and ill supplied with money, *Andrew* intended to alarm Christ by the greatness of the sum, meaning that they were not wealthy enough to entertain so many people.

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119 The value of the old French coins passed through so many changes, that all reasoning about them must be involved in uncertainty; but, so far as we have been able to ascertain, the value of a *carolus* of *Tours*, in Calvin's time, was nearly that of a penny sterling, and the *denier* was the tenth part of it, or nearly a modern *centime* of *Paris*. "Four times the *carolus*, with two *deniers*," would thus be 4 and 1/5 pence sterling, and, multiplying that by 200, we have *three pounds, ten shillings*. Again, taking the *franc* (as *Cotgrave* rates it) at *two shillings*, 35 francs are also equal to *three pounds, ten shillings*. This is, at least, a curious coincidence, and the reader may compare it with a computation made from the *livre Parisis*, (*Harmony*, volume 2, page 234, n. 2.) It would appear, however, that *Budaeus* and Calvin had estimated the *denarius* at little more than half its real value, which was *sevenpence halfpenny sterling*, taking silver at five shillings per ounce; so that *two hundred denarii* would be equal to *six pounds, five shillings sterling*. — *Ed.*

120 "Quatorze (fourteen) sols *Tournois*." According to *Cotgrave*, the *sol Tournois* is the tenth part of our shilling, or one part in six better than our penny." — *Ed.*

121 "Sesquituronicum;" — "un denier *Tournois* et maille;" — "one and a half denier of *Tours*."

**10. *Make the men sit down.*** That the disciples were not sooner prepared to cherish the hope which their Master held out, and did not remember to ascribe to his power all that was proper, was a degree of stupidity worthy of blame; but no small praise is due to their cheerful obedience in now complying with his injunction, though they know not what is his intention, or what advantage they will derive from what they are doing. The same readiness to obey is manifested by the people; for, while they are uncertain about the result, they all sit down as soon as a single word of command has been pronounced. And this is the trial of true faith, when God commands men to walk, as it were, in darkness. For this purpose let us learn not to be wise in ourselves, but, amidst great confusion, still to hope for a prosperous issue, when we follow the guidance of God, who never disappoints his own people.

**11. *After having given thanks.*** Christ has oftener than once instructed us by his example that, whenever we take food, we ought to begin with prayer. For those things which God has appointed for our use, being evidences of his infinite goodness and fatherly love towards us, call on us to offer praise to Him; and *thanksgiving*, as Paul informs us, is a kind of solemn *sanctification*, by means of which the use of them begins to be pure to us, (1 Timothy 4:4.) Hence it follows, that they who swallow them down without thinking of God, are guilty of sacrilege, and of profaning the gifts of God. And this instruction is the more worthy of attention, because we daily see a great part of the world feeding themselves like brute beasts. When Christ determined that the bread given to the disciples should grow among their hands, we are taught by it that God blesses our labor when we are serviceable to each other.

Let us now sum up the meaning of the whole miracle. It has this in common with the other miracles, that Christ displayed in it his Divine power in union with beneficence, It is also a confirmation to us of that statement by which he exhorts us to *seek the kingdom of God*, promising that *all other things shall be added to us*, (Matthew 6:33.) For if he took care of those who were led to him only by a sudden impulse, how would he desert us, if we seek him with a firm and steady purpose? True, indeed, he will sometimes allow his own people, as I have said, to suffer hunger; but he will never deprive them of his aid; and, in the meantime, he has very good reasons for not assisting us till matters come to an extremity.

Besides, Christ plainly showed that he not only bestows spiritual life on the world, but that his Father commanded him also to nourish the body. For abundance of all blessings is committed to his hand, that, as a channel, he may convey them to us; though I speak incorrectly by calling him a *channel*, for he is rather the living fountain flowing from the eternal Father. Accordingly, Paul prays that all blessings may come to us *from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*, in common, (1 Corinthians 1:3;) and, in another passage, he shows that

in all things we ought to give thanks to God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
(Ephesians 5:20.)

And not only does this office belong to his eternal Divinity, but even in his human nature, and so far as he has taken upon him our flesh,<sup>122</sup> the Father has appointed him to be the dispenser, that by his hands he may feed us. Now, though we do not every day see miracles before our eyes, yet not less bountifully does God display his power in feeding us. And indeed we do not read that, when he wished to give a supper to his people, he used any new means; and, therefore, it would be an inconsiderate prayer, if any one were to ask that meat and drink might be given to him by some unusual method.

Again, Christ did not provide great delicacies for the people, but they who saw his amazing power displayed in that supper, were obliged to rest satisfied with barley-bread and fish without sauce.<sup>123</sup> And though he does not now satisfy *five thousand men with five loaves*, still he does not cease to feed the whole world in a wonderful manner. It sounds to us, no doubt, like a paradox, that man liveth not by bread alone, but by the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God, (Deuteronomy 8:3.)

For we are so strongly attached to outward means, that nothing is more difficult than to depend on the providence of God. Hence it arises that we tremble so much, as soon as we have not bread at hand. And if we consider every thing aright, we shall be compelled to discern the blessing of God in all the creatures which serve for our bodily support;<sup>124</sup> but use and frequency lead us to undervalue the miracles of nature. And yet, in this respect, it is not so much our stupidity as our malignity that hinders us; for where is the man to be found who does not choose to wander astray in his mind, and to encompass heaven and earth a hundred times, rather than look at God who presents himself to his view?

13. *And filled twelve baskets.* When *four thousand men* were fed by *seven loaves*, Matthew relates that the number of baskets filled with fragments was exactly the same with the number of the loaves, (Matthew 15:37.) Since, therefore, a smaller quantity is sufficient for a greater number of men, and since the quantity left is nearly double, hence we see more clearly of what value is that blessing of God, against the sight of which we deliberately shut our eyes. We ought also to observe, in passing, that though Christ commands them to *fill the baskets* for illustrating the miracle, yet he likewise exhorts his disciples to frugality, when he says, *Gather the fragments which are left, that nothing may be lost*; for the increase of the bounty of God ought not to be an excitement to luxury. Let those, therefore, who have abundance, remember that they will one day render an account of their immoderate wealth, if they do not carefully and faithfully apply their superfluity to purposes which are good, and of which God approves.

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122 “Mesme en son humanite, et entant qu’il a pris nostre chair.”

123 “De poissons sans sausse.”

124 “En toutes creatures qui servent a nostre nourriture.”

### John 6:14-21

**14.** Those men, therefore, when they saw the miracle which Jesus had performed, said, This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world. **15.** And when Jesus knew that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he again withdrew alone into a mountain. **16.** And when it was evening, his disciples went down to the sea. **17.** And having entered into a ship, they came across the sea into Capernaum; and it was now dark, and Jesus had not come to them. **18.** And the sea arose by means of a great wind that blew. **19.** When therefore they had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea; and when he approached the ship, <sup>125</sup> they were terrified. **20.** But he saith to them, It is I, be not terrified. **21.** They were willing, therefore, to receive him into the ship; and immediately the ship reached the place to which they were going.

**14.** *Those men, therefore.* The miracle appears to have been attended by some advantage, that they acknowledge the author of it to be the Messiah; for Christ had no other object in view. But immediately they apply to a different and improper purpose the knowledge which they have obtained concerning Christ. And it is a fault extremely common among men, to corrupt and pervert his truth by their falsehoods, as soon as he has revealed himself to them; and even when they appear to have entered into the right path, they immediately fall away.

**15.** *To make him a king.* When those men intended to give to Christ the title and honor of king, there was some ground for what they did. But they erred egregiously in taking upon themselves the liberty of *making a king*; for Scripture ascribes this as peculiar to God alone, as it is said,

I have appointed my king on my holy hill of Zion,  
([Psalm 2:6.](#))

Again, what sort of *kingdom* do they contrive for him? An earthly one, which is utterly inconsistent with his person. Hence let us learn how dangerous it is, in the things of God, to neglect His word, and to contrive anything of our own opinion; for there is nothing which the foolish subtlety of our understanding does not corrupt. And what avails the pretense of zeal, when by our disorderly worship we offer a greater insult to God than if a person were expressly and deliberately to make an attack on his glory?

We know how furious were the efforts of adversaries to extinguish the glory of Christ. That violence, indeed, reached its extreme point when he was crucified. But by means of his crucifixion salvation was obtained for the world, <sup>126</sup> and Christ himself obtained a

<sup>125</sup> “Ils voyent Jesus cheminant sur la mer, s’approchant de la nasselle, dont ils eurent peur.” — “They see Jesus walking on the sea, and approaching the ship, at which they were afraid.”

<sup>126</sup> “Le salut a este acquis aux hommes;” — “salvation was obtained for men.”

splendid triumph over death and Satan. If he had permitted himself to be now *made a king*, his spiritual kingdom would have been ruined, the Gospel would have been stamped with everlasting infamy, and the hope of salvation would have been utterly destroyed. Modes of worship regulated according to our own fancy, and honors rashly contrived by men, have no other advantage than this, that they rob God of his true honor, and pour upon him nothing but reproach.

*And take him by force.* We must also observe the phrase, *take by force* They wished to *take Christ by force*, the Evangelist says; that is, with impetuous violence they wished to *make him a king*, though against his will. If we desire, therefore, that he should approve of the honor which we confer upon him, we ought always to consider what he requires. And, indeed, they who venture to offer to God honors invented by themselves are chargeable with using some sort of force and violence towards him; for obedience is the foundation of true worship. Let us also learn from it with what reverence we ought to abide by the pure and simple word of God; for as soon as we turn aside in the smallest degree, the truth is poisoned by our leaven, so that it is no longer like itself. They learned from the word of God that he who was promised to be the Redeemer would be *a king*; but out of their own head they contrive an earthly *kingdom*, and they assign to him a kingdom contrary to the word of God. Thus, whenever we mix up our own opinions with the word of God, faith degenerates into frivolous conjectures. Let believers, therefore, cultivate habitual modesty, lest Satan hurry them into an ardor of inconsiderate and rash zeal,<sup>127</sup> so that, like *the Giants*, they shall rush violently against God, who is never worshipped aright but when we receive him as he presents himself to us.

It is astonishing that *five thousand men* should have been seized with such daring presumption, that they did not hesitate, by *making a new king*, to provoke against themselves Pilate's army and the vast power<sup>128</sup> of the Roman empire; and it is certain that they would never have gone so far, if they had not, relying on the predictions of the Prophets, hoped that God would be on their side, and, consequently, that they would overcome. But still they went wrong in contriving a *kingdom* of which the Prophets had never spoken. So far are they from having the hand of God favorable to aid their undertaking that, on the contrary, Christ withdraws. That was also the reason why wretched men under Popery wandered so long in gross darkness — while God was, as it were, absent — because they had dared to pollute the whole of his worship by their foolish inventions.<sup>129</sup>

**16. His disciples went down.** Christ undoubtedly intended to conceal himself until the crowd should disperse. We know how difficult it is to allay a popular tumult. Now, if they

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127 “En une ardeur de zele inconsiderate et temeraire.”

128 “La grande puissance.”

129 “Par leurs folles inventions.”

had openly attempted to do what they had intended, it would have been no easy matter afterwards to wipe off the stain which had once been fixed upon him. Meanwhile, he spent all that time in prayer, as the other Evangelists ([Matthew 14:23](#); [Mark 6:46](#)) relate; probably, that God the Father might repress that folly of the people.<sup>130</sup> As to his crossing the lake in a miraculous manner, it is intended to profit his disciples by again confirming their faith. The advantage extended still farther; for next day all the people would easily see that he had not been brought thither by a boat or ship,<sup>131</sup> but that he had come by his own power; for they blockaded the shore from which he had to set out, and would scarcely have been drawn away from it, if they had not seen the disciples cross to a different place.

17. *It was now dark.* John passes by many circumstances which the other Evangelists introduce; such as, that for several hours they struggled with a contrary wind; for it is probable that the storm arose immediately after the night began to come on; and they tell us that Christ did not appear to his disciples till about the fourth watch of the night, ([Matthew 14:28](#); [Mark 6:48](#).) Those who conjecture that they were still about the middle of the lake when Christ appeared to them, because John says that *they had then advanced about twenty-five or thirty furlongs*, are led into a mistake by supposing that they had sailed to the farther or opposite bank; for Bethsaida, near which town, Luke tells us, the miracle was performed, ([Luke 9:10](#),) and Capernaum, which the ship reached, ([John 6:16](#),) were situated on the same coast.

Pliny, in his fifth book, states that this lake was six miles in breadth, and sixteen in length. Josephus (in the third book of the Wars of the Jews) assigns to it one hundred furlongs in length, and forty in breadth;<sup>132</sup> and as eight furlongs make one mile, we may easily infer how little the one description differs from the other. So far as relates to the present sailing, my opinion is, that they did not go over so great a space by direct sailing, but through being driven about by the tempest.<sup>133</sup> However that may be, the Evangelist intended to show that, when Christ presented himself to them, they were in the utmost danger. It may be thought strange that the disciples should be tormented in this manner, while others had nothing to disturb them in sailing; but in this manner the Lord often makes his people fall into alarming dangers, that they may more plainly and familiarly recognize him in their deliverance.

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130 On our Savior's retirement into the mountain to pray, our Author has made very interesting and profitable observations. *Harmony of the Evangelists*, volume 2, page 237. — Ed.

131 "Par basteau ou navire."

132 Our Author quotes inaccurately the measurement given by Josephus, whose words are: "Now this lake of Gennesareth is so called from the country, adjoining to it. Its breadth is forty furlongs, and its length *one hundred and forty*." — *Wars of the Jews*, III. 10. 7. — Ed.

133 "Mais estans agitez de tempeste."

**19. *They were terrified.*** The other Evangelists explain the cause of that fear to have been, that *they thought that it was an apparition*, ([Matthew 14:26](#); [Mark 6:49](#).) Now it is impossible not to be seized with consternation and dread, when *an apparition* is presented before our eyes; for we conclude that it is either some imposture of Satan, or some bad omen which God sends us. Besides, John here holds out to us, as in a mirror, what kind of knowledge of Christ we may obtain without the word, and what advantage may be reaped from that knowledge. For if he present a simple demonstration of his divinity, we immediately fall into our imaginations, and every person forms an idol for himself instead of Christ. After we have thus wandered in our understanding, this is immediately followed by trembling and a confused terror of heart. But when he begins to speak, we then obtain from his voice clear and solid knowledge, and then also joy and delightful peace dawn upon our minds. For there is great weight in these words:

**20. *It is I: be not terrified*** We learn from them that it is in Christ's presence alone that we have abundant grounds of confidence, so as to be calm and at ease. But this belongs exclusively to the disciples of Christ; for we shall afterwards see that wicked men were struck down by the same words, *It is I*, ([John 18:6](#).) The reason of the distinction is, that he is sent as a Judge to the reprobate and unbelievers for their destruction; and, therefore, they cannot bear his presence without being immediately overwhelmed. But believers, who know that he is given to them to make propitiation, as soon as they hear his name, which is a sure pledge to them both of the love of God and of their salvation, take courage as if they had been raised from death to life, calmly look at the clear sky, dwell quietly on earth, and, victorious over every calamity, take him for their shield against all dangers. Nor does he only comfort and encourage them by his word, but actually removes also the cause of the terror by allaying the tempest.

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### John 6:22-25

22. Next day, the multitude standing on the other side of the sea, when they saw that there was no other ship there but only that into which his disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered into the ship with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone; 23. And other ships came from Tiberias, near the place where they had eaten bread, after that the Lord had given thanks. 24. When therefore the multitude saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they also entered into the ships, and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25. And having found him on the opposite side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

22. *Next day.* Here the Evangelist relates circumstances from which the multitude might conclude that Christ had gone across by divine power. There had been but one ship; they see it go away without Christ; next day, ships come from other places, by which they are conveyed to Capernaum; and there they find Christ. It follows that he must have been conveyed across in a miraculous manner. There is an intricacy and apparent confusion (*ἀνακόλουθον*) in the words, but still the meaning of them is plain enough; for, in the 22nd verse, John says that *there had been but one ship*, and that all saw it leave the shore and that place, and that it had not Christ as a passenger; and, in the 23rd verse, he adds that *ships came from Tiberias*, by which the multitude passed over, which had remained on the shore, blockading, as it were, every outlet, that Christ might not escape.

23. *Near the place where they had eaten bread.* The meaning of the words is doubtful; for they may be explained, either that Tiberias was *near the place where* Christ had fed them with five loaves, or that the ships reached the shore which was near and below that place. I approve more highly of the latter exposition; for Bethsaida, near which Luke states that the miracle was performed, is half-way between Tiberias and Capernaum. Accordingly, when ships came down from that place, which was farther up the lake, they sailed along that shore on which the multitude were standing; and there can be no doubt that they came to land for the purpose of taking in passengers.

*After that the Lord had given thanks.* When John again mentions that Christ *gave thanks*, it is not a superfluous repetition; for he means that Christ obtained by prayer that those few loaves were sufficient for feeding so many people; and as we are cold and indolent in prayer, he presses upon us the same thing a second time.

25. *On the other side of the sea.* We have already said that Capernaum was not situated on the opposite shore; for Tiberias is situated on that part of the lake where it is broadest, Bethsaida follows next, and Capernaum lies near the lowest part, not far from where the river Jordan issues from the lake. Now, when John places it *on the other side of the lake* itself, we must not understand him as if its position were directly across, but because, at the lower

extremity, the lake made a large winding, and, on account of the bay that intervened, it was impossible to go by land without a very circuitous journey. The Evangelist therefore says, *on the other side of the sea*, adopting the mode of expression used by the common people, because the only direct and ordinary mode of conveyance was by a boat.

<b>John 6:26-29</b>
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<p><b>26.</b> Jesus answered them, and said, Verily, verily, I say to you, You seek me, not because you saw miracles, but because you ate of the loaves, and were satisfied. <b>27.</b> Labour for food, not that which perisheth, but the food which endureth to eternal life, which the Son of man shall give to you; for him hath God the Father sealed. <b>28.</b> They said therefore to him, What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? <b>29.</b> Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you may believe in him whom he hath sent.</p>
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**26.** *Jesus answered them.* Christ does not reply to the question put to him, which would have been fitted to show to them his power in having come thither by a miracle.<sup>134</sup> But, on the contrary, he chides them for throwing themselves forward without consideration; for they were not acquainted with the true and proper reason of what he did, because they sought in Christ something else than Christ himself. The fault which he complains of in them is, that they seek Christ for the sake of the belly and *not of the miracles*. And yet it cannot be denied that they looked to *the miracle*; nay more, the Evangelist has already told us that they were excited by the miracles to follow Christ. But because they abused the miracles for an improper purpose, he justly reproaches them with having a greater regard to the belly than to miracles. His meaning was, that they did not profit by the works of God as they ought to have done; for the true way of profiting would have been to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah in such a manner as to surrender themselves to be taught and governed by him, and, under his guidance, to aspire to the heavenly kingdom of God. On the contrary, they expect nothing greater from him than to live happily and at ease in this world. This is to rob Christ of his chief power; for the reason why he was given by the Father and revealed himself to men is, that he may form them anew after the image of God by giving them his Holy Spirit, and that he may conduct them to eternal life by clothing them with his righteousness.

It is of great importance, therefore, what we keep in view in the miracles of Christ; for he who does not aspire to the kingdom of God, but rests satisfied with the conveniences of the present life, seeks nothing else than to fill his belly. In like manner, there are many persons in the present day who would gladly embrace the gospel, if it were free from the bitterness of the cross, and if it brought nothing but carnal pleasures. Nay, we see many who make a Christian profession, that they may live in greater gaiety and with less restraint. Some through the expectation of gain, others through fear, and others for the sake of those whom they wish to please, profess to be the disciples of Christ. In seeking Christ, therefore, the chief point is, to despise the world and

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134 "Ce qui eust este propre pour leur monstrier sa puissance, en ce qu'il estoit la venu par miracle."

seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness,  
(Matthew 6:33.)

Besides, as men very generally impose on themselves, and persuade themselves that they are seeking Christ in the best manner, while they debase the whole of his power, for this reason Christ, in his usual manner, doubles the word *verily*, as if by the oath he intended to bring to light the vice which lurks under our hypocrisy.

27. *Labour for food, not that which perisheth.* He shows to what object our desires ought to be directed, namely, to eternal life; but because, in proportion as our understandings are gross, we are always devoted to earthly things, for this reason he corrects that disease which is natural to us, before he points out what we ought to do. The simple doctrine would have been, “Labour to have the incorruptible food;” but, knowing that the senses of men are held bound by earthly cares, he first enjoins them to be loosed and freed from those cords, that they may rise to heaven. Not that he forbids his followers to labor that they may procure daily food; but he shows that the heavenly life ought to be preferred to this earthly life, because the godly have no other reason for living here than that, being sojourners in the world, they may travel rapidly towards their heavenly country.

Next, we ought to see what is the present question; for, since the power of Christ is debased by those who are devoted to the belly and to earthly things, he argues what we ought to seek in him, and why we ought to seek it. He employs metaphors adapted to the circumstances in which his sermon was delivered. If food had not been mentioned, he would have said, without a figure, “You ought to lay aside anxiety about the world, and strive to obtain the heavenly life.” But as those men were running to their fodder like cattle, without looking to anything better,<sup>135</sup> Christ presents his sermon in a metaphorical dress, and gives the name of *food* to everything that belongs to newness of life. We know that our souls are fed by the doctrine of the gospel, when it is efficacious in us by the power of the Spirit; and, therefore, as faith is the life of the soul, all that nourishes and promotes faith is compared to *food*

*Which endureth to eternal life.* This kind of food he calls incorruptible, and says that it *endureth to eternal life*, in order to inform us that our souls are not fed for a day, but are nourished in the expectation of a blessed immortality; because the Lord

commences the work of our salvation, that he may perform it till the day of Christ,

(Philippians 1:6.)

For this reason we must receive the gifts of the Spirit, that they may be earnest and pledges of eternal life. For, though the reprobate, after having tasted this food, frequently reject it, so that it is not permanent in them, yet believing souls feel that enduring power,

135 “Sans regarder a rien de meilleur.”

when they are made partakers of the power of the Holy Spirit in his gifts, which is not of short duration, but, on the contrary, never fails.

It is a frivolous exercise of ingenuity to infer, as some do, from the word *labor* or *work*, that we merit eternal life by our works; for Christ metaphorically exhorts men, as we have said, to apply their minds earnestly to meditation on the heavenly life, instead of cleaving to the world, as they are wont to do; and Christ himself removes every doubt, when he declares that it is he who *giveth the food*; for what we obtain by his gift no man procures by his own industry. There is undoubtedly some appearance of contradiction in these words; but we may easily reconcile these two statements, that the spiritual food of the soul is the free gift of Christ, and that we must strive with all the affections of our heart to become partakers of so great a blessing.

*For him hath God the Father sealed.* He confirms the preceding statement, by saying that he was appointed to us for that purpose by the Father. The ancient writers have misinterpreted and tortured this passage, by maintaining that Christ is said to be *sealed*, because he is the stamp and lively image of the Father. For he does not here enter into abstruse discussions about his eternal essence, but explains what he has been commissioned and enjoined to do, what is his office in relation to us, and what we ought to seek and expect from him. By an appropriate metaphor, he alludes to an ancient custom; for they *sealed* with signets what they intended to sanction by their authority. Thus Christ — that it may not appear as if he claimed anything of himself, or by private authority<sup>136</sup> — declares that this office was enjoined on him by the Father, and that this decree of the Father was manifested, as if a *seal* had been engraven on him. It may be summed up thus: As it is not every person who has the ability or the right<sup>137</sup> to feed souls with incorruptible food, Christ appears in public, and, while he promises that he will be the Author of so great a blessing, he likewise adds that he is approved by God, and that he has been sent to men with this mark, which is, as it were, God's *seal* or *signet*<sup>138</sup>

Hence it follows that the desire of those who shall present their souls to Christ, to be fed by him, will not be disappointed. Let us know, therefore, that life is exhibited to us in Christ, in order that each of us may aspire to it, not at random, but with certainty of success. We are, at the same time, taught that all who bestow this praise on any other than Christ are guilty of falsehood before God. Hence it is evident that the Papists, in every part of their doctrine, are altogether liars; for as often as they invent any means of salvation in the room of Christ, so often do they — by erasing, as it were, the impression which has been made —

136 “A fin qu'il ne semble que Christ vueille de soy-mesme et d'une autorite privee s'attribuer quelque chose.”

137 “Que ce n'est pas une chose facile et commune a chacun.”

138 “Qui est comme le seau ou cachet de Dieu.”

spoil and deface, with wicked presumption and base treachery, this *seal* of God, which alone is authentic. That we may not fall into so dreadful a condemnation, let us learn to keep pure and entire for Christ all that the Father has given to him.

28. *What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?* The multitude understood well enough that Christ had exhorted them to aim at something higher than the conveniences of the present life, and that they ought not to confine their attention to the earth, since God calls them to more valuable blessings. But, in putting this question, they are partly mistaken by not understanding the kind of *labor*; for they do not consider that God bestows upon us, by the hand of the Son, all that is necessary for spiritual life. First, they ask *what they ought to do*; and next, when they use the expression, *the works of God*, they do not understand what they say, and talk without any definite object.<sup>139</sup> In this manner they manifest their ignorance of the grace of God. And yet they appear here to murmur disdainfully against Christ, as if he were accusing them groundlessly. “Dost thou suppose,” say they, “that we have no solicitude about eternal life? Why, then, dost thou enjoin us to do what is beyond our power?” By *the works of God* we must understand those which God demands, and of which he approves.

29. *The work of God is this.* They had spoken of *works* Christ reminds them of one work, that is, *faith*; by which he means that all that men undertake without *faith* is vain and useless, but that *faith* alone is sufficient, because *this* alone does God require from us, *that we believe*. For there is here an implied contrast between *faith* and the *works* and efforts of men; as if he had said, Men toil to no purpose, when they endeavor to please God without *faith*, because, by running, as it were, out of the course, they do not advance towards the goal. This is a remarkable passage, showing that, though men torment themselves wretchedly throughout their whole life, still they lose their pains, if they have not *faith* in Christ as the rule of their life. Those who infer from this passage that *faith* is the gift of God are mistaken; for Christ does not now show what God produces in us, but what he wishes and requires from us.

But we may think it strange that God approves of nothing but *faith* alone; for the love of our neighbor ought not to be despised, and the other exercises of religion do not lose their place and honor. So then, though *faith* may hold the highest rank, still other works are not superfluous. The reply is easy; for *faith* does not exclude either the love of our neighbor or any other good work, because it contains them all within itself. *Faith* is called *the only work of God*, because by means of it we possess Christ, and thus become the sons of God, so that he governs us by his Spirit. So then, because Christ does not separate *faith* from its fruits, we need not wonder if he make it to be the first and the last.<sup>140</sup>

139 “Ils n’entendent point ce qu’ils disent, et parlent sans certain but.”

140 “Proram et puppim,” literally, “stem and stern,” a Latin idiom for *the whole*. The Author’s French version (ed. 1558) renders the clause, “il ne se faut point esbahir s’il constitue en elle la fin et le commencement;” — “we

*That you believe in him whom he hath sent.* What is the import of the word *believe*, we have explained under the Third Chapter. It ought always to be remembered that, in order to have a full perception of the power of *faith*, we must understand what Christ is, in whom we *believe*, and why he was given to us by the Father. It is idle sophistry, under the pretext of this passage, to maintain that we are justified by works, if faith justifies, because it is likewise called *a work*. First, it is plain enough that Christ does not speak with strict accuracy, when he calls faith *a work*, just as Paul makes a comparison between *the law of faith* and *the law of works*, ([Romans 3:27](#).) Secondly, when we affirm that men are not justified by *works*, we mean *works* by the merit of which men may obtain favor with God. Now *faith* brings nothing to God, but, on the contrary, places man before God as empty and poor, that he may be filled with Christ and with his grace. It is, therefore, if we may be allowed the expression, a passive work, to which no reward can be paid, and it bestows on man no other righteousness than that which he receives from Christ.

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must not be astonished if he makes it to be the end and the beginning;" and in ed. 1564, it runs thus, "ce n'est pas merveille que la foy est tout ce que Dieu requiert;" — "it is not wonderful that faith is all that God requires."

### John 6:30-33

**30.** They said therefore to him, What sign doest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work? <sup>141</sup> **31.** Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, as it is written, He gave them bread of heaven to eat, ([Exodus 16:15](#); [Psalm 78:24](#).) **32.** Jesus therefore said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, Moses gave you not bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. <sup>142</sup> **33.** For the bread of God is this which hath come down from heaven, and giveth life to the world.

**30.** *What sign doest thou?* This wickedness abundantly proves how truly it is said elsewhere, *This wicked generation seeketh a sign*, ([Matthew 12:39](#).) They had been at first drawn to Christ by the admiration of his miracles or *signs*, and afterwards, through amazement at a new *sign*, they acknowledged Christ to be the Messiah, and, with that conviction, *wished to make him a king*; but now they demand a *sign* from him, as if he were a man unknown to them. Whence came such sudden forgetfulness, but because they are ungrateful to God, and, through their own malice, are blind to his power, which is before their eyes? Nor can it be doubted that they treat disdainfully all the miracles which they had already beheld, because Christ does not comply with their wishes, and because they do not find him to be what they imagined him to be. If he had given them expectation of earthly happiness, he would have been highly applauded by them; they would undoubtedly have hailed him as a Prophet, and the Messiah, and the Son of God; but now, because he blames them for being too much addicted to the flesh, they think that they ought not to listen to him any more. And in the present day, how many are there who resemble them! At first, because they promise to themselves that Christ will flatter their vices, they eagerly embrace the gospel, and call for no proof of it; but when they are called to deny the flesh and to bear the cross, then do they begin to renounce Christ and ask whence the gospel came. In short, as soon as Christ does not grant their prayers, he is no longer their Master.

**31.** *Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness.* Thus we see that Christ put his finger on the sore, when he told them that they came like brute beasts to fill their belly; for they discover this gross disposition, when they demand a Messiah by whom they are to be fed. And as to the magnificent terms in which they extol the grace of God in the *manna*, they do this cunningly, in order to bury the doctrine of Christ, by which he condemned them for immoderate desire of corruptible food; for they contrast with it the magnificent title bestowed on the *manna*, when it is called *heavenly bread*. But when the Holy Spirit bestows on the *manna*

141 “Quelle oeuvre fais-tu?” — “What work doest thou?”

142 “Moïse ne vous a point donné le pain du ciel; mais mon Père vous donne le vrai pain du ciel.” — “Moses gave you not the bread of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread of heaven.”



the honorable appellation of *the bread of heaven*, ([Psalm 78:24](#).) it is not with this intention, as if God fed his people, like a herd of swine, and gave them nothing more valuable; and, therefore, they are without excuse, when they wickedly reject the spiritual food of the soul, which God now offers to them.

32. *Verily, verily, I say to you, Moses gave you not bread from heaven.* Christ appears to contradict what was quoted from the psalm, but he speaks only by comparison. The *manna* ☒ is called *the bread of heaven*, but it is for the nourishment of the body; but *the bread* which ought truly and properly to be reckoned *heavenly*, is that which gives spiritual nourishment to the soul. Christ therefore makes a contrast here between the world and heaven, because we ought not to seek the incorruptible life but in the kingdom of heaven. In this passage, *truth* is not contrasted with *shadows*, as is often done elsewhere; but Christ considers what is the *true* life of man, or, in other words, what it is that makes him different from brute beasts, and excellent among the creatures.

*My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.* When he adds these words, the meaning is, “*The manna which Moses gave to your fathers did not bring heavenly life, but now heavenly life is truly exhibited to you.*” True, it is the *Father* whom he calls *the giver of this bread*, but he means that it is given by his own hand. Thus the contrast relates, not to Moses and God, but to Moses and Christ. Now, Christ represents his Father rather than himself as the Author of this gift, in order to procure for himself deeper reverence; as if he had said, “Acknowledge me to be the minister of God, by whose hands he wishes to feed you to eternal life.” But, again, this appears to be inconsistent with the doctrine of Paul, who calls the *manna* — *spiritual food*, ([1 Corinthians 10:3](#).) I reply, Christ speaks according to the capacity of those with whom he has to deal, and this is not uncommon in Scripture. We see how variously Paul speaks about circumcision. When he writes about the ordinance, he calls it *the seal of faith*, ([Romans 4:11](#);) but when he has to contend with false apostles, he calls it rather a seal of cursing, and that by taking it with the qualities which they ascribed to it, and according to their opinion.<sup>143</sup> Let us consider what was the objection made against Christ, namely, that he did not prove himself to be the Messiah, if he did not supply his followers with bodily food. Accordingly, he does not inquire what it was that was prefigured by the *manna*, but maintains that *the bread* with which *Moses* fed their bellies was not *true bread*.

33. *For the bread of God.* Christ reasons negatively from the definition to the thing defined, in this manner: “*The heavenly bread is that which hath come down from heaven to give life to the world* In the *manna* there was nothing of this sort; and, therefore, the *manna* was not *the heavenly bread*.” But, at the same time, he confirms what he formerly said, namely, that he is sent by the Father, in order that he may feed men in a manner far more

143 “Et ce en la prenant avec les qualitez qu’ils luy attribuoient, et selon leur sens.”

excellent than Moses. True, the *manna* came down *from* the visible *heaven*, that is, from the clouds; but not from the eternal kingdom of God, from which life flows to us. And the Jews, whom Christ addresses, looked no higher than that the bellies of their fathers were well stuffed and fattened in the wilderness.

What he formerly called *the bread of heaven*, he now calls *the bread of God*; not that the bread which supports us in the present life comes from any other than God, but because that alone can be reckoned *the bread of God*<sup>144</sup> which quickens souls to a blessed immortality. This passage teaches that the whole world is dead to God, except so far as Christ quickens it, because life will be found nowhere else than in him.

*Which hath come down from heaven.* In the *coming down from heaven* two things are worthy of observation; first, that we have a Divine life in Christ, because he has come from God to be the Author of life to us; secondly, that the heavenly life is near us,

so that we do not need to fly above the clouds or to cross the sea,

(Deuteronomy 30:12, 13; Romans 10:6-8;)

for the reason why Christ *descended* to us was, that no man could ascend above.

### John 6:34-40

34. They said therefore to him, Lord, give us always this bread. 35. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me shall never thirst. 36. But I have told you that you have also seen me and do not believe. 37. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will not cast out; 38. For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39. And this is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. 40. And this is the will of him who sent me, that whosoever seeth the Son, and believeth in him, shall have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

34. *Give us always this bread.* There is no doubt that they speak ironically, to accuse Christ of vain boasting, when he said that he was able to give *the bread of life*. Thus wretched men, while they reject the promises of God, are not satisfied with this evil alone, but put Christ in their room, as if he were chargeable with their unbelief.

35. *I am the bread of life.* First, he shows that *the bread*, which they asked in mockery, is before their eyes; and, next, he reproves them. He begins with doctrine, to make it more evident that they were guilty of ingratitude. There are two parts of the doctrine; for he shows whence we ought to seek *life*, and how we may enjoy it. We know what gave occasion to Christ to use those metaphors; it was because *manna* and daily food had been mentioned. But still this figure is better adapted to teach ignorant persons than a simple style. When we eat *bread* for the nourishment of the body, we see more clearly not only our own weakness, but also the power of divine grace, than if, without, *bread*, God were to impart a secret power to nourish the body itself. Thus, the analogy which is traced between the body and the soul, enables us to perceive more clearly the grace of Christ. For when we learn that Christ *is the bread* by which our souls must be fed, this penetrates more deeply into our hearts than if Christ simply said that *he is our life*.

It ought to be observed, however, that the word *bread* does not express the quickening power of Christ so fully as we feel it; for *bread* does not commence *life*, but nourishes and upholds that *life* which we already possess. But, through the kindness of Christ, we not only continue to possess life, but have the beginning of life, and therefore the comparison is partly inappropriate; but there is no inconsistency in this, for Christ adapts his style to the circumstances of the discourse which he formerly delivered. Now the question had been raised, Which of the two was more eminent in feeding men, Moses or Christ himself? This is also the reason why he calls it *bread* only, for it was only the *manna* that they objected to him, and, therefore, he reckoned it enough to contrast with it a different kind of *bread*. The simple

doctrine is, "Our souls do not *live* by an intrinsic power, so to speak, that is, by a power which they have naturally in themselves,<sup>145</sup> but borrow *life* from Christ."

*He who cometh to me.* He now defines the way of taking this food; it is when we receive Christ by faith. For it is of no avail to unbelievers that Christ is *the bread of life*, because they remain always empty; but then does Christ become our *bread*, when we come to him as hungry persons, that he may fill us. *To come to Christ* and *to believe* mean, in this passage, the same thing; but the former word is intended to express the effect of faith, namely, that it is in consequence of being driven by the feeling of our hunger that we fly to Christ to seek life.

Those who infer from this passage that *to eat* Christ is *faith*, and nothing else, reason inconclusively. I readily acknowledge that there is no other way in which we *eat* Christ than by *believing*; but the *eating* is the effect and fruit of faith rather than faith itself. For *faith* does not look at Christ only as at a distance, but embraces him, that he may become ours and may dwell in us. It causes us to be incorporated with him, to have life in common with him, and, in short, *to become one with him*, (John 17:21.) It is therefore true that by faith alone we eat Christ, provided we also understand in what manner faith unites us to him.

*Shall never thirst.* This appears to be added without any good reason; for the office of *bread* is not to quench *thirst*, but to allay hunger. Christ therefore attributes to *bread* more than its nature allows. I have already said, that he employs the word *bread* alone because it was required by the comparison between the *manna* and the heavenly power of Christ, by which our souls are sustained in life. At the same time, by the word *bread*, he means in general all that nourishes us, and that according to the ordinary custom of his nation. For the Hebrews, by the figure of speech called synecdoche, use the word *bread* for *dinner* or *supper*; and when we ask from God *our daily bread*, (Matthew 6:11,) we include drink and all the other parts of life. The meaning therefore is, "Whoever shall betake himself to Christ, to have life from him, will want nothing, but will have in abundance all that contributes to sustain life."

**36.** *But I have told you.* He now reproves them for wickedly rejecting the gift of God, which is offered to them. Now, that man is chargeable with wicked contempt of God, who rejects what he knows that God has given him. If Christ had not made known his power, and plainly showed that he came from God, the plea of ignorance might have alleviated their guilt; but when they reject the doctrine of him whom they formerly acknowledged to be the Lord's Messiah, it is extreme baseness. It is no doubt true, that men never resist God purposely, so as to reflect that they have to do with God; and to this applies the saying of Paul,

They would never have crucified the Lord of glory, if they had known him

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145 "Qu'elles ayent en elles naturellement."

(1 Corinthians 2:8.)

But unbelievers, because they willingly shut their eyes against the light are justly said to see that which immediately vanishes from their sight, because Satan darkens their understandings. This, at least, is beyond all controversy, that when he said that they *saw*, we must not understand him to mean his bodily appearance, but rather that he describes their voluntary blindness, because they might have known what he was, if their malice had not prevented them.

37. *All that the Father giveth me.* That their unbelief may not detract anything from his doctrine, he says, that the cause of so great obstinacy is, that they are reprobate, and do not belong to the flock of God. His intention, therefore, in distinguishing here between the elect and the reprobate is, that the authority of his doctrine may remain unimpaired, though there are many who do not believe it. For, on the one hand, ungodly men calumniate and utterly despise the word of God, because they are not moved by reverence for it; and, on the other hand, many weak and ignorant persons entertain doubts whether that which is rejected by a great part of the world be actually the word of God. Christ meets this offense, when he affirms, that all those who do not believe are not his own, and that we need not wonder if such persons have no relish for the word of God, but that it is embraced by all the children of God. In the first place, he says, that *all whom the Father giveth him come to him*; by which words he means, that faith is not a thing which depends on the will of men, so that this man and that man indiscriminately and at random believe, but that God elects those whom he hands over, as it were, to his Son; for when he says, that *whatever is given cometh*, we infer from it, that all do not come. Again, we infer, that God works in his elect by such an efficacy of the Holy Spirit, that not one of them falls away; for the word *give* has the same meaning as if Christ had said, "Those whom the Father hath chosen he regenerates, and gives to me, that they may obey the Gospel."

*And him that cometh to me I will not cast out.* This is added for the consolation of the godly, that they may be fully persuaded that they have free access to Christ by faith, and that, as soon as they have placed themselves under his protection and safeguard, they will be graciously received by him. Hence it follows, that the doctrine of the Gospel will be salutary to all believers, because no man becomes a disciple of Christ who does not, on the other hand, feel and experience him to be a good and faithful teacher.

38. *For I came down from heaven.* This is a confirmation of the preceding statement, that we do not seek Christ in vain. For faith is a work of God, by which he shows that we are his people, and appoints his Son to be the protector of our salvation. Now the Son has no other design than to fulfill the commands of his Father. Consequently, he will never reject those whom his Father hath sent. Hence, finally, it follows, that faith will never be useless. As to the distinction which Christ makes between his own will and the will of the Father, in this respect, he accommodates himself to his hearers, because, as the mind of man is

prone to distrust, we are wont to contrive some diversity which produces hesitation. To cut off every pretense for those wicked imaginations, Christ declares, that he has been manifested to the world, in order that he may actually ratify what the Father hath decreed concerning our salvation.

**39.** *And this is the will of the Father.* He now testifies, that this is the design of the Father, that believers may find salvation secured in Christ; from which again it follows, that all who do not profit by the doctrine of the Gospel are reprobate. Wherefore, if we see that it turns to the ruin of many, we have no reason to despond, because those men willingly draw down the evil on themselves. Let us rest satisfied with this, that the Gospel will always have power to gather the elect to salvation.

*That I should lose none of it.* That is, “That I should not suffer it to be taken from me or perish;” by which he means, that he is not the guardian of our salvation for a single day, or for a few days, but that he will take care of it to the end, so that he will conduct us, as it were, from the commencement to the termination of our course; and therefore he mentions the last resurrection. This promise is highly necessary for us, who miserably groan under so great weakness of the flesh, of which every one of us is sufficiently aware; and at every moment, indeed, the salvation of the whole world might be ruined, were it not that believers, supported by the hand of Christ, advance boldly to the day of resurrection. Let this, therefore, be fixed in our minds, that Christ has stretched out his hand to us, that he may not desert us in the midst of the course, but that, relying on his goodness, we may boldly raise our eyes to the last day.

There is also another reason why he mentions the resurrection. It is because, so long as *our life is hidden*, ([Colossians 3:3](#)), we are like dead men. For in what respect do believers differ from wicked men, but that, overwhelmed with afflictions, and *like sheep destined for the slaughter*, ([Romans 8:36](#)), they have always one foot in the grave, and, indeed, are not far from being continually swallowed up by death? Thus there remains no other support of our faith and patience but this, that we keep out of view the condition of the present life, and apply our minds and our senses to the last day, and pass through the obstructions of the world, until the fruit of our faith at length appear.

**40.** *And this is the will of him who sent me.* He had said that the Father had committed to him the protection of our salvation; and now he likewise describes the manner in which it is accomplished. The way to obtain salvation, therefore, is to obey the Gospel of Christ. This point he had, indeed, glanced at a little before but now he expresses more fully what he had spoken somewhat obscurely. And if it is the will of God that those whom he has elected shall be saved, and if in this manner he ratifies and executes his eternal decree, whoever he be that is not satisfied with Christ, but indulges in curious inquiries about eternal predestination, such a person, as far as lies in his power, desires to be saved contrary

to the purpose of God. The election of God is in itself hidden and secret; the Lord manifests it *by calling*, that is, when he bestows on us this blessing *of calling us* <sup>146</sup>

They are madmen, therefore, who seek their own salvation or that of others in the whirlpool of predestination, not keeping the way of salvation which is exhibited to them. Nay more, by this foolish speculation, they endeavor to overturn the force and effect of predestination; for if God has elected us to this end, that we may believe, take away faith, and election will be imperfect. But we have no right to break through the order and succession of the beginning and the end, since God, by his purpose, hath decreed and determined *that* it shall proceed unbroken. <sup>147</sup> Besides, as the election of God, by an indissoluble bond, draws his calling along with it, so when God has effectually called us to faith in Christ, let this have as much weight with us as if he had engraven his seal to ratify his decree concerning our salvation. For the testimony of the Holy Spirit is nothing else than the sealing of our adoption, ([Romans 8:15](#).) To every man, therefore, his faith is a sufficient attestation of the eternal predestination of God, so that it would be a shocking sacrilege <sup>148</sup> to carry the inquiry farther; for that man offers an aggravated insult to the Holy Spirit, who refuses to assent to his simple testimony.

*Whosoever seeth the Son, and believeth in him.* He uses the words, *see and believe*, in contrast with what he had formerly said; for he had reproached the Jews with *not believing, even though they saw*, (verse 36.) But now, speaking of the sons of God, with the feeling which they have of the power of God in Christ, he joins the obedience of faith. Moreover, these words show that faith proceeds from the knowledge of Christ; not that it desires anything beyond the simple word of God, but because, if we trust in Christ, we must perceive what he is, and what he brings to us.

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146 “C’est a dire, quand il nous fait ce bien de nous appeler.”

147 “Or ne nous est-il permis de rompre l’ordre et la suite du commencement avec la fin, puis que Dieu par son conseil l’a ainsi ordonne et voulu que cela allast d’un fil.”

148 “Un sacrilege horrible.”

### John 6:41-45

41. The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said, I am the bread which have come down from heaven. 42. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How therefore doth he say, I have come down from heaven? 43. Jesus therefore answered, and said to them, Murmur not among yourselves. 44. No man can come to me, unless the Father, who hath sent me, draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45. It is written in the Prophets, And they shall be all taught by God; whosoever therefore hath heard my Father, and hath learned,<sup>149</sup> cometh to me.

41. *The Jews therefore murmured concerning him.* The Evangelist explains the cause of the murmuring to have been, that the Jews were offended at the mean condition of Christ's human nature,<sup>150</sup> and did not perceive in him any thing Divine or heavenly. Yet he shows that they had a twofold obstruction. One they had framed for themselves out of a false opinion, when they said, *Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?* Another arose from a wicked sentiment, that they did not think that Christ was the Son of God, because he came down to men clothed with our flesh.<sup>151</sup> But we are guilty of excessive malignity, if we despise the Lord of glory because on our account

he emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant,

(Philippians 2:7;)

for this was rather an illustrious proof of his boundless love towards us, and of his wonderful grace. Besides, the Divine majesty of Christ was not so concealed under the mean and contemptible appearance of the flesh, as not to give out the rays of his brightness in a variety of ways; but those gross and stupid men wanted eyes to see his conspicuous glory.

We, too, sin daily in both of these ways. First, it is a great hinderance to us, that it is only with carnal eyes that we behold Christ; and this is the reason why we perceive in him nothing magnificent, for by our sinful views we pervert all that belongs to him and to his doctrine, so unskilful are we to profit by them, or to view them in the proper light.<sup>152</sup> Secondly, not satisfied with this, we adopt many false imaginations, which produce a contempt of the Gospel. Nay, there are even many who frame for themselves monsters, that they may make them a pretense for hating the Gospel. In this manner the world deliberately drives away the grace of God. Now the Evangelist expressly names the Jews, in order to inform

149 "Quiconque donc a ouy mon Pere, et a appris."

150 "De la petitesse de Christ, et de sa humaine condition;" — "at the meanness of Christ, and of his human condition."

151 "Prenant nostre chair."

152 "Tant nous sommes mal adroits a faire nostre profit des choses, et les prendre de la sorte qu'il faut."



us that the *murmuring* proceeded from those who gloried in the title of faith and of the Church, that we may all learn to receive Christ with reverence, when he *comes down to us*, and that, in proportion as he comes nearer to us, we may more cheerfully approach to him, that he may raise us to his heavenly glory.

43. *Murmur not among yourselves.* He throws back on them the blame of the *murmuring*, as if he had said, “My doctrine contains no ground of offense, but because you are reprobate, it irritates your envenomed breasts, and the reason why you do not relish it is, that you have a vitiated taste.”

44. *No man can come to me, unless the Father, who hath sent me, draw him.* He does not merely accuse them of wickedness, but likewise reminds them, that it is a peculiar gift of God to embrace the doctrine which is exhibited by him; which he does, that their unbelief may not disturb weak minds. For many are so foolish that, in the things of God, they depend on the opinions of men; in consequence of which, they entertain suspicions about the Gospel, as soon as they see that it is not received by the world. Unbelievers, on the other hand, flattering themselves in their obstinacy, have the hardihood to condemn the Gospel because it does not please them. On the contrary, therefore, Christ declares that the doctrine of the Gospel, though it is preached to all without exception, cannot be embraced by all, but that a new understanding and a new perception are requisite; and, therefore, that faith does not depend on the will of men, but that it is God who gives it.

*Unless the Father draw him.* To *come to Christ* being here used metaphorically for *believing*, the Evangelist, in order to carry out the metaphor in the apposite clause, says that those persons are *drawn* whose understandings God enlightens, and whose hearts he bends and forms to the obedience of Christ. The statement amounts to this, that we ought not to wonder if many refuse to embrace the Gospel; because no man will ever of himself be able to come to Christ, but God must first approach him by his Spirit; and hence it follows that all are not *drawn*, but that God bestows this grace on those whom he has elected. True, indeed, as to the kind of *drawing*, it is not violent, so as to compel men by external force; but still it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, which makes men willing who formerly were unwilling and reluctant. It is a false and profane assertion, therefore, that none are *drawn* but those who are willing to be *drawn*,<sup>153</sup> as if man made himself obedient to God by his own efforts; for the willingness with which men follow God is what they already have from himself, who has formed their hearts to obey him.

45. *It is written in the Prophets.* Christ confirms by the testimony of Isaiah what he said, that *no man can come to him, unless he be drawn by the Father* He uses the word *prophets* in the plural number, because all their prophecies had been collected into one volume, so that all *the prophets* might justly be accounted one book. The passage which is here quoted

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153 “Que nuls ne sont tirez sinon ceux qui le veulent estre.”

is to be found in [Isaiah 54:13](#), where, speaking of the restoration of the Church, he promises to her, *sons taught by the instruction of God*. Hence it may easily be inferred, that the Church cannot be restored in any other way than by God undertaking the office of a Teacher, and bringing believers to himself. The way of teaching, of which the prophet speaks, does not consist merely in the external voice, but likewise in the secret operation of the Holy Spirit. In short, this *teaching* of God is the inward illumination of the heart.

*And they shall be all taught by God.* As to the word *all*, it must be limited to the elect, who alone are the true children of the Church. Now it is not difficult to see in what manner Christ applies this prediction to the present subject. Isaiah shows that then only is the Church truly edified, when she has *her children taught by God*. Christ, therefore, justly concludes that men have not eyes to behold the light of life, until God has opened them. But at the same time, he fastens on the general phrase, *all*; because he argues from it, that *all* who are *taught by God* are effectually drawn, so as to come; and to this relates what he immediately adds,

*Whosoever therefore hath heard my Father.* The amount of what is said is, that all who do not believe are reprobate and doomed to destruction; because all *the sons* of the Church and heirs of life are made by God to be his obedient disciples. Hence it follows, that there is not one of all the elect of God who shall not be a partaker of faith in Christ.<sup>154</sup> Again, as Christ formerly affirmed that men are not fitted for believing, until they have been *drawn*, so he now declares that the grace of Christ, by which they are *drawn*, is efficacious, so that they necessarily believe.

These two clauses utterly overturn the whole power of free will, of which the Papists dream. For if it be only when the Father has *drawn* us that we begin to *come to Christ*, there is not in us any commencement of faith, or any preparation for it. On the other hand, if all come *whom the Father hath taught*, He gives to them not only the choice of believing, but faith itself. When, therefore, we willingly yield to the guidance of the Spirit, this is a part, and, as it were, a sealing of grace; because God would not *draw* us, if He were only to stretch out his hand, and leave our will in a state of suspense. But in strict propriety of language He is said to draw us, when He extends the power of his Spirit to the full effect of faith. They are said to *hear* God, who willingly assent to God speaking to them within, because the Holy Spirit reigns in their hearts.

*Cometh to me.* He shows the inseparable connection that exists between him and the Father. For the meaning is, that it is impossible that any who are God's disciples shall not obey Christ, and that they who reject Christ refuse to be *taught by God*; because the only wisdom that all the elect learn in the school of God is, to come to Christ; for the Father, who sent him, cannot deny himself.

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154 "Qu'il n'y en a pas un de tous les eleus de Dieu qui ne viene a estre participant de la foy."

### John 6:46-51

**46.** Not that any man hath seen the Father, but he who is from God; he hath seen the Father. **47.** Verily, verily, I say to you, He who believeth in me hath eternal life. **48.** I am the bread of life. **49.** Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead. **50.** This is the bread which hath come down from heaven, that any man may eat of it, and not die. **51.** I am the living bread which hath come down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread which I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.

**46.** *Not that any man hath seen the Father.* As he has hitherto magnified the grace of his Father, so now he earnestly directs believers to himself alone. For both must be joined together; that no knowledge of Christ can be obtained, until the Father enlighten by his Spirit those who are by nature blind; and yet that it is in vain to seek God, unless Christ go before; for the majesty of God is so lofty, that the senses of men cannot reach him. Nay, more, all that knowledge of God which men may think that they have attained out of Christ will be a deadly abyss. When he says that he alone hath known the Father, he means that it is an office which belongs peculiarly to himself, to manifest God to men, who would otherwise have been concealed.

**47.** *He who believeth in me.* This is an explanation of the former statement. For we are taught by these words that it is when we believe in Christ that God is made known to us; for then do we begin to see, as in a mirror, or as in a bright and lively image, God who was formerly invisible. Accursed then be every thing that is declared to us concerning God, if it do not lead us to Christ. What it is to believe in Christ I have already explained; for we must not imagine a confused and empty faith, which deprives Christ of his power, as the Papists do, who believe in Christ just as far as they think fit. For the reason why we obtain life by faith is, that we know that all the parts of our life are contained in Christ.

The inference which some draw from this passage — that *to believe in Christ* is the same thing as *to eat Christ*, or *his flesh* — is not well founded. For these two things differ from each other as former and latter; and in like manner, to *come to Christ* and to *drink* him, for *coming to him* is first in order. I acknowledge that Christ is not eaten but by faith; but the reason is, because we receive him by faith, that he may dwell in us, and that we may be made partakers of him, and thus may be one with him. To *eat* him, therefore, is an effect or work of faith.

**48.** *I am the bread of life* Besides what he formerly said, that he is the life-giving *bread*, by which our souls are nourished, in order to explain it more fully, he likewise repeats the contrast between this *bread* and the ancient manna, together with a comparison of the men.

49. *Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead.* He says that the *manna* was a perishing food to *their fathers*, for it did not free them from death. It follows, therefore, that souls do not find anywhere else than in him that food by which they are fed to spiritual life. Besides, we must keep in remembrance what I formerly stated, that what is here said does not relate to the *manna*, so far as it was a secret figure of Christ; for in that respect Paul calls it *spiritual food*, (1 Corinthians 10:3.) But we have said that Christ here accommodates his discourse to the hearers, who, caring only about feeding the belly, looked for nothing higher in the *manna*. Justly, therefore does he declare that *their fathers are dead*, that is, those who in the same manner, were devoted to the belly, or, in other words, who thought of nothing higher than this world.<sup>155</sup> And yet he invites them to *eat*, when he says that he has come, *that any man may eat*; for this mode of expression has the same meaning as if he said, that he is ready to give himself to all, provided that they are only willing to believe. That not one of those who have once eaten Christ *shall die* — must be understood to mean, that the life which he bestows on us is never extinguished, as we stated under the Fifth Chapter.

51. *I am the living bread.* He often repeats the same thing, because nothing is more necessary to be known; and every one feels in himself with what difficulty we are brought to believe it, and how easily and quickly it passes away and is forgotten.<sup>156</sup> We all desire life, but in seeking it, we foolishly and improperly wander about in circuitous roads; and when it is offered, the greater part disdainfully reject it. For who is there that does not contrive for himself life out of Christ? And how few are there who are satisfied with Christ alone! It is not a superfluous repetition, therefore, when Christ asserts so frequently that he alone is sufficient to give life. For he claims for himself the designation of *bread*, in order to tear from our hearts all fallacious hopes of living. Having formerly called himself *the bread of life*, he now calls himself *the living bread*, but in the same sense, namely, *life-giving bread*. — *Which have come down from heaven* He frequently mentions his *coming down from heaven*, because spiritual and incorruptible life will not be found in this world, the fashion of which passes away and vanishes, but only in the heavenly kingdom of God.

*If any man eat of this bread.* Whenever he uses the word *eat*, he exhorts us to faith, which alone enables us to enjoy this bread, so as to derive life from it.<sup>157</sup> Nor is it without good reason that he does so, for there are few who deign to stretch out their hand to put this bread to their mouth; and even when the Lord puts it into their mouth, there are few who relish it, but some are filled with wind, and others — like Tantalus — are dying of hunger through their own folly, while the food is close beside them.

155 “C’est a dire, ne pensoient plus haut que ce monde.”

156 “Il nous escoule et vient a estre mis en oubli.”

157 “Laquelle seule fait que nous tirons vie de ce pain.”

*The bread which I shall give is my flesh.* As this secret power to bestow life, of which he has spoken, might be referred to his Divine essence, he now comes down to the second step, and shows that this *life* is placed *in his flesh*, that it may be drawn out of it. It is, undoubtedly, a wonderful purpose of God that he has exhibited *life* to us in that *flesh*, where formerly there was nothing but the cause of death. And thus he provides for our weakness, when he does not call us above the clouds to enjoy life, but displays it on earth, in the same manner as if he were exalting us to the secrets of his kingdom. And yet, while he corrects the pride of our mind, he tries the humility and obedience of our faith, when he enjoins those who would seek *life* to place reliance on *his flesh*, which is contemptible in its appearance.

But an objection is brought, that the flesh of Christ cannot give life, because it was liable to death, and because even now it is not immortal in itself; and next, that it does not at all belong to the nature of flesh to quicken souls. I reply, though this power comes from another source than from the flesh, still this is no reason why the designation may not accurately apply to it; for as the eternal Word of God is the fountain of *life*, (John 1:4,) so his flesh, as a channel, conveys to us that *life* which dwells intrinsically, as we say, in his Divinity. And in this sense it is called life-giving, because it conveys to us that life which it borrows for us from another quarter. This will not be difficult to understand, if we consider what is the cause of life, namely, righteousness. And though righteousness flows from God alone, still we shall not attain the full manifestation of it any where else than in the flesh of Christ; for in it was accomplished the redemption of man, in it a sacrifice was offered to atone for sins, and an obedience yielded to God, to reconcile him to us; it was also filled with the sanctification of the Spirit, and at length, having vanquished death, it was received into the heavenly glory. It follows, therefore that all the parts of life have been placed in it, that no man may have reason to complain that he is deprived of life, as if it were placed in concealment, or at a distance.

*Which I shall give for the life of the world.* The word *give* is used in various senses. The first *giving*, of which he has formerly spoken, is made daily, whenever Christ offers himself to us. Secondly, it denotes that singular *giving* which was done on the cross, when he offered himself as a sacrifice to his Father; for then he delivered himself up to death for the life of men, and now he invites us to enjoy the fruit of his death. For it would be of no avail to us that that sacrifice was once offered, if we did not now feast on that sacred banquet. It ought also to be observed, that Christ claims for himself the office of sacrificing his flesh. Hence it appears with what wicked sacrilege the Papists pollute themselves, when they take upon themselves, in the mass, what belonged exclusively to that one High Priest.

### John 6:52-58

52. The Jews therefore debated among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? 53. Jesus therefore said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have not life in you. 54. He who eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55. For my flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink. 56. He who eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live on account of my Father; and he who eateth me, even he shall live for my sake. 58. This is the bread which hath come down from heaven; not as your fathers ate manna, and are dead; he who eateth this bread shall live for ever.

52. *The Jews therefore debated among themselves.* He again mentions the Jews, not by way of honor, but to reproach them with their unbelief, because they do not receive the well known doctrine concerning eternal life, or, at least, do not inquire modestly into the subject, if it be still obscure and doubtful. For when he says that they *debated*, it is a sign of obstinacy and contempt; and those who dispute so keenly do, indeed, block up against themselves the road to the knowledge of the truth. And yet the blame imputed to them is not simply that they inquired into the manner; for the same blame would fall on Abraham and the blessed Virgin, ([Genesis 15:2](#); [Luke 1:34](#).) Those persons, therefore, are either led astray through ignorance, or are deficient in candour, who, without taking into account the hardihood and eagerness to quarrel, which alone the Evangelist condemns, direct all their outcry against the word *how*; as if it had not been lawful for the Jews to inquire about the manner of *eating the flesh of Christ*<sup>158</sup> But it ought rather to be imputed to sloth than ascribed to the obedience of faith, if we knowingly and willingly leave unsolved those doubts and difficulties which are removed for us by the word of the Lord. Not only is it lawful, therefore, to inquire as to the manner of *eating the flesh of Christ*, but it is of great importance for us to understand it, so far as it is made known by the Scriptures. Away, then, with that fierce and obstinate pretense of humility, “For my part, I am satisfied with that single word of Christ, when he declares that his *flesh is truly food*: to all the rest I willingly shut my eyes.” As if heretics would not have equal plausibility on their side, if they willingly were ignorant that Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, because, believing that he is the seed of Abraham, they make no farther inquiry. Only we ought to preserve such moderation about the secret works of God, as not to desire to know anything more than what he determines by his word.

53. *Verily, verily, I say to you.* The just resentment which Christ felt,<sup>159</sup> when he saw his grace rejected with such haughty disdain, constrained him to employ this oath. For he

158 “De manger la chair de Christ.”

159 “Un juste despit que Christ a conceu.”

does not now make use of simple doctrine, but likewise mingles threatenings for the purpose of striking terror. He denounces eternal perdition against all who refuse to seek life from his flesh; as if he had said, "If you hold my flesh in contempt, rest assured that there remains for you no other hope of life." The vengeance that awaits all despisers of the grace of Christ is, that with their pride they miserably perish; and the reason why they must be urged with plainness and severity is, that they may not continue to flatter themselves. For if we threaten with death those diseased persons who refuse to take medicines, what must we do with wicked men, when they strive, as far as lies in their power, to destroy *life* itself?

*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man.* When he says, *the flesh of the Son of man*, the expression is emphatic; for he reproves them for their contempt, which arose from perceiving that he resembled other men. The meaning therefore is: "Despise me as much as you please, on account of the mean and despicable appearance of *my flesh*, still that despicable *flesh* contains *life*; and if you are destitute of it, you will nowhere else find any thing else to quicken you."

The ancients fell into a gross error by supposing that little children were deprived of eternal *life*, if they did not dispense to them the eucharist, that is, the Lord's Supper;<sup>160</sup> for this discourse does not relate to the Lord's Supper, but to the uninterrupted communication of *the flesh of Christ*,<sup>161</sup> which we obtain apart from the use of the Lord's Supper. Nor were the Bohemians in the right, when they adduced this passage to prove that all without exception ought to be admitted to the use of the cup. With respect to young children, the ordinance of Christ forbids them to partake of the Lord's Supper; because they are not yet able to know or to celebrate the remembrance of the death of Christ. The same ordinance makes *the cup* common to all, for it commands us *all to drink of it*, ([Matthew 26:27](#).)

54. *He who eateth my flesh.* This is a repetition, but is not superfluous; for it confirms what was difficult to be believed, That souls feed on *his flesh and blood*, in precisely the same manner that the body is sustained by *eating and drinking* Accordingly, as he lately testified that nothing but death remains for all who seek life anywhere else than in *his flesh*, so now he excites all believers<sup>162</sup> to cherish good hope, while he promises to them *life* in the same *flesh*.

*And I will raise him up at the last day.* It ought to be observed, that Christ so frequently connects *the resurrection* with eternal life, because our salvation will be hidden till that day. No man, therefore, can perceive what Christ bestows on us, unless, rising above the world, he places before his eyes the last *resurrection* From these words, it plainly appears that the whole of this passage is improperly explained, as applied to the Lord's Supper. For if it were

160 "C'est a dire, la Cene."

161 "De la chair de Christ."

162 "Tous les fideles."

true that all who present themselves at the holy table of the Lord are made partakers of his flesh and blood, all will, in like manner, obtain *life*; but we know that there are many who partake of it to their condemnation. And indeed it would have been foolish and unreasonable to discourse about the Lord's Supper, before he had instituted it. It is certain, then, that he now speaks of the perpetual and ordinary manner of eating the flesh of Christ, which is done by faith only.<sup>163</sup> And yet, at the same time, I acknowledge that there is nothing said here that is not figuratively represented, and actually bestowed on believers, in the Lord's Supper; and Christ even intended that the holy Supper should be, as it were, a seal and confirmation<sup>164</sup> of this sermon. This is also the reason why the Evangelist John makes no mention of the Lord's Supper; and therefore Augustine follows the natural order, when, in explaining this chapter, he does not touch on the Lord's Supper till he comes to the conclusion; and then he shows that this mystery is symbolically represented, whenever the Churches celebrate the Lord's Supper, in some places daily, and in other places only on the Lord's day.

55. *For my flesh is truly food.* He confirms the same statement by other words, "As the body is weakened and consumed by the want of food, so the soul, if it be not fed with heavenly bread, will soon perish with hunger." For when he declares that *his flesh is truly food*, he means that souls are famished, if they want that food. Then only wilt thou find life in Christ, when thou shalt seek the nourishment of life in his flesh. Thus we ought to boast, with Paul, that we reckon nothing to be excellent but Christ crucified; because, as soon as we have departed from the sacrifice of his death, we meet with nothing but death; nor is there any other road that conducts us to a perception of his Divine power than through his death and resurrection. Embrace Christ, therefore, as *the Servant of the Father*, ([Isaiah 42:1](#).) that he may show himself to thee to be *the Prince of life*, ([Acts 3:15](#).) For when *he emptied himself*, ([Philippians 2:7](#).) in this manner we were enriched with abundance of all blessings; his humiliation and descent into hell raised us to heaven; and, by enduring the curse of his cross, he erected the banner of our righteousness as a splendid memorial of his victory.<sup>165</sup> Consequently, they are false expounders of the mystery of the Lord's Supper,<sup>166</sup> who draw away souls from the flesh of Christ.

*And my blood is truly drink.* But why does Christ mention *his blood* separately, when it is included in the word *flesh*? I reply, he did so in condescension to our weakness. For when he expressly mentions *food and drink*, he declares that the life which he bestows is complete in every respect, that we may not imagine to ourselves a life which is only half or imperfect; as if he had said, that we shall want nothing that belongs to life, provided that we *eat his*

163 "De la maniere perpetuelle et ordinaire de manger la chair de Christ, qui se fait par la foy seulement."

164 "Comme un sceau et confirmation."

165 "Il a dressé l'enseigne de nostre justice comme un memorial magnifique de sa victoire."

166 "Ceux-la donc ne sont pas bons et droicts exposeurs du mystere de la Cene."



*flesh and drink his blood.* Thus also in the Lord's Supper, which corresponds to this doctrine, not satisfied with the symbol of *the bread*, he adds also *the cup*, that, having in him a twofold pledge, we may learn to be satisfied with him alone; for never will a man find a part of life in Christ, until he has entire and complete life in him.

**56. *He who eateth my flesh.*** This is another confirmation; for while he alone has life in himself, he shows how we may enjoy it, that is, by *eating his flesh*; as if he had affirmed that there is no other way in which he can become ours, than by our faith being directed to his flesh. For no one will ever come to Christ as God, who despises him as man; and, therefore, if you wish to have any interest in Christ, you must take care, above all things, that you do not disdain his flesh.

*Dwelleth in me, and I in him.* When he says that he *dwelleth in us*, the meaning is the same as if he had said, that the only bond of union, and the way by which he becomes one with us, is, when our faith relies on his death. We may likewise infer from it, that he is not now speaking of the outward symbol, which many unbelievers receive equally with believers, and yet continue separated from Christ. It enables us also to refute the dream of those who say, that Judas received the body of Christ as well as the other apostles, when Christ gave the bread to all; for as it is a display of ignorance to limit this doctrine to the outward sign, so we ought to remember what I have formerly said, that the doctrine which is here taught is sealed in the Lord's Supper. Now, it is certain, in the first place, that Judas never was a member of Christ; secondly, it is highly unreasonable to imagine *the flesh of Christ* to be dead and destitute of the Holy Spirit; and, lastly, it is a mockery to dream of any way of *eating the flesh of Christ* without faith, since faith alone is the mouth — so to speak — and the stomach of the soul.

**57. *As the living Father hath sent me.*** Hitherto Christ has explained the manner in which we must become partakers of life. He now comes to speak of the principal cause, for the first source of life is in the Father. But he meets an objection, for it might be thought that he took away from God what belonged to him, when he made himself the cause of life. He makes himself, therefore, to be the Author of life, in such a manner, as to acknowledge that there was another who gave him what he administers to others.

Let us observe, that this discourse also is accommodated to the capacity of those to whom Christ was speaking; for it is only with respect to his flesh that he compares himself to the Father. For though the Father is the beginning of *life*, yet the eternal Word himself is strictly *life*. But the eternal Divinity of Christ is not the present subject; for he exhibits himself such as he was manifested to the world, clothed with our flesh.

*I also live on account of the Father.* This does not apply to his Divinity simply, nor does it apply to his human nature simply and by itself, but it is a description of the Son of God manifested in the flesh. Besides, we know that it is not unusual with Christ to ascribe to the Father every thing Divine which he had in himself. It must be observed, however, that he

points out here three degrees of life. In the first rank is the living Father, who is the source, but remote and hidden. Next follows the Son, who is exhibited to us as an open fountain, and by whom life flows to us. The third is, the life which we draw from him. We now perceive what is stated to amount to this, that God the Father, in whom life dwells, is at a great distance from us, and that Christ, placed between us, is the second cause of life, in order that what would otherwise be concealed in God may proceed from him to us.

58. *This is the bread which came down from heaven.* He returns to the comparison between *the manna* and *his flesh*, with which he had begun; for it was necessary that he should close the sermon in this manner: “There is no reason why you should prefer Moses to me, because he fed your fathers in the wilderness; since I supply you with far more excellent food, for I bring heavenly life with me.” For — as was formerly said — the bread is said to have come down from heaven, because it has nothing earthly or corruptible in its nature, but breathes the immortality of the kingdom of God. They who were only bent on feeding the belly, did not find such virtue in the *manna*; for while the *manna* had a twofold use, the Jews, with whom Christ is now disputing, beheld in it nothing else than bodily food. But the life of the soul is not fading, but makes continual progress until the whole man is renewed.

### John 6:59-64

**59** He spoke these things in the synagogue, while he was teaching in Capernaum. **60.** Many of his disciples, therefore, having heard it, said, This is a harsh saying;<sup>167</sup> who can hear it? **61.** But Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, Doth this offend you? **62.** What if you shall see the Son of man ascend to where he was before? **63.** It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words which I speak to you are spirit and life. **64.** But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that did not believe, and who he was that would betray him.

**59.** *He spoke these things in the synagogue.* John points out the place, that we may know that there were many present, and likewise, that a sermon was delivered as on a weighty and important subject. But it immediately follows that out of so great a multitude there were scarcely to be found a very few who profited by it; and — what is worse — it proved to be the occasion of desertion to many who professed to be disciples of Christ. If the Evangelist had said that only some of them were offended, that ought to have been accounted monstrous; but when they rise up in crowds and conspire together against him, what name shall we give to such an action? Let this narrative then be deeply impressed on our minds, that we may never murmur against Christ when he speaks; and if in the present day we perceive any thing of this kind in others, let not their pride disturb our faith.

**60.** *This is a harsh saying.* On the contrary, it was in their hearts, and not in the *saying*, that the *harshness* lay. But out of the word of God the reprobate are thus accustomed to form stones to dash themselves upon, and when, by their hardened obstinacy, they rush against Christ, they complain that *his saying is harsh*, which ought rather to have softened them. For whoever shall submit with true humility<sup>168</sup> to the doctrine of Christ will find nothing in it *harsh* or disagreeable; but to unbelievers, who oppose themselves with obstinacy, it will be *a hammer which breaketh the rocks in pieces*, as the Prophet calls it, ([Jeremiah 23:29](#).) But since the same hardness is natural to us all, if we judge of the doctrine of Christ according to our feelings, his words will be just so many strange and incredible<sup>169</sup> statements. All that remains for us, therefore, is, that every one commit himself to the guidance of the Spirit, that he may inscribe on our hearts what otherwise would never have even entered into our ears.

<sup>167</sup> “Ceste parole est dure, *ou, rude*,” — “this saying hard, *or, harsh*.”

<sup>168</sup> “En vraye humilite.”

<sup>169</sup> “Estranges et incroyables.”

*Who can hear it?* Here we see the awful wickedness of unbelief; for they who impiously and basely reject the doctrine of salvation, not satisfied with excusing themselves, have the hardihood to put the Son of God in their room as if he were guilty, and to declare that he is unworthy of being *heard*. Thus, in the present day, Papists not only reject the Gospel in a daring manner, but likewise break out into horrid blasphemies, that it may not be thought that they have no good reason for opposing God. And, indeed, since they desire darkness, we need not wonder if Satan deceives them by strange monsters, where there is nothing but the open highway.<sup>170</sup> But that which they, through their rage and fury, cannot endure will not only be tolerable to modest and teachable persons, but will support and comfort them. Yet the reprobate, by their obstinate slanders, will do nothing more than bring down on themselves more dreadful condemnation.

**61. *But Jesus knowing.*** Christ knew indeed, that the offense which the reprobate had taken up could not be removed; for, to tell the truth,<sup>171</sup> the doctrine does not so much wound them as it exposes the putrid ulcer which they inwardly nourished in their hearts. But he wished by all methods to try if there were not one of those who were offended that was not yet beyond the reach of cure, and to stop the mouths of the rest. By putting the question, he means that they have no reason to be offended,<sup>172</sup> or, at least, that the ground of offense does not lie in the doctrine itself. Thus we ought to repress the wickedness of those who, urged on by nothing but the rage of mastiff dogs, slander the word of God; and thus too we ought to chastise the folly of those who inconsiderately attack the truth.

*Knowing in himself.* He says that Jesus *knew in himself*, because they had not yet declared openly what gave them uneasiness, but secretly murmured and groaned within themselves, and, therefore, he anticipates their open complaints. If it be objected, that the nature of those complaints was not difficult to understand, because in express terms they rejected the doctrine of Christ, I acknowledge that the words which John has formerly related are plain enough; but still I say that, like persons who are disgusted at any thing, they whispered those words to each other in low murmurs. For if they had spoken to Christ, there would have been better ground of hope, because the way would have been opened up for teaching them; but now, when they indulge in secret murmurings, they shut up against themselves the way to gain instruction. So then, when we do not immediately perceive the Lord's meaning, there is nothing better than to go straight to him, that he may solve all our difficulties.

*Doth this offend you?* Christ appears here to increase the offense instead of removing it; but if any person examine very closely the ground of offense, there was in the following statement what ought to have pacified their minds.

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170 "La ou il n'y a que le beau plein chemin."

171 "Pour dire a la verite."

172 "De se scandalizer."

62. *What if you shall see the Son of man ascend to where he was before?* The mean and despicable condition of Christ which they saw before their eyes, while, clothed with flesh, he was not at all different from other men, prevented them from submitting to his Divine power; but now — by withdrawing, as it were, the veil — he calls them to behold his heavenly glory, as if he had said, “Because I converse among men without honor, I am despised by you, and you recognize in me nothing that is Divine; but ere long God will adorn me with splendid power, and, withdrawing me from the contemptible state of mortal life, will raise me above the heavens.” For, in the resurrection of Christ, so great was the power displayed by the Holy Spirit, that it plainly showed Christ to be the Son of God, as Paul also shows, ([Romans 1:4.](#)) And when it is said,

Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee,  
([Psalm 2:7.](#))

the resurrection is brought forward as a proof from which that glory of Christ ought to be acknowledged, and his *ascension* to heaven was the completion of that glory. When he says that *he was formerly in heaven*, this does not apply strictly to his human nature, and yet he speaks of *the Son of man*; but since the two natures in Christ constitute one person, it is not an unusual way of speaking to transfer to one nature what is peculiar to the other.

63. *It is the Spirit that quickeneth.* By these words Christ shows the reason why the Jews did not profit by his doctrine to be, that, being spiritual and *quickeneth*, it does not find ears well prepared. But as this passage has been variously expounded, it will be of importance first to ascertain the natural meaning of the words; from which it will be easy to perceive Christ’s intention. When he affirms that *the flesh profiteth nothing*, Chrysostom improperly, in my opinion, refers it to the Jews, who were *carnal* I readily acknowledge that in heavenly mysteries the whole power of the human mind is utterly unavailing; but the words of Christ do not bear that meaning, if they be not violently tortured. Equally forced would be that opinion, as applied to the apposite clause; namely, it is the illumination of *the Spirit that quickeneth*. Nor do I approve of the views of those who say, that *the flesh of Christ profiteth*, so far as he was crucified, but that, when it is eaten, it is of no advantage to us; for, on the contrary, we must eat it, that, having been crucified, it may *profit*

Augustine thinks that we ought to supply the word *only*, or *by itself*, as if it had been said, “*The flesh alone, and by itself, profiteth not,*”<sup>173</sup> because it must be accompanied by *the Spirit* This meaning accords well with the scope of the discourse, for Christ refers simply to the manner of eating. He does not, therefore, exclude every kind of usefulness, as if none could be obtained from his *flesh*; but he declares that, if it be separated from *the Spirit*, it will then be useless. For whence has *the flesh* power to *quicken*, but because it is spiritual? Accordingly, whoever confines his whole attention to the earthly nature of *the flesh*, will

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173 “Comme s’il estoit dit, La chair seule et par soy ne profite de rien.”

find in it nothing but what is dead; but they who shall raise their eyes to the power of *the Spirit*, which is diffused over the flesh, will learn from the actual effect and from the experience of faith, that it is not without reason that it is called *quickenings*

We now understand in what manner *the flesh is truly food*, and yet it *profiteth not* It is *food*, because by it life is procured for us, because in it God is reconciled to us, because in it we have all the parts of salvation accomplished. It *profiteth not*, if it be estimated by its origin and nature; for the seed of Abraham, which is in itself subject to death, does not bestow life, but receives from *the Spirit* its power to feed us; and, therefore, on our part also, that we may be truly nourished by it, we must bring the spiritual mouth of faith.

As to the sentence breaking off in so abrupt a manner, it is probable that this was done because Christ saw that it was necessary to act in this manner towards unbelievers. By this clause, therefore, he suddenly closed the sermon, because they did not deserve that he should speak to them any longer. Yet he did not overlook those who are godly and teachable; for they have here, in a few words, what may abundantly satisfy them.

*The words which I speak to you.* This is an allusion to the preceding statement, for he now employs the word *Spirit* in a different sense. But as he had spoken of the secret power of *the Spirit*, he elegantly applies this to his doctrine, because it is spiritual; for the word *Spirit* must be explained to mean *spiritual* Now the word is called *spiritual*, because it calls us upwards to seek Christ in his heavenly glory, through the guidance of the Spirit, by faith, and not by our carnal perception; for we know that of all that was said, nothing can be comprehended but by faith. And it is also worthy of observation, that he connects *life* with *the Spirit* He calls his word *life*, from its effect, as if he had called it quickening; but shows that it will not be *quickenings* to any but those who receive it *spiritually*, for others will rather draw death from it. To the godly, this commendation bestowed on the Gospel is most delightful, because they are certain that it is appointed for their eternal salvation; but at the same time, they are reminded to labor to prove that they are genuine disciples.

**64.** *But there are some of you who do not believe.* He again imputes blame to them, because, being destitute of *the Spirit*, they wickedly corrupt and debase his doctrine, and thus turn it to their ruin. For otherwise they might have objected: "You boast, indeed, that what you speak is quickening, but we experience nothing of that nature." He therefore says, that by themselves it is prevented; for unbelief, as it is always proud, will never understand any thing in the words of Christ which it despises and disdains. Wherefore, if we wish to profit at all under this Teacher, let us bring minds well disposed to listen to him; for if the entrance to his doctrine be not opened up by humility and reverence, our understandings are harder than stones, and will not receive any part of sound doctrine. And therefore, when in the present day we see so few people in the world profiting by the Gospel, we ought to remember that this arises from the depravity of men. For how many will you find who deny themselves, and truly submit to Christ? As to his saying only that there were some *who did not believe*,

though almost all of them were liable to this charge, his reason for doing so appears to have been that, if there were any who were not yet beyond the possibility of cure, they might not cast down their minds in despair.

*For Jesus knew from the beginning.* The Evangelist added this, that none might think that Christ formed an opinion at random about his hearers. Many professed to belong to his flock, but a sudden apostacy exposed their hypocrisy. But the Evangelist says that their treachery, even while it was unknown to others, was well known to Christ. And this is stated, not so much on his account, as that we may learn not to form a judgment except on subjects which we have thoroughly investigated; for as to their being known to Christ from the beginning, this was peculiar to his Divinity. It is otherwise with us; for since we do not know the hearts, we ought to delay forming a judgment, until impiety be manifested by outward signs, and thus *the tree be known by its fruits*, ([Matthew 7:16.](#))

### John 6:65-71

**65.** And he said, Therefore have I told you that no man can come to me, unless it be given to him by my Father. **66.** From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. **67.** Jesus therefore said to the twelve, Do you also wish to go away? **68.** Simon Peter therefore answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. **69.** And we have believed and known that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. **70.** Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? **71.** Now he spoke of Judas Iscariot, son of Simon; for it was he that would betray him, although he was one of the twelve.

**65.** *Therefore have I told you.* He again states that faith is an uncommon and remarkable gift of the Spirit of God, that we may not be astonished that the Gospel is not received in every place and by all. For, being ill qualified to turn to our advantage the course of events, we think more meanly of the Gospel, because the whole world does not assent to it. The thought arises in our mind, How is it possible that the greater part of men shall deliberately reject their salvation? Christ therefore assigns a reason why there are so few believers, namely, because no man, whatever may be his acuteness,<sup>174</sup> can arrive at faith by his own sagacity; for all are blind, until they are illuminated by the Spirit of God, and therefore they only partake of so great a blessing whom the Father deigns to make partakers of it. If this grace were bestowed on all without exception, it would have been unseasonable and inappropriate to have mentioned it in this passage; for we must understand that it was Christ's design to show that not many believe the Gospel, because faith proceeds only from the secret revelation of the Spirit.

*Unless it be given him by my Father.* He now uses the word *give* instead of the word which he formerly used, *draw*; by which he means that there is no other reason why God *draws*, than because out of free grace he loves us; for what we obtain by the gift and grace of God, no man procures for himself by his own industry.

**66.** *From that time many of his disciples went back.* The Evangelist now relates what trouble was the consequence of that sermon. It is a dreadful and monstrous thing, that so kind and gracious an invitation of Christ could have alienated the minds of many, and especially of those who had formerly professed to belong to him, and were even his ordinary *disciples*. But this example is held out to us for a mirror, as it were, in which we may perceive how great is the wickedness and ingratitude of men, who turn a plain road into an occasion of stumbling to them, that they may not come to Christ. Many would say that it would have been better that a sermon of this kind should never have been preached, which occasioned

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174 "Tant aigu soit il."



the apostacy of many. But we ought to entertain a widely different view; for it was then necessary, and now is daily necessary, that what had been foretold concerning Christ should be perceived in his doctrine, namely, that

he is the stone of stumbling, ([Isaiah 8:14.](#))

We ought, indeed, to regulate our doctrine in such a manner that none may be offended through our fault; as far as possible, we ought to retain all; and, in short, we ought to take care that we do not, by talking inconsiderately or at random,<sup>175</sup> disturb ignorant or weak minds. But it will never be possible for us to exercise such caution that the doctrine of Christ shall not be the occasion of offense to many; because the reprobate, who are devoted to destruction, suck venom from the most wholesome food, and gall from honey. The Son of God undoubtedly knew well what was useful, and yet we see that he cannot avoid<sup>176</sup> offending *many of his disciples*. Whatever then may be the dislike entertained by many persons for pure doctrine, still we are not at liberty to suppress it. Only let the teachers of the Church remember the advice given by Paul, that *the word of God* ought to be *properly divided*, ([2 Timothy 2:15;](#)) and next let them advance boldly amidst all offenses. And if it happen that many apostatize, let us not be disgusted at the word of God, because it is not relished by the reprobate; for they who are so much shaken by the revolt of some that, when those persons fall away, they are immediately discouraged, are too delicate and tender.

*And walked no more with him.* When the Evangelist adds these words, he means that it was not a complete apostacy, but only that they withdrew from familiar intercourse with Christ; and yet he condemns them as apostates. Hence we ought to learn that we cannot go back a foot breadth, without being immediately in danger of falling into treacherous denial of our Master.

**67.** *Jesus therefore said to the twelve.* As the faith of the apostles might be greatly shaken, when they saw that they were so small a remnant of a great multitude, Christ directs his discourse to them, and shows that there is no reason why they should allow themselves to be hurried away by the lightness and unsteadiness of others. When he asks them if *they also wish to go away*, he does so in order to confirm their faith; for, by exhibiting to them himself, that they may remain with him, he likewise exhorts them not to become the companions of apostates. And, indeed, if faith be founded on Christ, it will not depend on men, and will never waver, though it should see heaven and earth mingling. We ought also to observe this circumstance, that Christ, when deprived of nearly all his disciples, retains *the twelve* only, in like manner as Isaiah was formerly commanded to

bind the testimony and seal the law among the disciples,  
([Isaiah 8:16.](#))

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175 “Inconsiderement, ou a la volée.”

176 “Il ne peut éviter.”

By such examples, every one of the believers is taught to follow God, even though he should have no companion.

**68.** *Simon Peter therefore answered him.* Peter replies here in the name of all, as he does on other occasions; because all of them were of the same mind, except that in Judas there was no sincerity. This reply contains two clauses; for *Peter* first states the reason why he cheerfully adheres to Christ, along with his brethren; namely, because they feel that his doctrine is wholesome and quickening; and, secondly, he acknowledges that *to whomsoever they might go*, if they left Christ, there remained for them nothing but death.

*Thou hast the words of eternal life.* When he says *the words of life*, by the phrase *of life*, he means *quicken*ing, using the genitive case instead of the adjective, which is a very common mode of expression among the Hebrews. It is a remarkable commendation bestowed on the Gospel, that it administers to us *eternal life*, as Paul testifies, that

it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believeth,

(Romans 1:16.)

True, the Law also contains *life*, but because it denounces against all transgressors<sup>177</sup> the condemnation of eternal death, it can do nothing but kill. Widely different is the manner in which life is offered to us in the Gospel, that is, when *God reconciles us to himself* through free grace, *by not imputing our sins*, (2 Corinthians 5:19.) It is no ordinary assertion that Peter makes concerning Christ, when he says that he has *the words of eternal life*; but he ascribes this to Christ as belonging to him alone. Hence follows the second statement which I glanced at a little ago, that as soon as they have gone away from Christ, there remains for them everywhere nothing but death. Certain destruction, therefore, awaits all who, not satisfied with that Teacher, fly to the inventions of men.

**69.** *And we have believed and known.* The verbs are in the past tense, but they may be changed into the present tense, *we believe and know*, but it makes little difference in the meaning. In these words Peter gives a brief summary of faith. But the confession appears to have nothing to do with the matter in hand, for the question had been raised about *eating the flesh of Christ*. I reply, although *the twelve* did not at once comprehend all that Christ had taught, yet it is enough that, according to the capacity of their faith, they acknowledge him to be the Author of salvation, and submit themselves to him in all things. The word *believe* is put first, because the obedience of faith is the commencement of right understanding, or rather, because faith itself is truly the eye of the understanding. But immediately afterwards knowledge is added, which distinguishes faith from erroneous and false opinions; for Mahometans and Jews and Papists *believe*, but they neither *know* nor understand any thing. Knowledge is connected with faith, because we are certain and fully convinced of the

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177 "A tous transgresseurs."

truth of God, not in the same manner as human sciences are learned, but when the Spirit seals it on our hearts.

70. *Jesus answered them.* Since Christ replies to all, we infer from it that all spake by the mouth of Peter. Besides, Christ now prepares and fortifies the eleven apostles against a new offense which was already at hand. It was a powerful instrument of Satan for shaking their faith, when they were reduced to so small a number, but the fall of Judas might take away all their courage; for since Christ had chosen that sacred number, who would ever have thought that any portion of the whole number could be torn away? That admonition of Christ may be interpreted thus: "You twelve alone remain out of a large company. If your faith has not been shaken by the unbelief of many, prepare for a new contest; for this company, though small, will be still diminished by one man."

*Have not I chosen you twelve?* When Christ says that he has chosen or elected *twelve*, he does not refer to the eternal purpose of God; for it is impossible that any one of those who have been predestinated to life shall fall away; but, having been *chosen* to the apostolic office, they ought to have surpassed others in piety and holiness. He used the word *chosen*, therefore, to denote those who were eminent and distinguished from the ordinary rank.

*And one of you is a devil.* He unquestionably intended, by this name, to hold up Judas to the utmost detestation; for they are mistaken who extenuate the atrocity implied in the name and indeed we cannot sufficiently execrate those who dishonor so sacred an office. Teachers who faithfully discharge their office are called *angels*

They should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the angel of the Lord of Hosts,

(Malachi 2:7.)

Justly, therefore, is he accounted *a devil*, who, after having been admitted to so honorable a rank, is corrupted through his treachery and wickedness. Another reason is, that God allows more power and liberty to Satan over wicked and ungodly ministers, than over other ordinary men; and therefore, if they who were *chosen* to be pastors are driven by diabolical rage, so as to resemble wild and monstrous beasts, so far are we from being entitled, on that account, to despise the honorable rank to which they belong, that we ought rather to honor it the more, when the profanation of it is followed by so fearful a punishment.

71. *He spoke of Judas* Although Judas had a bad conscience, still we do not read that he was at all moved. Hypocrites are so stupid that they do not feel their sores, and in the presence of men they have such hardened effrontery, that they do not scruple to prefer themselves to the very best of men.

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# CHAPTER 7

## John 7:1-8

1. And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he did not wish to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. 2. And the setting up of tabernacles, a feast of the Jews, was at hand. 3. His brethren therefore said to him, Depart hence, and go away into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works which thou dost. 4. For no man doth any thing in secret, and seeketh to become known; if thou dost these things, show thyself to the world. 5. For even his brethren did not believe in him. 6. Jesus therefore said to them, My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready. 7. The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it that its works are evil. 8. Go you up to this feast. I go not up yet to this feast, because my time is not yet completed.

1. *Jesus walked in Galilee.* The Evangelist appears not to pursue a continued narrative, but to select out of what occurred at different times those events which were worthy of being related. He says that Christ sojourned for a time in Galilee, because he could not remain in safety anywhere among the Jews. If any person think it strange that Christ sought a place of concealment, who, by the mere act of his will, could break and render powerless all the efforts of his enemies, it is easy to reply, that he remembered the commission which he had received from the Father, and determined to confine himself within the limits which belonged to him as man; for,

having taken upon him the form of a servant,  
he emptied himself, till the Father exalted him,

(Philippians 2:6-8.)

If it be objected that, as he knew the time of his death, which had been foreordained and determined in the purpose of God,<sup>178</sup> he had no reason for avoiding it, the former solution applies here also; for he conducted himself as a man who was liable to dangers, and, therefore, it was not proper that he should throw himself at random into dangerous situations. In encountering dangers, it is not our business to inquire what God has determined respecting us in his decree, but what he commands and enjoins on us, what our office requires and demands, and what is the proper method of regulating our life. Besides, while Christ avoided dangers, he did not turn aside a hairsbreadth from the course of duty; for to what purpose would life be maintained and defended, but that we may serve the Lord? We ought always to take care, therefore, that we do not, for the sake of life, lose the reasons for living. When a small and despised corner of Galilee grants a lodging to Christ, whom Judea cannot endure, we learn from it that piety and the fear of God are not always to be found in the chief places of the Church.

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178 "Determine au conseil de Dieu."

2. *Now a feast of the Jews was at hand.* Though I do not affirm it, yet it is probable that this happened during the second year after Christ's baptism. As to this feast, which the Evangelist mentions, it is not necessary at present to say much. For what purpose and use it was enjoined, Moses shows, ([Leviticus 23:34](#).) It was, that by this annual ceremony the Jews might call to remembrance, that their fathers lived forty years in *tabernacles*, when they had no houses, that they might thus celebrate the grace of God displayed in their deliverance. We have formerly said that there were two reasons why Christ came to Jerusalem during this *feast*. One was, that, being subject to the Law, in order to redeem us all from its bondage, he wished to omit no part of the observation of it; and the other was, that, amidst a numerous and extraordinary assemblage of people, he had a better opportunity of advancing the Gospel. But now the Evangelist relates that Christ kept himself in retirement at Galilee, as if he did not intend to come to Jerusalem.

3. *His brethren therefore said to him.* Under the word *brethren* the Hebrews include all cousins and other relations, whatever may be the degree of affinity. He says that they mocked at Christ, because he shunned to be seen or known, and concealed himself in a mean and despised district of Judea. There is reason to doubt, however, if they were excited by ambition to desire that Christ should obtain celebrity. But granting this, still it is evident that they ridicule him, because they do not think that his conduct is rational and judicious; and they even upbraid him with folly, because, while he wishes to be something, he wants confidence in himself, and does not venture to appear openly before men. When they say, *that thy disciples also may see*, they mean not only his domestics, but all those whom he wished to procure out of the whole nation; for they add, "Thou wishest to be known by all, and yet thou concealest thyself."

4. *If thou dost these things;* that is, if thou aspirest to such greatness that all may applaud thee, direct towards thee the eyes of all. And they add, *show thyself to the world*, using the word *world*, as contrasted with the small number of persons among whom he was spending his time without honor. We might also draw from it another meaning. "If thou dost these things, that is, since thou art endued with so great power as to procure reputation for thyself by miracles, do not throw them away; for all that has been given to thee by God thou spendest here to no purpose, because there are none to bear thee testimony, or to hold thee in just estimation." Hence we perceive how great is the indolence of men in considering the works of God; for the relations of Christ would never have spoken in this manner, if they had not — as it were — trampled under foot the manifest proofs of his Divine power, which they ought to have beheld with the greatest admiration and reverence. What is here told us concerning Christ happens in daily experience, that the children of God suffer greater annoyance from their near relations than from strangers; for they are instruments of Satan which tempt, sometimes to ambition, and sometimes to avarice, those who desire to serve God purely and faithfully. But such Satans receive a vigorous repulse from Christ, who thus

instructs us by his example, that we ought not to yield to the foolish wishes of *brethren* or relations.<sup>179</sup>

5. *For even his brethren did not believe in him.* Hence we infer how small is the value of carnal relationship; for the Holy Spirit stamps with a perpetual mark of infamy the relations of Christ, because, though convinced by the testimonies of so many works, they did not even then believe. *Therefore, whosoever wishes to be thought to be in Christ*, as Paul says, *let him be a new creature*, (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15;) for they who dedicate themselves wholly to God obtain the place of father, and mother, and brethren to Christ, and all others he utterly disavows, (Matthew 12:50.) So much the more ridiculous is the superstition of Papists, who, disregarding everything else in the Virgin Mary, extol her only on the ground of relationship, bestowing on her the title of the Mother of Christ,<sup>180</sup> as if Christ himself had not reproved the woman who exclaimed from the midst of the crowd,

Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that suckled thee; for Christ replied,  
Nay, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God,

(Luke 11:27, 28.)

6. *My time is not yet come.* There are some who erroneously interpret this as referring to the *time* of his death, for it denotes the *time* of his setting out on the journey to go to the feast.<sup>181</sup> He assures them that, in this respect, he differs from his relations. They may freely and without danger appear, at all hours, before the world, because the world is friendly and favorable to them; but he is in dread of his person, and justly, because the world is his mortal enemy. By these words he means that they do wrong in giving advice on a matter which they do not understand.

7. *The world cannot hate you.* When he says that *the world cannot hate them*, he reproveth them for being altogether carnal; for peace with *the world* can only be purchased by a wicked consent to vices and to every kind of wickedness.

*But me it hateth, because I testify.* *The world* here denotes men who are not born again, who retain their natural disposition; and accordingly he declares that all who have not yet been regenerated by the Spirit are Christ's adversaries. And why? Because he condemns *their works*. And if we acquiesce in the decision of Christ, we are under the necessity of acknowledging that the whole nature of man is so sinful and wicked, that nothing right, or sincere, or good, can proceed from it. This is the only reason why any of us is pleased with himself, so long as he is in his natural state.

*Because I testify of it, that its works are evil.* When Christ says that *the world hateth him* on this account, he means that the Gospel cannot be faithfully preached without summoning

179 "De nos parens."

180 "Le titre de Mere de Christ."

181 "De se mettre en chemin pour aller a la feste."

the whole world, as guilty, to the judgment-seat of God, that flesh and blood may thus be crushed and reduced to nothing, according to that saying,

When the Spirit shall come, he will reprove the world of sin,

([John 16:8](#).)

We learn from it also, that so great is the pride natural to men, that they flatter and applaud themselves in their vices; for they would not kindle into rage, when they are reprov'd, were it not that they are blinded by excessive love of themselves, and on that account flatter themselves in their sins. Even among the vices of men, the chief and most dangerous is pride and arrogance. The Holy Spirit alone softens us, so as to endure reproofs patiently, and thus to offer ourselves willingly to be slain by the sword of the Church.



### John 7:9-13

**9.** And having said these things, he remained in Galilee. **10.** And when his brethren had gone up, then he also went up to the feast, not openly, but, as it were, in secret. **11.** The Jews therefore sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? **12.** And there was much murmuring concerning him among the crowds; for some said, He is a good man, and others said, No, but he seduceth the multitude. **13.** Yet no man spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews.

**9.** *He remained in Galilee.* The Evangelist here places before our eyes the cousins of our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>182</sup> who, in compliance with ordinary customs, pretend to worship God, but yet are on friendly terms with unbelievers, and therefore walk without any alarm. On the other hand, he places before our eyes Christ himself, who *hated by the world*, comes *secretly* into the city, till the necessity arising out of his office compels him to show himself openly. But if there be nothing more wretched than to be separated from Christ, accursed be that peace which costs so high a price as to leave and abandon the Son of God.<sup>183</sup>

**11.** *The Jews therefore sought him.* Here we ought to consider what was the condition of the Church. For the Jews, at that time, gaped for the promised redemption like hungry men; yet, when Christ appears to them, they remain in suspense. Hence arose that murmuring and that variety of opinions. That they whisper secretly is an indication of the tyranny which the priests and scribes exercised over them. It is a shocking exhibition, indeed, that this Church, which was at that time the only Church on earth, is here represented to us as a confused and shapeless chaos.<sup>184</sup> They who rule, instead of pastors, hold the people oppressed by fear and terror, and throughout the whole body there is shameful desolation and lamentable disorder. By *the Jews* he means the common people, who, having been accustomed for two years to hear Christ, inquire about him, because he does not appear according to his custom. For when they say, *Where is he?* they describe a man whom they knew, and yet that word shows that they had not yet been earnestly moved, and that they always remained in doubt and suspense.

**12.** *And there was much murmuring.* He means that, wherever men were collected in crowds, as usually happens in large assemblies, they held secret conversations about Christ. The diversity of opinion, which is here related, proves that it is not a new evil, that men should differ in their opinions about Christ, even in the very bosom of the Church. And as we do not hesitate to receive Christ, who was formerly condemned by the greater part of

182 “Les cousins de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ.”

183 “De quitter et renoncer le Fils de Dieu.”

184 “Comme un abysme de confusion et disordre;” — “as a gulf of confusion and disorder.”

his own nation, so we ought to be armed with the same kind of shield, that the dissensions which we see daily may not disturb us. Again, we may perceive how great is the rashness of men in the things of God. In a matter of no importance, they would not have taken so great liberty, but when the question relates to the Son of God and to his most holy doctrine, they immediately hasten to give judgment respecting it. So much the greater moderation ought we to maintain, that we may not thoughtlessly condemn our life with the eternal truth of God. And if the world holds us for impostors, let us remember that these are the marks and brands of Christ, provided that we show, at the same time, that we are faithful. This passage shows likewise that in a great multitude, even when the whole body is in a state of confusion, there are always some who think aright; but those few persons, whose minds are well regulated, are swallowed up by the multitude of those whose understandings are bewildered.

13. *Yet no man spoke openly of him for fear of the Jews.* By *the Jews* he here means the rulers, who had the government in their hands. They burned with such hatred against Christ, that they did not permit a word to be uttered on either side. Not that they were displeased at any reproaches which were heaped upon him, but because they could discover no better expedient than that his name should be buried in oblivion. Thus the enemies of the truth, after having found that they gain nothing by their cruelty, desire nothing more than to suppress the remembrance of him, and this object alone they strive to attain. That all were silent, being subdued by *fear*, was a proof of gross tyranny, as I have already said; for as unbridled licentiousness has no place in a well-regulated Church, so when all freedom is held oppressed by *fear*, it is a most wretched condition. But the power of our Lord Jesus Christ shone forth with greater and more wonderful brightness, when — causing himself to be heard amidst armed foes, and amidst their furious resentment, and under so formidable a government — he openly maintained and asserted the truth of God.

## John 7:14-19

**14.** And about the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. **15.** And the Jews wondered, saying, How doth this man know letters, since he did not learn them? **16.** Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but that of him who sent me. **17.** If any man wish to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, if it be of God, or if I speak from myself. **18.** He who speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory; but he who seeketh the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him. **19.** Did not Moses give you the law, and not one of you keepeth the law? Why do you seek to kill me?

**14.** *Jesus went up into the temple.* We now see that Christ was not so much afraid as to desist from the execution of his office; for the cause of his delay was, that he might preach to a very large assembly. We may sometimes, therefore, expose ourselves to dangers, but we ought never to disregard or omit a single opportunity of doing good. As to his *teaching in the temple*, he does so according to the ancient ordinance and custom; for while God commanded so many ceremonies, he did not choose that his people should be occupied with cold and useless spectacles. That their usefulness might be known, it was necessary that they should be accompanied by doctrine; and in this manner, external rites are lively images of spiritual things, when they take their shape from the word of God. But almost all the priests being at that time dumb, and the pure doctrine being corrupted by the leaven and false inventions of the scribes, Christ undertook the office of a teacher; and justly, because he was the great High Priest, as he affirms shortly afterwards, that he attempts nothing but by the command of the Father.

**15.** *And the Jews wondered* Those who think that Christ was received in such a manner as to be esteemed and honored are mistaken; for the *wonder* or *astonishment* of the Jews is of such a nature, that they seek occasion from it to despise him. For such is the ingratitude of men that, in judging of the works of God, they always seek deliberately an occasion of falling into error. If God acts by the usual means and in the ordinary way, those means which are visible to the eyes are — as it were — veils which hinder us from perceiving the Divine hand; and therefore we discern nothing in them but what is human. But if an unwonted power of God shines above the order of nature and the means generally known, we are stunned; and what ought to have deeply affected all our senses passes away as a dream. For such is our pride, that we take no interest in any thing of which we do not know the reason.

*How doth this man know letters?* It was an astonishing proof of the power and grace of God, that Christ, who had not been taught by any master, was yet eminently distinguished by his knowledge of the Scriptures; and that he, who had never been a scholar, should be a

most excellent teacher and instructor. But for this very reason the Jews despise the grace of God, because it exceeds their capacity. Admonished by their example, therefore, let us learn to exercise deeper reverence for God than we are wont to do in the consideration of his works.

**16. *My doctrine is not mine.*** Christ shows that this circumstance, which was an offense to the Jews, was rather a ladder by which they ought to have risen higher to perceive the glory of God; as if he had said, "When you see a teacher not trained in the school of men, know that I have been taught by God." For the reason why the Heavenly Father determined that his Son should go out of a mechanic's workshop, rather than from the schools of the scribes, was, that the origin of the Gospel might be more manifest, that none might think that it had been fabricated on the earth, or imagine that any human being was the author of it. Thus also Christ chose ignorant and uneducated men to be his apostles, and permitted them to remain three years in gross ignorance, that, having instructed them in a single instant, he might bring them forward as new men, and even as angels who had just come down from heaven.

*But that of him who sent me.* Meanwhile, Christ shows whence we ought to derive the authority of spiritual doctrine, from God alone. And when he asserts that the doctrine of his Father is not his, he looks to the capacity of the hearers, who had no higher opinion of him than that he was a man. By way of concession, therefore, he allows himself to be reckoned different from his Father, but so as to bring forward nothing but what the Father had enjoined. The amount of what is stated is, that what he teaches in the name of his Father is not a doctrine of men, and did not proceed from men, so as to be capable of being despised with impunity. We see by what method he procures authority for his doctrine. It is by referring it to God as its Author. We see also on what ground, and for what reason, he demands that he shall be heard. It is, because the Father sent him to teach. Both of these things ought to be possessed by every man who takes upon himself the office of a teacher, and wishes that he should be believed.

**17. *If any man wish to do his will.*** He anticipates the objections that might be made. For since he had many adversaries in that place, some one might readily have murmured against him in this manner: "Why dost thou boast to us of the name of God? For we do not know that thou hast proceeded from him. Why, then, dost thou press upon us that maxim, which we do not admit to thee, that thou teachest nothing but by the command of God?" Christ, therefore, replies that sound judgment flows from fear and reverence for God; so that, if their minds be well disposed to the fear of God, they will easily perceive if what he preaches be true or not. He likewise administers to them, by it, an indirect reproof; for how comes it that they cannot distinguish between falsehood and truth,<sup>185</sup> but because they want the

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185 "Entre la faussete et la verite."

principal requisite to sound understanding, namely, piety, and the earnest desire to obey God?

This statement is highly worthy of observation. Satan continually plots against us, and spreads his nets in every direction, that he may take us unawares by his delusions. Here Christ most excellently forewarns us to beware of exposing ourselves to any of his impostures, assuring us that if we are prepared to obey God, he will never fail to illuminate us by the light of his Spirit, so that we shall be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Nothing else, therefore, hinders us from judging aright, but that we are unruly and headstrong; and every time that Satan deceives us, we are justly punished for our hypocrisy. In like manner Moses gives warning that, when false prophets arise, we are *tried* and *proved* by God; for they whose hearts are right will never be deceived, ([Deuteronomy 13:3](#).) Hence it is evident how wickedly and foolishly many persons in the present day, dreading the danger of falling into error, by that very dread shut the door against all desire to learn; as if our Savior had not good ground for saying,

Knock, and it shall be opened to you, ([Matthew 7:7](#).)

On the contrary, if we be entirely devoted to obedience to God, let us not doubt that He will give us the spirit of discernment, to be our continual director and guide. If others choose to waver, they will ultimately find how flimsy are the pretences for their ignorance. And, indeed, we see that all who now hesitate, and prefer to cherish their doubt rather than, by reading or hearing, to inquire earnestly where the truth of God is, have the hardihood to set God at defiance by general principles. One man will say that he prays for the dead, because, distrusting his own judgment, he cannot venture to condemn the false doctrines invented by wicked men about purgatory; and yet he will freely allow himself to commit fornication. Another will say that he has not so much acuteness as to be able to distinguish between the pure doctrine of Christ and the spurious contrivances of men, but yet he will have acuteness enough to steal or commit perjury. In short, all those doubters, who cover themselves with a veil of doubt in all those matters which are at present the subject of controversy, display a manifest contempt of God on subjects that are not at all obscure.

We need not wonder, therefore, that the doctrine of the Gospel is received by very few persons in the present day, since there is so little of the fear of God in the world. Besides, these words of Christ contain a definition of true religion; that is, when we are prepared heartily to follow the will of God, which no man can do, unless he has renounced his own views.

*Or if I speak from myself.* We ought to observe in what manner Christ wishes that a judgment should be formed about any doctrine whatever. He wishes that what is from God should be received without controversy, but freely allows us to reject whatever is from man; for this is the only distinction that he lays down, by which we ought to distinguish between doctrines.

18. *He who speaketh from himself.* Hitherto he has showed that there is no other reason why men are blind, but because they are not governed by the fear of God. He now puts another mark on the doctrine itself, by which it may be known whether it is of God or of man. For every thing that displays the glory of God is holy and divine; but every thing that contributes to the ambition of men, and, by exalting them, obscures the glory of God, not only has no claim to be believed, but ought to be vehemently rejected. He who shall make the glory of God the object at which he aims will never go wrong; he who shall try and prove by this touchstone what is brought forward in the name of God will never be deceived by the semblance of right. We are also reminded by it that no man can faithfully discharge the office of teacher in the Church, unless he be void of ambition, and resolve to make it his sole object to promote, to the utmost of his power, the glory of God. When he says that *there is no unrighteousness in him*, he means that there is nothing wicked or hypocritical, but that he does what becomes an upright and sincere minister of God.

19. *Did not Moses give you the Law?* The Evangelist does not give a full and connected narrative of the sermon delivered by Christ, but only a brief selection of the principal topics, which contain the substance of what was spoken. The scribes mortally hated him,<sup>186</sup> and the priests had been kindled into rage against him, because he had cured a paralytic; and they professed that this arose from their zeal for the Law. To confute their hypocrisy, he reasons, not from the subject, but from the person. All of them having freely indulged in their vices, as if they had never known any law, he infers from it that they are not moved by any love or zeal for the Law. True, this defense would not have been sufficient to prove the point. Granting that — under a false pretense — they concealed their wicked and unjust hatred, still it does not follow that Christ did right, if he committed any thing contrary to the injunction of the Law; for we must not attempt to extenuate our own blame by the sins of others.

But Christ connects here two clauses. In the former, he addresses the consciences of his enemies, and, since they proudly boasted of being defenders of the Law, he tears from them this mask; for he brings against them this reproach, that they allow themselves to violate the Law as often as they please, and, therefore, that they care nothing about the Law. Next, he comes to the question itself, as we shall afterwards see; so that the defense is satisfactory and complete in all its parts. Consequently, the amount of this clause is, that no zeal for the Law exists in its despisers. Hence Christ infers that something else has excited the Jews to so great rage, when they seek to put him to death. In this manner we ought to drag the wicked from their concealments, whenever they fight against God and sound doctrine, and pretend to do so from pious motives.

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186 “Les scribes le haïssoient mortellement.”

Those who, in the present day, are the fiercest enemies of the Gospel and the most strenuous defenders of Popery, have nothing more plausible to urge in their behalf than that they are excited by ardor of zeal. But if their life be narrowly examined, they are all filled with base crimes, and openly mock at God. Who knows not that the Pope's court is filled with Epicureans? <sup>187</sup> And as to Bishops and Abbots, have they as much modesty as to conceal their baseness, that some appearance of religion may be observed in them? Again, as to monks and other brawlers, are they not abandoned to all wickedness, to uncleanness, covetousness, and every kind of shocking crimes, so that their life cries aloud that they have altogether forgotten God? And now that they are not ashamed to boast of their zeal for God and the Church, ought we not to repress them by this reply of Christ?

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187 "Que la cour du Pape est remplie d'Epicuriens."

### John 7:20-24

**20.** The multitude answered, and said, Thou hast a devil; who seeketh to kill thee? **21.** Jesus answered, and said to them, I have done one work, and you all wonder. **22.** Therefore Moses gave you circumcision, not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers, and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. **23.** If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you offended at me, because I have completely cured a man on the Sabbath? **24.** Judge not according to the appearance, but judge right judgment.

**20.** *Thou hast a devil.* The meaning is, “Thou art mad;” for it was a customary phrase among the Jews, who had been trained to the doctrine that, when men are excited to rage, or when they have lost sense and reason, they are tormented by the devil. And, indeed, as gentle and moderate chastisements are God’s fatherly rods, so when He treats us with greater harshness and severity, He appears not to strike us with his own hand, but rather to employ the devil as the executioner and minister of his wrath. Again, the multitude reproach Christ with simplicity; for the common people were not acquainted with the intentions of the priests. Those foolish men, therefore, ascribe it to madness, when Christ complains that they are endeavoring to put him to death. We learn from it that we ought to be exceedingly cautious not to form an opinion about subjects which we do not understand; but, if it ever happens that we are rashly condemned by ignorant men, mildly to digest such an affront.

**21.** *I have done one work.* Now, leaving their persons, he begins to speak of the fact; for he proves that the miracle which he performed is not inconsistent with the Law of God. When he says that *he has done one work*, the meaning is, that it is only of a single crime that he is held guilty, or that it is only for a single work that he is blamed, which is, that he cured a man on the day of Rest;<sup>188</sup> but that they, on every day of Rest, do many works of the same, or a similar description, and do not reckon them criminal; for not a day of Rest passed on which there were not many infants *circumcised* in Judea. By this example he defends his action, although he does not merely argue from what is similar, but draws a comparison between the greater and the less. There was this similarity between *circumcision* and the cure of the paralytic, that both were works of God; but Christ maintains that the latter is more excellent, because the benefit of it extends to the whole man. Now if he had merely cured the man of bodily disease, the comparison would not have been applicable; for *circumcision* would have greater excellence as to the cure of the soul. Christ, therefore, connects the spiritual advantage of the miracle with the outward benefit granted to the body; and on this account he justly prefers to *circumcision* the entire cure of a man.

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188 “An jour de Repos.”



There might also be another reason for the comparison, namely, that the sacraments are not always attended by power and efficacy, while Christ wrought efficaciously in curing the paralytic. But I prefer the former exposition, that the Jews maliciously and slanderously blame *a work*, in which the grace of God shines more illustriously than in *circumcision*, on which they bestow so much honor that they think *the Sabbath* is not violated by it. *And you all wonder* The *wonder*, of which he speaks, means that what Christ had done caused this murmur, because they thought that he had ventured to do more than was lawful.

22. *Therefore Moses gave you circumcision* The particle *therefore* appears to be unsuitable; and, accordingly, some take διὰ τοῦτο (*on this account, or therefore*) in the sense of διὰ τοῦτο, (*because;*) but the Greek syntax is unfavourable to their opinion.<sup>189</sup> I explain it simply as meaning, that *circumcision* was enjoined in such a manner that the practice of that symbolical rite was necessary *even on the Sabbath-day* *Therefore*, says he; that is, it has in this manner been sufficiently demonstrated to them, that the worship of the Sabbath is not violated by the works of God. And although Christ accommodates the instance of *circumcision* to the present subject, yet he immediately makes use of a correction, when he says, that Moses was not the first minister of *circumcision*. But it was enough for his purpose, that Moses, who so rigidly demanded the keeping of *the Sabbath*, commanded that infants should be *circumcised* on the eighth day, even though it should fall on *the day of Rest*<sup>190</sup>

24. *Judge not according to the appearance.* Having concluded his defense, he likewise administers a reproof on this ground, that they are carried away by wicked dispositions, and do not form *a judgment* according to the fact and the matter in hand. *Circumcision* was properly held by them in reverence; and when it was performed on the Sabbath-day, they knew that the Law was not violated by it, because *the works of God* agree well with each other. Why do they not arrive at the same conclusion as to the *work* of Christ, but because their minds are preoccupied by a prejudice which they have formed against his person? *Judgment*, therefore, will never be *right*, unless it be regulated by the truth of the fact; for as soon as persons appear in public, they turn their eyes and senses on them, so that the truth

189 The difficulty is obviated by reading the words διὰ τοῦτο, (with Scholz, Bloomfield, and others,) as the conclusion of the 21st, and not as the commencement of the 22nd verse; καὶ πάντες θαυμάζετε διὰ τοῦτο, *and you all wonder* at it, or, *on this account* Our Author, with his usual sagacity, has, in this instance, also anticipated the results of modern criticism; for his French version, which contains his latest views, runs thus: “J’ay fait une oeuvre, et vous en estes tous émerveillez, ou, et vous estes esmerveillez de cela Moise vous a donne la Circoncision.” — “I have done one work, and you are all astonished at it, or, and you are all astonished at that Moses gave you *Circumcision*.” It is remarkable that, while a modern French version copies Calvin’s rendering very closely, *et vous en estes tous etonnes*, (*and you are all astonished at it*;) the translator has overlooked the force of διὰ τοῦτο, for *en* (*at it*) is marked by him in Italics, as a supplement. — Ed.

190 “An jour de Repos.”

immediately vanishes. While this admonition ought to be observed in all causes and affairs, it is peculiarly necessary when the question relates to the heavenly doctrine; for there is nothing to which we are more prone than to dislike that doctrine on account of the hatred or contempt of men.

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### John 7:25-30

25. Some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem therefore said, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? 26. And, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing to him. Do the rulers actually know that this is truly the Christ? 27. But we know whence this man is; but when Christ shall come, no man will know whence he is. 28. Jesus therefore exclaimed in the temple, teaching and saying, You both know me, and you know whence I am; and I did not come of myself, but he who sent me is true, whom you know not. 29. But I know him, for I am from him, and he hath sent me. 30. Therefore they sought to seize him; but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.

25. *Some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem*; that is, those to whom the rulers had communicated their plots, and who knew how much Christ was hated; for the people at large — as we saw lately — looked upon this as a dream, or as madness. Those persons, therefore, who knew with what inveterate rage the rulers of their nation burned against Christ, have some reason for wondering that, while Christ *in the temple* not only converses openly but preaches freely, the rulers *say nothing to him*. But they err in this respect, that in a miracle altogether Divine they do not take into account the providence of God. Thus carnal men, whenever they behold any unusual work of God, do indeed wonder, but no consideration of the power of God ever enters into their mind. But it is our duty to examine more wisely the works of God; and especially when wicked men, with all their contrivances, do not hinder the progress of the Gospel so much as they would desire, we ought to be fully persuaded that their efforts have been rendered fruitless, because God, by interposing his word, has defeated them.

27. *But we know whence this man is*. Here we see not only how great is the blindness of men, when they ought to judge about the things of God, but this vice is almost natural to them, to be ingenious in contriving what may hinder them from arriving at the knowledge of the truth. It is frequently, indeed, from the craft of Satan that offenses arise, which cause many to turn away from Christ; but though the road were plain and smooth, every man would contrive an offense for himself. So long as the rulers were opposed to Christ, their unbelief would of itself have kept back this multitude; but when that obstacle has been removed, they contrive a new reason for themselves, that they may not come to the faith. And even though it were proper that they should be influenced by the example of their rulers, they are so far from following what is right, that they willingly stumble at the first step. Thus it frequently happens, that men who had begun well fall away quickly, unless the Lord conduct them to the very end of their career.

*But when Christ shall come*. The argument by which they obstruct their own progress is this: “The Prophets have testified that the origin of Christ will be unknown. Now *we know whence this man is*, and therefore we cannot reckon him to be *the Christ*.” Hence we are

reminded how pernicious it is to mangle the Scriptures, and even Christ himself, so as not to admit more than the half of him. God promised that the Redeemer would be of the seed of David; but he frequently claims this office as peculiar to himself; therefore, he must have been God manifested in the flesh, that he might be the Redeemer of his Church. Thus Micah points out the place where Christ would be born. *Out of thee, Bethlehem, he says, a Prince shall come, to govern my people* But, immediately afterwards, he speaks of another *going forth* which is far loftier, and then he says that it is hidden and secret, ([Micah 5:2.](#)) Yet those wretched men, when they perceived in Christ nothing but what is liable to contempt, draw the absurd conclusion, that he is not the person who had been promised. On the mean condition of Christ in the flesh let us therefore learn to look in such a manner, that this state of humiliation, which is despised by wicked men, may raise us to his heavenly glory. Thus *Bethlehem*, where the man was to be born, will be to us a door by which we may enter into the presence of the eternal God.

**28.** *Jesus therefore exclaimed in the temple.* He bitterly reproaches them for their rashness, because they arrogantly flattered themselves in a false opinion, and in this manner excluded themselves from a knowledge of the truth; as if he had said, “You know all things, and yet you know nothing.” And, indeed, there is not a more destructive plague than when men are so intoxicated by the scanty portion of knowledge which they possess, that they boldly reject every thing that is contrary to their opinion.

*You both know me, and you know whence I am.* This is ironical language. With the false opinion which they had formed concerning him, he contrasts what is true; as if he had said, “While you have your eyes fixed on the earth, you think that every part of me is before your eyes; and therefore you despise me as mean and unknown. But God will testify that I have come from heaven; and though I may be rejected by you, God will acknowledge that I am truly his own Son.”

*But he who hath sent me is true.* He calls God *true* in the same sense that Paul calls him *faithful*

If we are unbelievers, says he, he remaineth faithful, he cannot deny himself,

([2 Timothy 2:13.](#))

For his object is to prove, that the credit due to the Gospel is not in the smallest degree diminished by the utmost exertions of the world to overthrow it; that though wicked men may attempt to take from Christ what belonged to him, still he remains unimpaired, because the truth of God is firm and is always like itself. Christ sees that he is despised; but so far is he from yielding, that, on the contrary, he boldly repels the furious arrogance of those who hold him in no estimation. With such unshaken and heroic fortitude all believers ought to be endued; nay, more, our faith will never be solid or lasting, unless it treat with contempt the presumption of wicked men, when they rise up against Christ. Above all, godly teachers, relying on this support, ought to persevere in maintaining sound doctrine, even though it

should be opposed by the whole world. Thus Jeremiah appeals to God as his defender and guardian, because he is condemned as an impostor:

Thou hast deceived me, O Lord, says he, and I was deceived,  
([Jeremiah 20:7](#).)

Thus Isaiah, overwhelmed on all sides by calumnies and reproaches, flies to this refuge, that God will approve his cause, ([Isaiah 50:8](#).) Thus Paul, oppressed by unjust judgments, appeals against all to *the day of the Lord*, ([1 Corinthians 4:5](#);) reckoning it enough to have God alone to place against the whole world, however it may rage and storm.

*Whom you knew not.* He means that it is not wonderful that he is not *known* by the Jews, because they *do not know God*; for the beginning of wisdom is, to behold God.

**29.** *But I know him.* When he says that *he knoweth God*, he means that it is not without good grounds that he has risen to so great confidence; and by his example he warns us not to assume lightly the name of God, so as to vaunt of Him as the patron and defender of our cause. For many are too presumptuous in boasting of the authority of God; and, indeed, it is impossible to imagine greater readiness and boldness in rejecting the opinions of all men, than is to be found among fanatics who give out their own inventions as the oracles of God. But we are taught by these words of our Lord Jesus Christ that we ought especially to beware of proud and foolish confidence; and that, when we have fully ascertained the truth of God, we ought boldly to resist men. And he who is fully aware that God is on his side has no reason to dread the charge of being insolent, in trampling under foot all the haughtiness of the world.

*Because I am from him, and he hath sent me.* Some distinguish these two clauses in this manner. They refer the former clause — *I am from him* — to the Divine essence of Christ; and the latter clause — *he hath sent me* — to the office enjoined on him by the Father, for the sake of executing which he took upon him the flesh and human nature. Though I do not venture to reject this view, still I do not know if Christ intended to speak so abstrusely. I readily acknowledge that Christ's heavenly descent may be inferred from it, but it would not be a sufficiently strong proof of his eternal Divinity against the Arians.

**30.** *Therefore they sought to seize him.* They had no want of will to do him mischief; they even made the attempt, and they had strength to do it. Why, then, amidst so much ardor, are they benumbed, as if they had their hands and feet bound? The Evangelist replies, *because Christ's hour was not yet come*; by which he means that, against all their violence and furious attacks, Christ was guarded by the protection of God. And at the same time he meets the offense of the cross; for we have no reason to be alarmed when we learn that Christ was dragged to death, not through the caprice of men, but because he was destined for such a sacrifice by the decree of the Father. And hence we ought to infer a general doctrine; for though we live from day to day, still the time of every man's death has been fixed by God. It is difficult to believe that, while we are subject to so many accidents, exposed to so many

open and concealed attacks both from men and beasts, and liable to so many diseases, we are safe from all risk until God is pleased to call us away. But we ought to struggle against our own distrust; and we ought to attend first to the doctrine itself which is here taught, and next, to the object at which it aims, and the exhortation which is drawn from it, namely, that each of us, *casting all his cares on God*, ([Psalm 55:22](#); [1 Peter 5:7](#);) should follow his own calling, and not be led away from the performance of his duty by any fears. Yet let no man go beyond his own bounds; for confidence in the providence of God must not go farther than God himself commands.

### John 7:31-36

**31.** And many of the multitude believed in him, and said, When Christ shall come, will he do more miracles than this man doth? **32.** The Pharisees heard the multitude muttering these things concerning him; and the Pharisees and priests sent officers to seize him. **33.** Jesus, therefore, said to them, Yet a little while am I with you, and I go to him who hath sent me. **34.** You shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, you cannot come. **35.** The Jews, therefore, said among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? Will he go to those who are scattered among the Greeks,<sup>191</sup> and teach the Greeks? **36.** What is this saying which he hath spoken, You shall seek me, and shall not find me, and whither I go, you cannot come?

**31.** *And many of the multitude believed in him.* We might have thought that Christ preached to deaf and altogether obstinate persons; and yet the Evangelist says that some fruit followed. And, therefore, though some may murmur, and others scorn, and others slander, and though many differences of opinion may arise, still the preaching of the Gospel will not be without effect; so that we must sow the seed, and wait with patience until, in process of time, the fruit appear. The word *believe* is here used inaccurately, for they depended more on miracles than they relied on doctrine, and were not convinced that Jesus was the Christ; but as they were prepared to listen to him, and showed themselves willing to receive instruction from him as their Teacher, such a preparation for faith is called *faith*. When the Holy Spirit bestows so honorable a designation on a small spark of good disposition, it ought to encourage us, so as not to doubt that faith, however small it may be, is acceptable to God.

**32.** *The Pharisees heard.* Hence it appears that the Pharisees, like persons set on the watch, were anxious on all occasions not to permit Christ to be known. In the first instance the Evangelist calls them only *Pharisees*, and next he adds to them *the priests* of whom *the Pharisees* were a part. There can be no doubt that, as they wished to be reckoned the greatest zealots for the Law, they opposed Christ more bitterly than all the other sects; but finding that their unaided exertions were not sufficient to oppress Christ, they committed the affair to the whole order of the priests. Thus they who, in other respects, differed among themselves now conspire together, under the guidance of Satan, against the Son of God. Meanwhile, since *the Pharisees* had such ardent zeal and such incessant toil for defending their tyranny and the corrupt state of the Church, how much more zealous ought we to be in maintaining the kingdom of Christ! The Papists in the present day are not less mad or less eager to extinguish the Gospel; and yet it is monstrously wicked that their example does not, at least, whet

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191 “Vers ceux qui sont espars entre les Grecs.”

our desires, and cause us to labor with greater boldness in the defense of true and sound doctrine.

**33.** *Yet a little while am I with you.* Some think that this sermon was addressed to the assembly of the people who were present, and others, that it was addressed to *the officers* who had been sent *to seize* Christ. But for my own part, I have no doubt that Christ particularly addresses his enemies, who had taken counsel to destroy him; for he ridicules their efforts, because they will be utterly ineffectual, *until the time* decreed by the Father *be come*. And at the same time, he reproaches them for their obstinacy, because they not only reject, but furiously oppose, the grace which is offered to them; and threatens that ere long it will be taken from them. When he says, *I am with you*, he rebukes their ingratitude, because, though he had been given to them by the Father, though he had come down to them from the heavenly glory, though, by calling them to be his familiar associates, he desired nothing more than to assist them, still there were few who received him. When he says, *Yet a little while*, he warns them that God will not long endure that his grace should be exposed to such shameful contempt. Yet he also means, that neither his life nor his death is placed at their disposal, but that his Father has fixed a time, which must be fulfilled.

*I go to him who hath sent me.* By these words he testifies that he will not be extinguished by his death, but, on the contrary, when he shall have laid aside his mortal body, will be declared to be the Son of God by the magnificent triumph of his resurrection; as if he had said, “Labour as much as you please, yet you will never hinder my Father from receiving me into his heavenly glory, when I have discharged the embassy which he has committed to me. Thus not only will my rank remain undiminished after my death, but a more excellent condition is then provided for me.” Besides, we ought to draw from it a general admonition; for as often as Christ calls us to the hope of salvation by the preaching of the Gospel, he is present with us. For not without reason is the preaching of the Gospel called Christ’s descent to us, where it is said,

he came and preached peace to those who were far off, and to those who were near,  
([Ephesians 2:17.](#))

If we accept the hand which he holds out, he will lead us to the Father; and so long as we must sojourn in the world, not only will he show himself to be near us, but will constantly dwell in us. And if we disregard his presence, he will lose nothing, but, departing from us, will leave us altogether strangers to God and to life.

**34.** *You shall seek me.* They sought Christ, to put him to death. Here Christ alludes to the ambiguous signification of the word *seek*, for soon *they shall seek him* in another manner; as if he had said, “My presence, which is now irksome and intolerable to you, will last for a short time; but ere long *you shall seek me* in vain, for, far removed from you, not only by my body, but also by my power, I shall behold from heaven your destruction.” But here a question may be put, of what nature was this *seeking* of Christ? For it is plain enough that



Christ speaks of the reprobate, whose obstinacy in rejecting Christ had reached the utmost point. Some refer it to doctrine, because the Jews, by foolishly pursuing the righteousness of works, *did not obtain what they desired*, ([Romans 9:31](#).) Many understand it as referring to the person of the Messiah, because the Jews, reduced to extremities, in vain implored a Redeemer. But for my own part, I explain it as merely denoting the groans of distress uttered by the wicked, when, compelled by necessity, they look in some manner towards God.

*And shall not find me.* When they *seek* him, they do not seek him; for unbelief and obstinacy — by shutting up their hearts, as it were — hinders them from approaching to God. They would desire, indeed, that God should aid them, and should be their Redeemer, but, by impenitence and hardness of heart, they obstruct their path. We have a very striking example <sup>192</sup> in Esau, who, on account of having lost his birthright, not only is oppressed with grief, but groans and gnashes his teeth, and breaks out into furious indignation, ([Genesis 27:38](#); [Hebrews 12:17](#).) But yet so far is he from the right way of seeking the blessing, that, at the very time when he is seeking it, <sup>193</sup> he renders himself more unworthy of it. In this manner God usually punishes the contempt of his grace in the reprobate, so that, either afflicted by severe punishments, or oppressed by a conviction of their misery, or reduced to other extremities, they complain, and cry, and howl, but without reaping any advantage; for, being always like themselves, they nourish within their hearts the same cruelty which they formerly displayed, and do not go to God, but rather wish that he were changed, since they cannot destroy him. Hence let us learn that we ought to receive Christ without delay, while he is still present with us, that the opportunity of enjoying him may not pass away from us; for if the door be once shut, it will be vain for us to try to open it.

Seek the Lord, says Isaiah, while he may be found; call upon him, while he is near,

([Isaiah 55:6](#).)

We ought therefore to go to God early, *while the time of his good pleasure lasts*, as the prophet speaks, ([Isaiah 49:8](#);) for we know not how long God will bear with our negligence. In these words, *where I am, you cannot come*, he employs the present tense instead of the future, *where I shall be, you shall not be able to come*

**35.** *Whither will he go?* This was added by the Evangelist, for the express purpose of showing how great was the stupidity of the people. Thus not only are wicked men deaf to hear God's instruction, but even dreadful threatenings are allowed by them to pass by in mockery, as if they were listening to a fable. Christ spoke expressly of the Father, but they remain fixed on the earth, and think of nothing else than a departure to distant countries.

*Will he go to the dispersion of the Greeks?* It is well known that the Jews gave the name of Greeks to all nations beyond the sea; but they do not mean that Christ will go to the un-

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192 “Un fort bel exemple.”

193 “Quand il la cherche.”

circumcised nations, but to the Jews, who were dispersed through the various countries of the world. For the word dispersion would not apply to those who are natives of the place, and who inhabit their native soil, but applies well to the Jews, who were fugitives and exiles. Thus Peter inscribes his First Epistle *παρεπιδήμοις διασποράς*, to the strangers of the dispersion, that is, to the strangers who are scattered <sup>194</sup> through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, (1 Peter 1:1;) and James salutes the twelve tribes *ἐν τῷ διασπορᾷ*, in the dispersion, that is, scattered abroad, (James 1:1.) The meaning of the words therefore is, “Will he cross the sea, to go to Jews who dwell in a world unknown to us?” And it is possible that they intended to tease Christ by this mockery. “If this be the Messiah, will he fix the seat of his reign in Greece, since God has assigned to him the land of Canaan as his own habitation?” But however that may be, we see that the severe threatening which Christ had uttered did not at all affect them.

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194 “Aux étrangers qui estes espars.”

### John 7:37-39

37. Now on the last day, which was the greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood, and exclaimed, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. 38. He who believeth in me, as the Scripture saith, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. 39 But this he spoke of the Spirit which they who believed in him were to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

37. *On the last day.* The first thing that ought to be observed here is, that no plots or intrigues of enemies terrified Christ, so as to cause him to desist from his duty; but, on the contrary, his courage rose with dangers, so that he persevered with greater firmness. This is proved by the circumstance of the time, the crowded assembly, and the freedom he used in *exclaiming*, while he knew that hands were stretched out on all sides to seize him; for it is probable that the officers were at that time ready to execute their commission.

We must next observe, that nothing else than the protection of God, on which he relied, enabled him to stand firm against such violent efforts of those men, who had every thing in their power. For what other reason can be assigned why Christ preached on the most public day of the festival, in the midst of the temple, over which his enemies enjoyed a quiet reign, and after that they had prepared a band of officers, but because God restrained their rage? Yet it is highly useful to us, that the Evangelist introduces Christ exclaiming aloud, *Let all who thirst come to me* For we infer from it that the invitation was not addressed to one or two persons only, or in a low and gentle whisper, but that this doctrine is proclaimed to all, in such a manner that none may be ignorant of it, but those who, of their own accord shutting their ears, will not receive this loud and distinct cry.

*If any man thirst.* By this clause he exhorts all to partake of his blessings, provided that, from a conviction of their own poverty, they desire to obtain assistance. For it is true that we are all poor and destitute of every blessing, but it is far from being true that all are roused by a conviction of their poverty to seek relief. Hence it arises that many persons do not stir a foot, but wretchedly wither and decay, and there are even very many who are not affected by a perception of their emptiness, until the Spirit of God, by his own fire, kindle *hunger and thirst* in their hearts. It belongs to the Spirit, therefore, to cause us to desire his grace.

As to the present passage, we ought to observe, first, that none are called to obtain the riches of the Spirit but those who burn with the desire of them. For we know that the pain of *thirst* is most acute and tormenting, so that the very strongest men, and those who can endure any amount of toil, are overpowered by *thirst*. And yet he invites the *thirsty* rather than the hungry, in order to pursue the metaphor which he afterwards employs in the word *water* and the word *drink*, that all the parts of the discourse may agree with each other. And I have no doubt that he alludes to that passage in Isaiah, *All that thirst, come to the waters*,

(Isaiah 55:1.) For what the Prophet there ascribes to God must have been at length fulfilled in Christ, as also that which the blessed Virgin sung, that

those who are rich and full he sendeth empty away,

(Luke 1:53.)

He therefore enjoins us to come direct to himself, as if he had said, that it is he alone who can fully satisfy the *thirst* of all, and that all who seek even the smallest alleviation of their thirst anywhere else are mistaken, and labor in vain.

*And let him drink.* To the exhortation a promise is added; for though the *word* — *let him drink* — conveys an exhortation, still it contains within itself a promise; because Christ testifies that he is not a dry and worn-out cistern, but an inexhaustible fountain, which largely and abundantly supplies all who will come *to drink*. Hence it follows that, if we ask from him what we want, our desire will not be disappointed.

**38.** *He who believeth in me.* He now points out the manner of coming, which is, that we must approach, not with the feet, but by faith; or rather, *to come* is nothing else than *to believe*, at least, if you define accurately the word *believe*; as we have already said that we *believe in* Christ, when we embrace him as he is held out to us in the Gospel, full of power, wisdom, righteousness, purity, life, and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Besides, he now confirms more plainly and fully the promise which we lately mentioned; for he shows that he has a rich abundance to satisfy us to the full.

*Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* The metaphor appears, no doubt, to be somewhat harsh, when he says that *rivers of living water shall flow out of the belly of believers*; but there can be no doubt as to the meaning, that they who believe shall suffer no want of spiritual blessings. He calls it *living water*, the fountain of which never grows dry, nor ceases to flow continually. As to the word *rivers* being in the plural number, I interpret it as denoting the diversified graces of the Spirit, which are necessary for the spiritual life of the soul. In short, the perpetuity, as well as the abundance, of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit,<sup>195</sup> is here promised to us. Some understand the saying — that *waters flow out of the belly of believers* — to mean, that he to whom the Spirit has been given makes a part *to flow* to his brethren, as there ought to be mutual communication between us. But I consider it to be a simpler meaning, that whosoever shall believe in Christ shall have a fountain of life springing up, as it were, in himself, as Christ said formerly,

He who shall drink of this water shall never thirst,

(John 4:14;)

for while ordinary drinking quenches thirst only for a short time, Christ says that by faith we draw the Spirit, that he may become *a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*

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195 “Des dons et graces du Saint Esprit.”

Still he does not say that, on the first day, believers are so fully satisfied with Christ, that ever afterwards they neither hunger nor thirst; but, on the contrary, the enjoyment of Christ kindles a new desire of him. But the meaning is, that the Holy Spirit is like a living and continually flowing fountain in believers; as Paul also declares that he is life in us, ([Romans 8:10](#),) though we still carry about, in the remains of sin, the cause of death. And, indeed, as every one partakes of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, according to the measure of his faith, we cannot possess a perfect fullness of them in the present life. But believers, while they make progress in faith, continually aspire to fresh additions of the Spirit, so that the first-fruits which they have tasted carry them forward to perpetuity of life. But we are also reminded by it, how small is the capacity of our faith, since the graces of the Spirit scarcely come into us by drops, which would flow like rivers, if we gave due admission to Christ; that is, if faith made us capable of receiving him.

As the Scripture saith. Some confine this to the former clause, and others to the latter clause; for my own part, I extend it to the entire scope of the discourse. Besides, Christ does not here, in my opinion, point out any particular passage of Scripture, but produces a testimony drawn from the ordinary doctrine of the Prophets. For whenever the Lord, promising an abundance of his Spirit, compares it to living waters, he looks principally to the kingdom of Christ, to which he directs the minds of believers. All the predictions of living waters, therefore, have their fulfillment in Christ, because he alone hath opened and displayed the hidden treasures of God. The reason why the graces of the Spirit are poured out on him is, that we may all draw out of his fullness, ([John 1:16](#).)

Those persons, therefore, whom Christ so kindly and graciously calls, and who wander in every direction, deserve to perish miserably.

**39.** *But this he spoke of the Spirit.* The word *water* is sometimes applied to *the Spirit* on account of its purity, because it is his office to cleanse our pollutions; but in this and similar passages this term is employed in a different acceptance, which is, that we are destitute of all the sap and moisture of life, unless when the Spirit of God quickens us, and when he waters us, as it were, by secret vigor. Under one part he includes the whole;<sup>196</sup> for under the one word *water* he includes all the parts of life. Hence we infer also, that all who have not been regenerated by the Spirit of Christ ought to be reckoned dead, whatever may be the pretended life of which they boast.

*For the Holy Spirit was not yet given.* We know that the Spirit is eternal; but the Evangelist declares that, so long as Christ dwelt in the world in the mean form of a servant, that grace of the Spirit, which was poured out on men after the resurrection of Christ, had not been openly manifested. And, indeed, he speaks comparatively, in the same manner as when the New Testament is compared to the Old. God promises his Spirit to his elect and believers,

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196 “Sous une partie il comprend le tout.”

<sup>197</sup> as if he had never given him to the Fathers. At that very time, the disciples had undoubtedly received the first-fruits of the Spirit; for whence comes faith but from the Spirit? The Evangelist, therefore, does not absolutely affirm that the grace of the Spirit was not offered and given <sup>198</sup> to believers before the death of Christ, but that it was not yet so bright and illustrious as it would afterwards become. For it is the highest ornament of the kingdom of Christ, that he governs his Church by his Spirit; but he entered into the lawful and — what may be called — the solemn possession of his kingdom, when he was exalted to the right hand of the Father; so that we need not wonder if he delayed till that time the full manifestation of the Spirit.

But one question still remains to be answered. Does he mean here the visible graces of the Spirit, or the regeneration which is the fruit of adoption? I answer: The Spirit, who had been promised at the coming of Christ, appeared in those visible gifts, as in mirrors; but here the question relates strictly to the power of the Spirit, by which we are born again in Christ, and become new creatures. That we lie on earth poor, and famished, and almost destitute of spiritual blessings, while Christ now sits in glory at the right hand of the Father, and clothed with the highest majesty of government, ought to be imputed to our slothfulness, and to the small measure of our faith.

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197 “A ses eleus et fideles.”

198 “Offerte et donnee.”

### John 7:40-44

**40.** Many of the multitude, therefore, having heard this sermon, said, This is truly a Prophet.<sup>199</sup> **41.** Others said, This is the Christ. And others said, But will Christ come out of Galilee? **42.** Doth not the Scripture say that Christ will come from the seed of David, and from the town of Bethlehem, where David dwelt? **43.** There was therefore a difference of opinion in the multitude on account of him. **44.** And some of them wished to seize him, but no man laid hands on him.

**40.** *Many of the multitude.* The Evangelist now relates what fruit followed from this last sermon of our Lord Jesus Christ; namely, that some thought one thing and some another, so that *a difference of opinion arose among the people* It ought to be observed that John does not speak of the open enemies of Christ, or of those who were already filled with deadly hatred<sup>200</sup> against sound doctrine, but of the common people, among whom there ought to have been greater integrity. He enumerates three classes of them.

*He is truly a Prophet.* The first acknowledged that Jesus *was truly a Prophet*, from which we infer that they did not dislike his doctrine. But, on the other hand, how light and trifling this confession was, is evident from the fact, that, while they approve of the Teacher, they neither understand what he means, nor relish what he says; for they could not truly receive him *as a Prophet*, without, at the same time, acknowledging that he is the Son of God and the Author of their salvation. Yet this is good in them, that they perceive in Christ something Divine, which leads them to regard him with reverence; for this willingness to learn might afterwards give an easy opening to faith.

**41.** *Others said, He is the Christ.* The second have a more correct opinion than the first; for they plainly acknowledge that he is the Christ; but the third<sup>201</sup> rise up against them, and hence proceeds the debate. By this example we are warned that we ought not to think it strange in the present day, if men are divided among themselves by various controversies. We learn that Christ's sermon produced a schism, and that not among Gentiles who were strangers to the faith, but in the midst of the Church of Christ, and even in the chief seat of the Church. Shall the doctrine of Christ be blamed on that account, as if it were the cause of disturbances? Nay rather, though the whole world were in commotion, the word of God is so precious, that we ought to wish that it were received, at least by a few. There is no reason, therefore, why our consciences should be distressed, when we see those who wish to be accounted the people of God fighting with each other by contrary opinions.

199 "Cestuy-ci est veritablement Prophete, ou, le Prophete." — "This is truly a Prophet, or, the Prophet."

200 "De mortelle haine."

201 "Les troisiemes."

Yet it ought also to be observed that divisions do not properly draw their origin from the Gospel; for there can be no firm agreement among men except in undoubted truth. As to the peace maintained among those who know not God, it arises more from stupidity than from true agreement. In short, of all the differences which spring up, when the Gospel is preached, the cause and seed formerly lay concealed in men; but when they are awakened, as it were, out of sleep, they begin to move, just as vapours are produced by something else than the sun, although it is not till the sun arises that they make their appearance.

*But will Christ come out of Galilee?* That they may not be thought to reject Christ on insufficient grounds, they fortify themselves by the testimony of Scripture; and though they do violence to this passage, by turning it improperly against Christ, still they have some appearance of truth. In this point only they are in the wrong, that they make Christ a Galilean. But whence arises this ignorance but from contempt? For if they had taken the trouble to inquire, they would have seen that Christ was adorned with both titles; that he was *born in Bethlehem*, and that he was *the son of David*. But such is our natural disposition; in matters of little consequence we are ashamed of being indolent, while, in the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, we slumber without any concern. It is likewise of importance to observe, that those men are diligent and industrious in seeking an excuse for turning aside from Christ, but, at the same time, are astonishingly slow and dull in receiving sound doctrine. In this manner, out of the Scriptures themselves, which lead us by the hand to Christ, men frequently make obstacles for themselves, that they may not come to Christ.

**44.** *Some of them wished to seize him.* By these words the Evangelist means, that they not only despised Christ, but that their wicked rejection of him was accompanied by cruelty and eagerness to do him injury; for superstition is always cruel. That their efforts were unavailing, we ought to ascribe to the providence of God; for since Christ's *hour was not yet come*, as has been formerly said, guarded by the protection of his Father, on which he relied, he surmounted all dangers.

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### John 7:45-53

45. So the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, Why have you not brought him? 46. The officers answered, Never man spoke like this man. 47. The Pharisees therefore answered them, And are you also seduced? 48. Hath any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed in him? 49. But this multitude, who know not the law, are accursed. 50. Nicodemus said to them, (he who came to him by night, for he was one of them,) 51. Doth our law judge a man before it hath heard him, and knoweth what he doth? 52. They answered and said to him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and see, that no Prophet hath arisen out of Galilee. 53. And every man went to his own house.

45. *So the officers came.* Here we may see how blind is the arrogance of men. To such an extent do they admire and adore the greatness which renders them eminent, that they have no hesitation in trampling under foot morality and religion. If any thing happen contrary to their wish, they would willingly mingle heaven and earth; for when these haughty and wicked priests<sup>202</sup> ask, *why Christ was not brought*, they magnify their power so greatly as if nothing ought to oppose their command.

46. *Never man spoke like this man.* Those officers acknowledge that they are subdued and vanquished by the word of Christ, and yet they do not on that account repent or give due honor to the word. If it be true, that *never man spoke like this man*, why did not the Divine power, which they were compelled to feel, touch their hearts in such a manner as to cause them to devote themselves wholly to God? But it was necessary that the prediction of Isaiah should thus be accomplished:

he will prostrate the wicked by the breath of his mouth,  
(Isaiah 11:4.)

Nay more, we shall afterwards see how those who were attempting to put him to death, overwhelmed by the voice of Christ alone, and as if they had been struck down with mallets, fell backwards, (John 18:6.) Let us, therefore, learn that the doctrine of Christ possesses such power as even to terrify the wicked; but as this tends to their destruction, let us take care that we be softened, instead of being broken. Even in the present day, we see many persons who too much resemble those officers, who are reluctantly drawn into admiration of the doctrine of the Gospel, and yet are so far from yielding to Christ, that they still remain in the enemy's camp. There are others even worse, who, for the sake of obtaining favor with the wicked, employ all the opprobrious terms which they can find for basely slandering that doctrine, which, notwithstanding, they acknowledge to be from God, because they are convinced of it in their hearts.<sup>203</sup>

202 "Ces orgueilleux et méchants sacrificateurs."

203 "Laquelle toutefois ils confessent être de Dieu, d'autant qu'ils en sont convaincus en leurs cœurs."

47. *And are you also seduced?* While they reprove their officers, they endeavor, at the same time, to keep them in subjection. For by these words they mean, that it would be unreasonable and unbecoming that they should not remain steady, though the whole people should revolt. But we must see on what argument they rest, when they so haughtily insult Christ.

48. *Has any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed in him?* “He has none on his side,” they say, “but low and ignorant men; *the rulers*, and every person of distinction, are opposed to him.” They expressly name *the Pharisees*, because they had a reputation above others, both for knowledge and holiness, so that they might be said to be the princes of the people. This objection appears to have some plausibility; for if the rulers and governors of the Church do not retain their authority, it is impossible that any thing shall ever be properly done, or that the good order of the Church shall long continue. We know what are the fierce passions of the common people; in consequence of which the most frightful disorder must follow, when every man is allowed to do what he pleases. The authority of those who rule is therefore a necessary bridle for preserving the good order of the Church; and, accordingly, it was provided by the Law of God that, if any question or controversy should arise, it should be submitted to the decision of the High Priest, (*Deuteronomy 17:8.*)

But they err in this respect, that, while they claim for themselves the highest authority, they are unwilling to submit to God. It is true that God conferred the power of judgment on the high priest, but God did not intend that the high priest should decide, except according to his Law. All the authority that is possessed by pastors, therefore, is subject to the word of God, that all may be kept in their own rank, from the greatest to the smallest, and that God alone may be exalted. If pastors who honestly and sincerely discharge their duty, claim authority for themselves, this glorying will be holy and lawful; but when the mere authority of men is supported, without the authority of God’s word, it is vain and useless boasting. But it often happens that wicked men rule in the Church; and therefore we must beware of giving any authority to men, as soon as they depart from the word of God.

We see that nearly all the prophets were tormented by this kind of annoyance; for, in order to bury their doctrine, men continually brought against them the magnificent titles of Princes, of Priests, and of the Church. Provided with the same armor, Papists in the present day rage not less fiercely than did the adversaries of Christ and of the Prophets in former times. It is a horrible blindness, indeed, when a mortal man is not ashamed to oppose himself to God; but to such a pitch of madness does Satan carry those who set a higher value on their own ambition than on the truth of God. Meanwhile, it is our duty to cherish such a reverence for the word of God as shall extinguish all the splendor of the world, and scatter its vain pretensions; for miserable would be our condition, if our salvation depended on the will of princes, and far too unsteady would our faith be, if it were to stand or fall according to their pleasure.

49. *But this multitude.* The first part of their pride was, that, relying on the title of Priests, they wished to subject all to them in a tyrannical manner. The next is, that they despise others as men of no estimation, as those who excessively flatter themselves are always disposed to abuse others, and an immoderate love of ourselves is accompanied by contempt of the brethren. They pronounce the whole populace to be *accursed*; and why? It is no doubt alleged by them that *the people do not know the law*; but another reason, which they concealed, was, that they thought that there was no holiness but in their own rank. In like manner, the Popish priests in our own day pretend that none but themselves deserve to be called the Church; and all others, whom they call the laity, they despise as if they were profane persons. But to throw down such madness of pride, God prefers the mean and despised to those who hold the highest authority and power. And it ought to be observed that they here boast of *knowledge*, not that which instructs men in religion and the fear of God, but such as they possessed while, with magisterial pride, they gave forth their responses, as if they alone had been qualified to interpret the law. It is undoubtedly true, that all who have not been instructed in the law of God are *accursed*, because by the knowledge of it we are truly sanctified. But this knowledge is not confined to a few who, swelled with false confidence, wish to exclude themselves from the rank of other men, but belongs in common to all the children of God, that all, from the smallest even to the greatest, may be united in the same obedience of faith.

50. *Nicodemus said to them.* The Evangelist describes *Nicodemus* as a neutral man, who does not venture to undertake in good earnest the defense of sound doctrine, and yet cannot endure to have the truth oppressed.

*He who came to Jesus by night.* This circumstance is mentioned by the Evangelist, partly to the praise, and partly to the disgrace, of *Nicodemus*. If he had not loved the doctrine of Christ, he would never have dared to meet the rage of wicked men; for he knew that, if any of them but opened his mouth, he would be immediately exposed to dislike and to danger. When, therefore, he ventures to throw out one word, however feeble it may be, some small spark of godliness shines from his heart; but in not defending Christ openly, he manifests excessive timidity. Thus the Evangelist means that he has still a hankering after the concealment of the night, and is not a true disciple of Christ. He says that he once *came to Jesus by night*, but remained openly among his enemies, and kept his place in their camp.

This ought to be the more carefully observed, because there are many in the present day who plead that they resemble *Nicodemus*, and hope that, by assuming this mask, they will mock God with impunity. Granting what they ask, that there is no difference between them and *Nicodemus*, what assistance, pray, do they derive from such an example? *Nicodemus* says that Christ *ought not to be condemned until he be heard*; and the same thing might be said of a robber or an assassin; for it is a well-known and proverbial sentiment, that it is better to acquit the innocent than to condemn the guilty. Besides, in his attempts

to release the person of Christ, he leaves and abandons the doctrine. What shall we find here that is worthy of a believer or a Christian?<sup>204</sup> Thus the seed of the gospel, which afterwards bore fruit, was still concealed and choked in him. We shall apply this example far more profitably to another purpose, that the Lord frequently causes the doctrine, which seemed to have perished, gradually to take a concealed root, and, after a long period, to put forth some bud, first like an untimely plant, afterwards lively and vigorous; just as the faith of Nicodemus acquired new and sudden vigor from the death of Christ.

52. *Art thou also from Galilee?* They say that all who favor Christ are *from Galilee*, and this is spoken reproachfully, as if he could not have any person among his followers except from the small and unknown corner of *Galilee*<sup>205</sup> The extreme violence to which they are excited against Nicodemus, shows with what furious hatred they burned against Christ; for he had not avowedly undertaken to defend Christ, but had only said that *he ought not to be condemned before he was heard* Thus among the Papists in our own day, no man can show the slightest token of candour that the Gospel may not be oppressed, but immediately the enemies fly into a passion, and exclaim that he is a heretic.

53. *And every man went to his own house.* Now follows an astonishing close of the transaction. If any one take into account what was the reign of the priests at that time, with what rage they were excited, and how vast was their retinue, and, on the other hand, if he consider that Christ was unarmed and defenceless, and that there was no body of men to protect him, the conclusion must be, that it was all over with him a hundred times. When so formidable a conspiracy is dissolved of its own accord, and when all those men, like waves of the sea, break themselves by their own violence, who will not acknowledge that they were scattered by the hand of God? But God always continues to be like himself; and therefore, whenever he pleases, he will bring to nothing all the efforts of enemies, so that, while they have everything in their power, and are ready and prepared to execute their design, they will depart without having done their work. And we have often found that, whatever contrivances our enemies have made to extinguish the Gospel, yet by the amazing kindness of God, it immediately fell powerless to the ground.

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204 “D’un homme fidele et Chrestien.”

205 “De ce petit coin incognee de Galilee.”

# CHAPTER 8

## John 8:1-11

1. But Jesus went to the mountain of Olives. 2. And early in the morning he again came to the temple, and all the people came to him; and sitting down, he taught them 3. And the scribes and Pharisees bring to him a woman caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst, 4. They say to him, Master, this woman was caught in the very act, while she was committing adultery. 5. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such persons; but what sayest thou? 6. Now they said this, trying him, that they might have ground for accusing him. But Jesus, casting down his eyes,<sup>206</sup> wrote with the finger on the ground. 7. And as they persisted in asking him, he lifted up his eyes,<sup>207</sup> and said to them, He who is without sin amongst you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9. And having heard that, and being reproved by their conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even to the last; so that Jesus was left alone, and the woman who stood in the midst. 10. And Jesus, lifting up his eyes, having seen nobody but the woman, said to her, Woman, where are thy accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? 11. She said, No man, Lord. Jesus answered her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

3. *And the scribes and Pharisees bring to him.* It is plain enough that this passage was unknown anciently to the Greek Churches; and some conjecture that it has been brought from some other place and inserted here. But as it has always been received by the Latin Churches, and is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and contains nothing unworthy of an Apostolic Spirit, there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage. When the Evangelist says that *the scribes brought to him a woman*, he means that it was done by an agreement among them, in order to lay traps for Christ. He expressly mentions *the Pharisees*, because they were the chief persons in the rank of *scribes*. In adopting this pretense for slander, they display enormous wickedness, and even their own lips accuse them; for they do not disguise that they have a plain commandment of the Law, and hence it follows that they act maliciously in putting a question as if it were a doubtful matter. But their intention was, to constrain Christ to depart from his office of preaching grace, that he might appear to be fickle and unsteady. They expressly state that adulteresses are condemned by Moses, ([Leviticus 20:10](#)), that they may hold Christ bound by the sentence already given by the Law, for it was not lawful to acquit those whom the Law condemned; and, on the other hand, if he had consented to the Law, he might be thought to be somewhat unlike himself.

206 "S'enclinant en bas." — "Stooping down."

207 "Il se dressa."

6. *And Jesus stooping down.* By this attitude he intended to show that he despised them. Those who conjecture that *he wrote* this or the other thing, in my opinion, do not understand his meaning. Nor do I approve of the ingenuity of Augustine, who thinks that in this manner the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is pointed out, because Christ did not write on *tables of stone*, ([Exodus 31:18](#)), but on man, who is dust and earth. For Christ rather intended, by doing nothing, to show how unworthy they were of being heard; just as if any person, while another was speaking to him, were to draw lines on the wall, or to turn his back, or to show, by any other sign, that he was not attending to what was said. Thus in the present day, when Satan attempts, by various methods, to draw us aside from the right way of teaching, we ought disdainfully to pass by many things which he holds out to us. The Papists tease us, to the utmost of their power, by many trifling cavils, as if they were throwing clouds into the air. If godly teachers be laboriously employed in examining each of those cavils, they will begin to weave Penelope's web;<sup>208</sup> and therefore delays of this sort, which do nothing but hinder the progress of the Gospel, are wisely disregarded.

7. *He who is without sin among you.* He said this according to the custom of the Law; for God commanded that the witnesses should, with their own hands, put malefactors to death, according to the sentence which had been pronounced on them; that greater caution might be used in bearing testimony, ([Deuteronomy 17:7](#).) There are many who proceed rashly to overwhelm their brother by perjury, because they do not think that they inflict a deadly wound by their tongue. And this very argument, had weight with those slanderers, desperate as they were; for no sooner do they obtain a sight of it, than they lay aside those fierce passions with which they were swelled when they came. Yet there is this difference between the injunction of the Law and the words of Christ, that in the Law God merely enjoined that they should not condemn a man with the tongue, unless they were permitted to put him to death with their own hands; but here Christ demands from the witnesses perfect innocence, so that no man ought to accuse another of crime, unless he be pure, and free from every fault. Now what he said, at that time, to a few persons, we ought to view as spoken to all, that whoever accuses another, ought to impose on himself a law of innocence; otherwise, we do not pursue wicked actions, but rather are hostile to the persons of men.

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208 "Ce sera toujours a recommencer;" — "they will always have to begin anew." Dropping the classical allusion, our Author has thus conveyed the meaning to his countrymen in plain terms. All who have read Homer's *Odyssey* will remember *Penelope*, the wife of *Ulysses*, and especially that part of her history to which Calvin refers, that what she wove during the day she unravelled during the night, and thus accomplished her resolution that she should be daily employed in weaving, and yet that her web should not be finished till after her husband's return. *Penelopes telam texere*, to weave *Penelope's web*, was a proverbial expression, which the Romans borrowed from the Greeks. — *Ed.*

In this way, however, Christ appears to take out of the world all judicial decisions, so that no man shall dare to say that he has a right to punish crimes. For shall a single judge be found, who is not conscious of having something that is wrong? Shall a single witness be produced who is not chargeable with some fault? He appears, therefore, to forbid all witnesses to give public testimony, and all judges to occupy the judgment-seat. I reply: this is not an absolute and unlimited prohibition, by which Christ forbids sinners to do their duty in correcting the sins of others; but by this word he only reproves hypocrites, who mildly flatter themselves and their vices, but are excessively severe, and even act the part of felons, in censuring others. No man, therefore, shall be prevented by his own sins from correcting the sins of others, and even from punishing them, when it may be found necessary, provided that both in himself and in others he hate what ought to be condemned; and in addition to all this, every man ought to begin by interrogating his own conscience, and by acting both as witness and judge against himself, before he come to others. In this manner shall we, without hating men, make war with sins.

*9. And being reproved by their conscience.* Here we perceive how great is the power of an evil conscience. Though those wicked hypocrites intended to entrap Christ by their cavils, yet as soon as he pierces their consciences by a single word, shame puts them to flight. This is the hammer with which we must break the pride of hypocrites. They must be summoned to the judgment-seat of God. Though it is possible that the shame, with which they were struck before men, had greater influence over them than the fear of God, still it is a great matter that, of their own accord, they acknowledge themselves to be guilty, when they thus fly away as if they were confounded. It is immediately added,

*Beginning from the eldest even to the last.* Our attention is drawn to this circumstance, that, according as each of them surpassed the others in honorable rank, he was the more quickly moved by his condemnation. And would to God that <sup>209</sup> our *scribes*, who in the present day sell their labors to the Pope to make war with Christ, had at least as much modesty as those men; but they are so destitute of shame that, while they have rendered themselves infamous by every detestable crime, they glory in the fact that they are permitted to be as abominable as they choose, without being punished. We ought also to observe how widely this conviction of sin, by which the scribes were affected, differs from true repentance. For we ought to be affected by the judgment of God in such a manner, that we shall not seek a place of concealment to avoid the presence of the Judge, but rather shall go direct to Him, in order to implore his forgiveness.

*Jesus was left alone.* This was brought about by the Spirit of wisdom, that those wicked men, having gained nothing by tempting Christ, went away. Nor is there any reason to doubt that we shall succeed in defeating all the contrivances of our enemies, provided that

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209 "Pléust a Dieu que."



we permit ourselves to be governed by the same Spirit. But it frequently happens that they gain an advantage over us, because, not attending to their snares, we are not careful to take advice, or rather, trusting to our own wisdom, we do not consider how much we need the government of the Holy Spirit. He says that Christ remained *alone*; not that the people, whom he was formerly teaching, had left him, but because all the *scribes*, who had brought the adulteress, gave him no farther annoyance. When it is said that *the woman* remained with Christ, let us learn by this example that there is nothing better for us than to be brought, as guilty, to his tribunal, provided that we surrender ourselves mildly and submissively to his government.

**11.** *Neither do I condemn thee.* We are not told that Christ absolutely acquitted the woman, but that he allowed her to go at liberty. Nor is this wonderful, for he did not wish to undertake any thing that did not belong to his office. He had been sent by the Father to gather *the lost sheep*, ([Matthew 10:6](#);) and, therefore, mindful of his calling, he exhorts the woman to repentance, and comforts her by a promise of grace. They who infer from this that adultery ought not to be punished with death, must, for the same reason, admit that inheritances ought not to be divided, because Christ refused to arbitrate in that matter between two brothers, ([Luke 12:13](#).) Indeed, there will be no crime whatever that shall not be exempted from the penalties of the law, if adultery be not punished; for then the door will be thrown open for any kind of treachery, and for poisoning, and murder, and robbery. Besides, the adulteress, when she bears an unlawful child, not only robs the name of the family, but violently takes away the right of inheritance from the lawful offspring, and conveys it to strangers. But what is worst of all, the wife not only dishonors the husband to whom she had been united, but prostitutes herself to shameful wickedness, and likewise violates the sacred covenant of God, without which no holiness can continue to exist in the world.

Yet the Popish theology is, that in this passage Christ has brought to us the Law of grace, by which adulterers are freed from punishment. And though they endeavor, by every method, to efface from the minds of men the grace of God, such grace as is every where declared to us by the doctrine of the Gospel, yet in this passage alone they preach aloud the Law of grace. Why is this, but that they may pollute, with unbridled lust, almost every marriage-bed, and may escape unpunished? Truly, this is the fine fruit<sup>210</sup> which we have reaped from the diabolical system of celibacy, that they who are not permitted to marry a lawful wife can commit fornication without restraint. But let us remember that, while Christ forgives the sins of men, he does not overturn political order, or reverse the sentences and punishments appointed by the laws.

*Go, and sin no more.* Hence we infer what is the design of the grace of Christ. It is, that the sinner, being reconciled to God, may honor the Author of his salvation by a good and

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210 "Voyla la beau fruit."

holy life. In short, by the same word of God, when forgiveness is offered to us, we are likewise called to repentance. Besides, though this exhortation looks forward to the future, still it humbles sinners by recalling to remembrance their past life.

### John 8:12-14

12. Therefore Jesus spoke again to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. 13. The Pharisees therefore said to him, Thou testifiest concerning thyself, thy testimony is not true.<sup>211</sup> 14. Jesus answered, and said to them, Though I testify concerning myself, my testimony is true:<sup>212</sup> for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but you know not whence I come, and whither I go.

12. *I am the light of the world.* Those who leave out the former narrative, which relates to the adulteress,<sup>213</sup> connect this discourse of Christ with the sermon which he delivered on the last day of the assembly. It is a beautiful commendation of Christ, when he is called *the light of the world*; for, since we are all blind by nature, a remedy is offered, by which we may be freed and rescued from darkness and made partakers of the true *light*. Nor is it only to one person or to another that this benefit is offered, for Christ declares that he is *the light of the whole world*; for by this universal statement he intended to remove the distinction, not only between Jews and Gentiles, but between the learned and ignorant, between persons of distinction and the common people.

But we must first ascertain what necessity there is for seeking this *light*; for men will never present themselves to Christ to be illuminated, until they have known both that *this world* is darkness, and that they themselves are altogether blind. Let us therefore know that, when the manner of obtaining this light is pointed out to us in Christ, we are all condemned for blindness, and everything else which we consider to be *light* is compared to darkness, and to a very dark night. For Christ does not speak of it as what belongs to him in common with others, but claims it as being peculiarly his own. Hence it follows, that out of Christ there is not even a spark of true *light*. There may be some appearance of brightness, but it resembles lightning, which only dazzles the eyes. It must also be observed, that the power and office of illuminating is not confined to the personal presence of Christ; for though he is far removed from us with respect to his body, yet he daily sheds his light upon us, by the doctrine of the Gospel, and by the secret power of his Spirit. Yet we have not a full definition of this light, unless we learn that we are illuminated by the Gospel and by the Spirit of Christ, that we may know that the fountain of all knowledge and wisdom is hidden in him.

211 “Ton tesmoignage n’est pas vrai; *c’est a dire, n’est point digne de foy.*” — “Thy testimony is not true; that is, is not worthy of credit.”

212 “Mon tesmoignage est vrai; *c’est a dire, digne de foy.*” — “My testimony is true; *that is, worthy of credit.*”

213 “De la femme adultere.”

*He who followeth me.* To the doctrine he adds an exhortation, which he immediately afterwards confirms by a promise. For when we learn that all who allow themselves to be governed by Christ are out of danger of going astray, we ought to be excited to follow him, and, indeed, by stretching out his hand — as it were — he draws us to him. We ought also to be powerfully affected by so large and magnificent a promise, that they who shall direct their eyes to Christ are certain that, even in the midst of darkness, they will be preserved from going astray; and that not only for a short period, but until they have finished their course. For that is the meaning of the words used in the future tense, *he shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life* Such is also the import of this latter clause, in which the perpetuity of *life* is stated in express terms. We ought not to fear, therefore, lest it leave us in the middle of the journey, for it conducts us even to *life* The genitive *of life*, in accordance with the Hebrew idiom, is employed, instead of the adjective, to denote the effect; as if he had said, *the life-giving light* We need not wonder that such gross darkness of errors and superstitions prevails in *the world*, in which there are so few that have their eyes fixed on Christ.

**13.** *The Pharisees therefore said.* They adduce as an objection what is commonly said, that no man ought to be trusted, when speaking in his own cause. For a *true testimony* is put for “what is lawful and worthy of credit.” In short, they mean that it is of no use for him to speak, unless he bring proof from some other quarter.

**14.** *Though I testify concerning myself.* Christ replies, that his testimony possesses sufficient credit and authority, because he is not a private person belonging to the great body of men, but holds a very different station. For when he says, that *he knoweth whence he came, and whither he goeth*, he thus excludes himself from the ordinary rank of men. The meaning therefore is, that every man is heard with suspicion in his own cause, and it is provided by the laws, that no man shall be believed, when he speaks for his own advantage. But this does not apply to the Son of God, who holds a rank above the whole world; for he is not reckoned as belonging to the rank of men, but has received from his Father this privilege, to reduce all men to obedience to him by a single word.

*I know whence I came.* By these words he declares that his origin is not from the world, but that he proceeded from God, and therefore that it would be unjust and unreasonable that his doctrine, which is Divine, should be subjected to the laws of men. But as he was at that time clothed with the form of a servant, in consequence of which they despised him on account of the mean condition of the flesh, he sends them away to the future glory of his resurrection, from which his Divinity, formerly hidden and unknown, received a clear demonstration. That intermediate condition, therefore, ought not to have prevented the Jews from submitting to God’s only ambassador, who had been formerly promised to them in the Law.

*But you know not whence I came, and whither I go.* He means that his glory is not at all diminished by their unbelief. Again, as he has given the same testimony to us, our faith ought to despise all the reports and slanders of wicked men; for it cannot be founded upon God without rising far above the loftiest pride of the world. But in order that we may perceive the majesty of his Gospel, we ought always to direct our eyes to the heavenly glory of the Son of God,<sup>214</sup> and to hear him speaking in the world, so as to remember *whence he came*, and what authority he now possesses, after having discharged his embassy. For as he humbled himself for a time, so now he is highly exalted<sup>215</sup> at the right hand of the Father, *that every knee may bow to him*, ([Philippians 2:10.](#))

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214 “Du Fils de Dieu.”

215 “Aussi maintenant est-il haut eleve.”

### John 8:15-20

**15.** You judge according to the flesh; I judge no man. **16.** And if I judge, my judgment is true; <sup>216</sup> for I am not alone, but I and the Father, who hath sent me. **17.** It is even written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. **18.** I am one who testify concerning myself, and the Father who hath sent me testifieth concerning me. **19.** They said therefore to him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, You neither know me nor my Father. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. **20.** These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, teaching in the temple; and no man seized him, because his hour was not yet come.

**15.** *You judge according to the flesh.* This may be explained in two ways; either that they *judge according to* the wicked views of *the flesh*, or that they *judge according to* the appearance of the person. For *the flesh* sometimes denotes the outward appearance of a man; and both meanings agree well with this passage, since wherever either the feelings of *the flesh* prevail, or a regard to the person regulates the judgment, neither truth nor justice dwells. But I think that the meaning will be more certain, if you contrast *the flesh* with *the Spirit*, understanding his meaning to be, that they are not lawful and competent judges, because they have not the Spirit for their guide.

*I judge no man.* Here, too, commentators differ. Some distinguish it thus, that *he does not judge* as man. Others refer it to the time, that while he was on earth, he did not undertake the office of a Judge Augustine gives both expositions, but does not decide between them. But the former distinction cannot at all apply. For this sentence contains two clauses, that Christ *does not judge*, and that *if he judge, his judgment is solid and just*, because it is divine. As to the former clause, therefore, in which he says that *he does not judge*, I confine it to what belongs peculiarly to this passage. For in order the more fully to convict his enemies of pride, he employs this comparison, that they unjustly assume the liberty to *judge*, and yet cannot condemn him, while he merely teaches and abstains from performing the office of a *judge*.

**16.** *And if I judge,* He adds this correction, that he may not appear entirely to surrender his right. *If I judge,* says he, *my judgment is true*, that is, it is entitled to authority. Now the authority arises from this consideration, that he does nothing but according to the commandment of the Father.

*For I am not alone.* This phrase amounts to an affirmative, that he is not one of the ordinary rank of men, but that he must be considered along with the office which was assigned to him by the Father. But why does he not rather make an open assertion of his Divinity, as

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216 “Mon jugement est vray; c’est a dire, digne de foy.” — “My judgment is true; that is, worthy of credit.”

he might truly and justly have done? The reason is, that as his Divinity was concealed under the veil of the flesh, he brings forward his Father, in whom it was more manifest. Still, the object of the discourse is, to show that all that he does and teaches ought to be accounted Divine.

17. *Even in your law it is written.* The argument might, at first sight, appear to be weak, because no man is received as a witness in his own cause. But we ought to remember what I have already said, that the Son of God<sup>217</sup> ought to be excluded from the ordinary number of other men,<sup>218</sup> because he neither is a private individual, nor transacts his own private business. As to his distinguishing himself from his Father, by doing so he accommodates himself to the capacity of his hearers, and that on account of his office, because he was at that time a servant of the Father, from whom, therefore, he asserts that all his doctrine has proceeded.

19. *Where is thy father?* There can be no doubt whatever, that it was in mockery that they inquired about *his Father* For not only do they, with their wonted pride, treat contemptuously what he had said about *the Father*, but they likewise ridicule him for talking loftily about *his Father*, as if he had drawn his birth from heaven. By these words, therefore, they mean that they do not value so highly Christ's *Father*, as to ascribe any thing to the Son on his account. And the reason why there are so many in the present day who, with daring presumption, despise Christ, is, that few consider that God has sent him.

*You neither know me nor my Father.* He does not deign to give them a direct reply, but in a few words reproaches them with the ignorance in which they flattered themselves. They inquired about *the Father*; and yet when they had the Son before their eyes, *seeing, they did not see*, ([Matthew 13:13](#).) It was therefore a just punishment of their pride and wicked ingratitude, that they who despised the Son of God, who had been familiarly offered to them, never approached to *the Father* For how shall any mortal man ascend to the height of God, unless he be raised on high by the hand of his Son? God in Christ condescended to the mean condition of men, so as to stretch out his hand; and do not those who reject God, when he thus approaches to them, deserve to be excluded from heaven?

Let us know that the same thing is spoken to us all; for whoever aspires to know God, and does not begin with Christ, must wander — as it were — in a labyrinth; for it is not without good reason that Christ is called the image of the Father, as has been already said. Again, as all who, leaving Christ, attempt to rise to heaven, after the manner of *the giants*,<sup>219</sup> are destitute of all right knowledge of God, so every man who shall direct his mind and

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217 “Le Fils de Dieu.”

218 “Du nombre commun des autres hommes.”

219 See [page 223, n. 1](#).

all his senses to Christ, will be led straight to the Father. For on good grounds does God declare that,

by the mirror of the Gospel, we clearly behold God in the person of Christ,

(2 Corinthians 3:18.)

And certainly it is an astonishing reward of the obedience of faith, that whosoever humbles himself before the Lord Jesus,<sup>220</sup> penetrates above all the heavens, even to those mysteries which the angels behold and adore.

**20.** *These words spoke Jesus in the treasury.* The treasury was a part of the temple where the sacred offerings were laid up. It was a much frequented place, and hence we infer that this sermon was delivered by Christ amidst a large assembly of men, so that the people had less excuse. The Evangelist likewise holds out to us the astonishing power of God in this respect, that they were constrained to endure Christ openly *teaching in the temple*, though but lately they sought to seize him, and put him to death. For since they held an undisputed sway *in the temple*, so that they ruled there with the fierceness of tyrants, they might have banished Christ from it by a single word. And when he ventured to take upon himself the office of a teacher, why do they not instantly lay violent hands on him? We see then that God caused men to hear him, and guarded him by his protection, so that those savage beasts did not touch him, though they had their throats opened to swallow him.<sup>221</sup> The Evangelist again mentions *his hour*, that we may learn that it is not by the will of men, but by the will of God, that we live and die.

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220 “Quiconque s’humilie devant le Seigneur Jesus.”

221 “Combien qu’ils eussent leurs gueules ouvertes pour l’engloutir.”



### John 8:21-24

**21.** Jesus therefore spake again to them, I go, and you shall seek me, and you shall die in your sin. Whither I go, you cannot come. **22.** The Jews therefore said, Will he kill himself? Because he saith, Whither I go, you cannot come. **23.** Then he said to them, You are from beneath, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. **24.** Therefore I said to you, that you shall die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am, you shall die in your sins.

**21.** *I go.* Perceiving that he is doing no good among these obstinate men, he threatens their destruction; and this is the end of all those who reject the Gospel. For it is not thrown uselessly into the air, but must breathe *the odour either of life or of death*, (2 Corinthians 2:16.) The meaning of these words amounts to this. “The wicked will at length feel how great loss they have suffered by rejecting Christ, when he freely offers himself to them. They will feel it, but it will be too late, for there will be no more room for repentance.” And to alarm them still more by showing them that their judgment is near at hand, in the first place, he says that he will soon *go away*, by which he means that the Gospel is preached to them only for a short time, and that if they allow this opportunity to pass away, *the accepted time and the days appointed for salvation* (Isaiah 49:8; 2 Corinthians 6:2) will not always last. Thus also, in the present day, when Christ knocks at our door, we ought to go immediately to meet him, lest he be wearied by our slothfulness and withdraw from us. And indeed we have learned, by many experiments in all ages, how greatly this departure of Christ is to be dreaded.

*And you shall seek me.* We must first ascertain in what manner the persons now spoken of *sought Christ*; for if they had been truly converted, they would not have *sought* him in vain; because he has not falsely promised that, as soon as a sinner groans, he will be ready to assist him. Christ does not mean, therefore, that they *sought him* by the right way of faith, but that they *sought him*, as men, overwhelmed by the extremity of anguish, look for deliverance on every hand. For unbelievers would desire to have God reconciled to them, but yet they do not cease to fly from him. God calls them; the approach consists in faith and repentance; but they oppose God by hardness of heart, and, overwhelmed with despair, they exclaim against him. In short, they are so far from desiring to enjoy the favor of God, that they do not give him permission to assist them, unless he deny himself, which he will never do.

In this manner, however wicked the scribes were, they would willingly have applied to themselves the redemption which had been promised by the hand of the Messiah, provided that Christ would transform himself, to suit their natural disposition. Wherefore, by these words Christ threatens and denounces to all unbelievers, that, after having despised the doctrine of the Gospel, they will be seized with such anguish, that they shall be constrained

to cry to God, but their howling will be of no avail; because, as we have already said, *seeking, they do not seek* And this is still more plainly expressed in the next clause, when he says, *you shall die in your sin*; for he shows that the cause of their destruction will be, that they were disobedient and rebellious to the very last. What is the nature of *their sin* we shall presently see.

**22. Will he kill himself?** The scribes persevere not only in fearless scorn, but likewise in effrontery; for they ridicule what he had said, that *they cannot follow whither he shall go*; as if they had said, “If he *kill himself*, we acknowledge that we cannot accompany him, because we do not choose to do so.” They regarded Christ’s absence as a matter of no moment, and thought that in all respects they would gain a victory over him; and so they bid him begone wherever he pleases. Shocking stupidity! But thus does Satan infatuate the reprobate, that, intoxicated with more than brutal indifference,<sup>222</sup> they may throw themselves into the midst of the flame of the wrath of God. Do we not in the present day behold the same rage in many who, having stupified their consciences, insolently play off their jests and buffoonery on every thing that they hear about the dreadful judgment of God? Yet it is certain that this is an affected or sardonic smile, for they are pierced inwardly with unseen wounds; but all on a sudden, like men bereft of their senses, they burst out into furious laughter.

**23. You are from beneath, I am from above.** As they did not deserve that he should teach them, he wished only to strike them with reproofs conveyed in few words, as in this passage he declares that they do not receive his doctrine, because they have an utter dislike of the kingdom of God. Under the words, *world* and *beneath*, he includes all that men naturally possess, and thus points out the disagreement which exists between his Gospel and the ingenuity and sagacity of the human mind; for the Gospel is heavenly wisdom, but our mind grovels on the earth. No man, therefore, will ever be qualified to become a disciple of Christ, till Christ has formed him by his Spirit. And hence it arises that faith is so seldom found in the world, because all mankind are naturally opposed and averse to Christ, except those whom he elevates by the special grace of his Holy Spirit.

**24. You shall die in your sins.** Having formerly employed the singular number, *in your sin*, he now resorts to the plural number, *in your sins*; but the meaning is the same, except that in the former passage he intended to point out that unbelief is the source and cause of all evils. Not that there are no other sins but unbelief,<sup>223</sup> or that it is unbelief alone which subjects us to the condemnation of eternal death before God, as some men too extravagantly talk; but because it drives us away from Christ, and deprives us of his grace, from which we ought to expect deliverance from all our sins. That the Jews reject the medicine with obstinate malice, is their mortal disease; and hence it arises that the slaves of Satan do not cease to

222 “Enyvrez d’une stupidite plus que brutale.”

223 “Non pas qu’il n’y a point d’autres pechez que l’incredulite.”

heap up sins on sins, and continually to bring down upon themselves fresh condemnations. And, therefore, he immediately adds, —

*If you do not believe that I am.* For there is no other way for lost men to recover salvation, but to betake themselves to Christ. The phrase, *that I am*, is emphatic; for, in order to make the meaning complete, we must supply all that the Scripture ascribes to the Messiah, and all that it bids us expect from him. But the sum and substance is — the restoration of the Church, the commencement of which is the light of faith, from which proceed righteousness and a new life. Some of the ancient writers have deduced from this passage the Divine essence of Christ; but that is a mistake, for he speaks of his office towards us. This statement is worthy of observation; for men never consider sufficiently the evils in which they are plunged; and though they are constrained to acknowledge their destruction, yet they neglect Christ, and look around them, in every direction, for useless remedies. Wherefore we ought to believe that, until the grace of Christ be manifested to deliver us, nothing but a boundless mass of all evils reigns perpetually in us.<sup>224</sup>

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224 “Il n’y a qu’un amas infini de tous maux qui regne continuellement en nous.”

### John 8:25-29

25. Then they said to him. Who art thou? Jesus said to them, From the beginning,<sup>225</sup> because I also speak to you.<sup>226</sup> 26. I have many things to speak and judge of you; but he who hath sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I have heard from him. 27. They knew not that he spoke to them of the Father. Jesus therefore said to them, 28. When you shall have exalted the Son of man, then shall you know that I am, and that I do nothing of myself; but as the Father hath taught me, I speak. 29. And he who hath sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone, because I always do the things which please him.

25. *From the beginning.* They who translate the words τὴν ἀρχὴν, as if they had been in the nominative case, *I am the beginning*,<sup>227</sup> and as if Christ were here asserting his eternal Divinity, are greatly mistaken. There is no ambiguity of this sort in the Greek, but still the Greek commentators also differ as to the meaning. All of them, indeed, are agreed that a preposition must be understood; but many give to it the force of an adverb, as if Christ had said, “This ought *first* (τὴν ἀρχὴν) to be observed.” Some too — among whom is Chrysostom — render it continuously thus: *The beginning, who also speak to you, I have many things to say and judge of you* This meaning has been put into verse by Nonnus.<sup>228</sup> But a different reading is more generally adopted, and appears to be the true one. I interpret τὴν ἀρχὴν, *from the beginning*; so that the meaning, in my opinion, is this: “I did not arise suddenly, but as I was formerly promised, so now I come forth publicly.” He adds,

*Because I also speak to you;* by which he means that he testifies plainly enough who he is, provided that they had ears. This word, ὅτι *because*, is not employed merely to assign a reason, as if Christ intended to prove that he was *from the beginning*, because *he now speaks*; but he asserts that there is such an agreement between his doctrine and the eternity which he has spoken of, that it ought to be reckoned an undoubted confirmation of it. It may be explained thus: “*According to the beginning*, that is, what I have formerly said, I now, as it

225 “Ou, *ce dont je vous parle des le commencement;*” — “or, *what I tell you from the beginning.*”

226 “Ou, *comme aussi je vous en parle;*” — “or, *as also I speak of it to you.*”

227 Ceux qui traduisent, “Je suis le commencement.”

228 He refers to Nonnus, a Greek writer, who rendered into hexameter verse the Gospel by John. The passage stands thus: Τὴν ἀρχὴν σου λέγει καὶ Χριστὸς ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς, ὅτι παρὰ ἡμῶν

ἔξ ἀρχῆς ἀγορεύει καὶ κρίνει ὑμᾶς. So far as relates to τὴν ἀρχὴν, Nonnus appears to agree with

Calvin; for he renders it ἐξ ἀρχῆς, *from the beginning.* — Ed

were, confirm anew;" or, "And truly what I now also speak, is in accordance with the conditions made in all ages, so as to be a strong confirmation of it."

In short, this reply consists of two clauses; for, under the word *beginning*, he includes an uninterrupted succession of ages, during which God had made a covenant with their fathers. When he says that *he also speaks*, he joins his doctrine with the ancient predictions, and shows that it depends on them. Hence it follows that the Jews had no other reason for their ignorance, than that they did not believe either the Prophets or the Gospel; for it is the same Christ that is exhibited in all of them. They pretended to be disciples of the Prophets, and to look to the eternal covenant of God; but still they rejected Christ, who had been promised *from the beginning*, and presented himself before them.

26. *I have many things to say and judge of you.* Perceiving that he is in the position of one who sings to the deaf, he pursues his discourse no farther, but only declares that God will defend that doctrine, which they despise, because he is the Author of it. "If I wished to accuse you," says he, "your malice and wickedness supply me with ample materials; but I leave you for the present. But my Father, who committed to me the office of a teacher, will not fail to fulfill his promise; for he will always vindicate his word against the wicked and sacrilegious contempt of men." This saying of Christ is of the same import with that of Paul,

If we deny him, he remaineth faithful, he cannot deny himself,

(2 Timothy 2:13.)

In short, he threatens the judgment of God against unbelievers, who refuse to give credit to his word; and he does so on this ground, that God must inevitably defend his truth. Now this is the true firmness of faith, when we believe that God is alone sufficient to establish the authority of his doctrine, though the world should reject it. All who, relying on this doctrine, serve Christ faithfully, may fearlessly accuse the whole world of falsehood.

*And I speak to the world those things which I have heard from him.* He says that he utters nothing which he has not received from the Father; and this is the only confirmation of a doctrine, when the minister shows that what he speaks has proceeded from the Father. Now we know that Christ sustained, at that time, the office of a minister; and, therefore, we need not wonder, if he demands that men listen to him, because he brings to them the commandments of God. Besides, by his example he lays down a general law for the whole Church, that no man ought to be heard, unless he speak from the mouth of God. But while he lays low the wicked arrogance of those men who take upon themselves to speak without the word of God, faithful teachers, who know well the nature of their calling, are fortified and armed by him with unshaken firmness, that, under the guidance of God, they may boldly bid defiance to all mortals.

27. *They did not know that he spoke to them about the Father.* Hence we see how stupid those men are whose understandings are possessed by Satan. Nothing could be more plain than that they were summoned to the judgment-seat of God. But what then? They are alto-

gether blind. This happens daily to other enemies of the Gospel; and such blindness ought to instruct us to walk with fear.<sup>229</sup>

28. *When you shall have exalted the Son of man.* Offended at that stupidity which the Evangelist has described, Christ again declares that they do not deserve that he should open his mouth to speak to them any more.<sup>230</sup> “You now,” says he, “have all your senses — as it were — fascinated, and, therefore, you understand nothing of all that I say; but the time will yet come, when you shall know that a Prophet of God has lived among you, and has spoken to you.” This is the manner in which we ought to deal with wicked men; we ought expressly to summon them to the judgment-seat of God. But this knowledge, which Christ speaks of, comes too late, when the reprobate and unbelievers,<sup>231</sup> dragged to punishment, reluctantly acknowledge that God, to whom they ought mildly to have given honor and reverence, is their Judge. For he does not promise them repentance, but declares that, after they have been struck with new and unexpressed horror at the wrath of God, they will be aroused from that sleep in which they now repose. Thus Adam’s eyes were opened, so that, overwhelmed with shame, he sought in vain for places of concealment, and ultimately was convinced that he was ruined. Yet that knowledge of Adam, which was in itself useless, turned to his advantage through the grace of God; but the reprobate, being overwhelmed with despair, have their eyes opened only for this purpose, that they may perceive their destruction. To this kind of knowledge God conducts them in a variety of ways. Sometimes it happens that, constrained by heavy afflictions, they learn that God is angry with them; sometimes, without any outward punishment, he inwardly torments them; and, at other times, he permits them to sleep until he call them out of the world.

By the term *exalt* Christ points out his own death. He mentions his death, in order to warn them that, though they destroy him according to the flesh, they will gain nothing by it; as if he had said, “Now you treat me with haughty scorn, while I speak to you; but ere long your wickedness will proceed farther, even so far as to put me to death. Then will you triumph, as if you had gained your wish, but within a short time you shall feel, to your utter ruin, how widely my death differs from destruction.” He employs the word *exalt*, in order to vex them the more. Their intention was to plunge Christ into the lowest hell. He tells them that they will be completely disappointed, and that the event will be altogether contrary to what they thus expect. He may, indeed, have intended to allude to the outward form of his death, that he was *to be lifted up* on the cross; but he looked chiefly to the glorious result of it, which soon afterwards followed, contrary to the expectation of all. True, indeed, *in the cross* itself he gained a splendid triumph over Satan, before God and the angels, by *blotting*

229 “A cheminer en crainte.”

230 “Qu’il ouvre plus sa bouche pour leur dire rein.”

231 “Les reprouvez et infideles.”

out the hand-writing of sin, and cancelling the condemnation of death, (Colossians 2:14;) but it was only after that the Gospel had been preached, that this triumph began to be made known to men. The same thing which happened shortly afterwards — that Christ rose out of the grave, and ascended to heaven — is what we ought daily to expect; for, notwithstanding all the contrivances of wicked men to oppress Christ in his Church, not only will he rise in spite of them, but he will turn their wicked efforts into the means of promoting the progress of his kingdom.

*That I am.* I have already stated that this does not refer to Christ's Divine essence, but to his office; which appears still more clearly from what follows, when he affirms that he does nothing but by the command of the Father; for this means, that he was sent by God, and that he performs his office faithfully.

*And that I do nothing of myself.* That is, I do not put myself forward, to attempt anything rashly. Again, the word *speaks*, refers to the same thing, that is, to the office of teaching; for when Christ wishes to prove that he does nothing but by the commandment of the Father, he says that he *speaks* as he has been taught by Him. The meaning of the words, therefore, may be summed up thus: In the whole of these proceedings, which you condemn, no part is my own, but I only execute what God has enjoined upon me; the words which you hear from my mouth are his words, and my calling, of which He is the Author, is directed by him alone. Let us remember, however, what I have sometimes mentioned already, that these words are accommodated to the capacity of the hearers. For, since they thought that Christ was only one of the ordinary rank of men, he asserts that whatever in him is Divine is not his own; meaning that it is not of man or by man; because the Father teaches us by him, and appoints him to be the only Teacher of the Church; and for this reason he affirms that *he has been taught by the Father*

**29.** *And he who hath sent me is with me.* He again boasts that God, under whose guidance and authority he does every thing, will assist him, so that he shall not labor in vain and to no purpose, as if he had said, that the power of the Spirit of God accompanies his ministry. All faithful teachers ought to be endued with the same confidence, so as to entertain no doubt that the hand of God will be near them, when, with a pure conscience, they discharge such a ministry as he demands. For God does not furnish them with his word, in order that they may strike the air with an idle and useless sound, but makes his word successful by the secret efficacy of his Spirit, and at the same time guards them by his protection, that, when their enemies shall have been subdued, they may remain invincible against the whole world. And, indeed, if they judge of themselves and their own powers, they must give way every hour; so that the only method of pursuing is, to be convinced that they are supported by the hand of God.

*Because I do always the things which please him.* We must observe the reason why Christ declares that God is on his side, and that he will never be deprived of his assistance. It is,

because he is regulated entirely by his will, and serves him in sincerity. For this is what he means by the word *always*, that he does not obey God only in part, but is entirely and unreservedly devoted to his service. Wherefore, if we desire to enjoy the same presence of God, our whole reason must be subjected to his authority; for if our senses hold the government in any degree, all our exertions will be fruitless, because the blessing of God will not be on them. And though for a time we may be delighted with the joyful prospect of success, yet the final result will be dismal.

*The Father hath not left me alone* By these words, he indirectly complains of the treachery of his nation, in which he found scarcely any that gave him their support. Yet he shows that he reckons this alone to be abundantly sufficient, that he has God to protect him. Such is the courage with which we ought to be animated in the present day, that we may not give way on account of the small number of believers; for, though the whole world be opposed to his doctrine, still we *are not alone*. Hence, too, it is evident how foolish is the boasting of the Papists, who, while they neglect God, proudly boast of their vast numbers.



### John 8:30-38

**30.** While he spoke these things, many believed on him. **31.** Jesus therefore said to the Jews who believed on him, If you continue in my word, you shall be truly my disciples. **32.** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. **33.** They answered, We are Abraham's seed, and never were enslaved to any one; how then sayest thou, You shall be free? **34.** Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say to you, That every man who committeth sin is the slave of sin. <sup>232</sup> **35.** And the slave <sup>233</sup> remaineth not always in the house, but the son remaineth always. **36.** If the Son then shall make you free, you shall be truly free. **37.** I know that you are the seed of Abraham, but you seek to kill me, because my word dwelleth not in you. <sup>234</sup> **38.** I speak what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.

**30.** *While he spoke these things.* Though the Jews, at that time, almost resembled a dry and barren soil, yet God did not permit the seed of his word to be entirely lost. Thus, contrary to all hopes, and amidst so many obstructions, some fruit appears. But the Evangelist inaccurately gives the name of *faith* to that which was only a sort of preparation for *faith* For he affirms nothing higher concerning them than that they were disposed to receive the doctrine of Christ, to which also the preceding warning refers.

**31.** *If you continue in my word.* Here Christ warns them, in the first place, that it is not enough for any one to have begun well, if their progress to the end do not correspond to it; and for this reason he exhorts to perseverance in the faith those who have tasted of his doctrine. When he says that they who are firmly rooted *in his word*, so as *to continue* in him, *will truly be his disciples*, he means that many profess to be *disciples* who yet are not so in reality, and have no right to be accounted such. He distinguishes his followers from hypocrites by this mark, that they who falsely boasted of faith give way as soon as they have entered into the course, or at least in the middle of it; but believers persevere constantly to the end. If, therefore, we wish that Christ should reckon us to be his disciples, we must endeavor to persevere.

**32.** *And you shall know the truth.* He says, that they who have arrived at some knowledge of it *shall know the truth* True, those whom Christ addresses were as yet uneducated, and scarcely knew the first elements, and therefore we need not wonder if he promises them a more full understanding of his doctrine. But the statement is general. Wherefore, whatever progress any of us have made in the Gospel, let him know that he needs new additions. This

232 "Il est serf de peche."

233 "Le serf."

234 "Pource que ma parole n'a point de lieu en vous;" — "because my word hath no place in you."

is the reward which Christ bestows on their perseverance, that he admits them to greater familiarity with him; though in this way he does nothing more than add another gift to the former, so that no man ought to think that he is entitled to any reward. For it is he who impresses his word on our hearts by his Spirit, and it is he who daily chases away from our minds the clouds of ignorance which obscure the brightness of the Gospel. In order that the truth may be fully revealed to us, we ought sincerely and earnestly to endeavor to attain it. It is the same unvarying truth which Christ teaches his followers from the beginning to the end, but on those who were at first enlightened by him, as it were with small sparks, he at length pours a full light. Thus believers, until they have been fully confirmed, are in some measure ignorant of what they know; and yet it is not so small or obscure a knowledge of faith as not to be efficacious for salvation.

*The truth shall make you free.* He commends the knowledge of the Gospel from the fruit which we derive from it, or — which is the same thing — from its effect, namely, that it restores us to *freedom*. This is an invaluable blessing. Hence it follows, that nothing is more excellent or desirable than the knowledge of the Gospel. All men feel and acknowledge that *slavery* is a very wretched state; and since the Gospel delivers us from it, it follows that we derive from the Gospel the treasure of a blessed life.

We must now ascertain what kind of liberty is here described by Christ, namely, that which *sets us free* from the tyranny of Satan, sin, and death. And if we obtain it by means of the Gospel, it is evident from this that we are by nature the *slaves* of sin. Next, we must ascertain what is the method of our deliverance. For so long as we are governed by our sense and by our natural disposition, we are *in bondage* to sin; but when the Lord regenerates us by his Spirit, he likewise *makes us free*, so that, loosed from the snares of Satan, we willingly obey righteousness. But regeneration proceeds from faith, and hence it is evident that freedom proceeds from the Gospel.

Let Papists now go and proudly vaunt of their free-will, but let us, who are conscious of our own slavery, glory in none but Christ our Deliverer. For the reason why the Gospel ought to be reckoned to have achieved our deliverance is, that it offers and gives us to Christ *to be freed* from the yoke of sin. Lastly, we ought to observe, that *freedom* has its degrees according to the measure of their faith; and therefore Paul, though clearly *made free*, still groans and longs after perfect freedom, ([Romans 7:24.](#))

**33.** *We are Abraham's seed.* It is uncertain if the Evangelist here introduces the same persons who formerly spoke, <sup>235</sup> or others. My opinion is, that they replied to Christ in a confused manner, as usually happens in a promiscuous crowd; and that this reply was made rather by despisers than by those who believed. It is a mode of expression very customary

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235 “Ceux-la memes parlans, qui parloyent auparavant.”

in Scripture, whenever the body of a people is mentioned, to ascribe generally to all what belongs only to a part.

Those who object that they are *Abraham's seed, and have always been free*, easily inferred from the words of Christ that *freedom* was promised to them as to people who were *slaves*. But they cannot endure to have it said that they, who are a holy and elect people, are reduced to *slavery*. For of what avail was *the adoption and the covenant*, ([Romans 9:4](#)), by which they were separated from other nations, but because they were accounted the children of God? They think, therefore, that they are insulted, when *freedom* is exhibited to them as a blessing which they do not yet possess. But it might be thought strange that they should maintain that they *never were enslaved*, since they had been so frequently oppressed by various tyrants, and at that time were subjected to the Roman yoke, and groaned under the heaviest burden of *slavery*; and hence it may be easily seen how foolish was their boasting.

Yet they had this plausible excuse, that the unjust sway of their enemies did not hinder them from continuing to be *free* by right. But they erred, first, in this respect, that they did not consider that the right of adoption was founded on the Mediator alone; for how comes it that *Abraham's seed* is *free*, but because, by the extraordinary grace of the Redeemer, it is exempted from the general bondage of the human race? But there was another error less tolerable than the former, that, though they were altogether degenerate, yet they wished to be reckoned among the children of *Abraham*, and did not consider that it is nothing else than the regeneration of the Spirit that makes them lawful *children of Abraham*. And indeed, it has been too common a vice in almost all ages, to refer to the origin of the flesh the extraordinary gifts of God, and to ascribe to nature those remedies which Christ bestows for correcting nature. Meanwhile, we see how all who, swelled with false confidence, flatter themselves on their condition drive away from them the grace of Christ. And yet this pride is spread over the whole world, so that there is scarcely one person in a hundred who feels that he needs the grace of God.

**34.** *Every man who committeth sin is the slave of sin.* This is an argument drawn from contrary things. They boasted that they were free. He proves that they are the *slaves of sin*, because, being enslaved by the desires of the flesh, they continually sin. It is astonishing that men are not convinced by their own experience, so that, laying aside their pride, they may learn to be humble. And it is a very frequent occurrence in the present day, that, the greater the load of vices by which a man is weighed down, the more fiercely does he utter unmeaning words in extolling free-will.

Christ appears to say nothing more here than what was formerly said by philosophers, that they who are devoted to their lusts are subject to the most degrading *slavery*. But there is a deeper and more hidden meaning; for he does not argue what evil men bring on themselves, but what is the condition of human nature. The philosophers thought that any man is a *slave* by his own choice, and that by the same choice he returns to *freedom*. But here

Christ maintains, that all who are not delivered by him are in a state of *slavery*, and that all who derive the contagion of sin from corrupted nature are *slaves* from their birth. We must attend to the comparison between grace and nature, on which Christ here dwells; from which it may be easily seen that men are destitute of freedom, unless they regain it from some other quarter. Yet this *slavery* is voluntary, so that they who necessarily sin are not compelled to sin.

35. *Now the slave remaineth not in the house always.* He adds a comparison, taken from the laws and from political law, to the effect that *a slave*, though he may have power for a time, yet is not the heir of the house; from which he infers that there is no perfect and durable *freedom*, but what is obtained through *the Son*. In this manner he accuses the Jews of vanity, because they hold but a mask instead of the reality; for, as to their being *Abraham's offspring*, they were nothing but a mask. They held a place in the Church of God, but such a place as Ishmael, *a slave*, rising up against his *freeborn* brother, usurped for a short time, ([Galatians 4:29](#).) The conclusion is, that all who boast of being *Abraham's children* have nothing but an empty and deceitful pretense.

36. *If then the Son shall make you free.* By these words he means that the right of *freedom* belongs to himself alone, and that all others, being born *slaves*, cannot be delivered but by his grace. For what he possesses as his own by nature he imparts to us by adoption, when we are ingrafted by faith into his body, and become his members. Thus we ought to remember what I said formerly, that the Gospel is the instrument by which we obtain our *freedom*. So then our *freedom* is a benefit conferred by Christ, but we obtain it by faith, in consequence of which also Christ regenerates us by his Spirit. When he says that they *shall be truly free*, there is an emphasis on the word *truly*; for we must supply the contrast with the foolish persuasion by which the Jews were swelled with pride, in like manner as the greater part of the world imagine that they possess a kingdom, while they are in the most wretched bondage.

37. *I know that you are Abraham's seed.* I explain this as said by way of concession. Yet at the same time he ridicules their folly in glorying in so absurd a title, as if he had said: "Granting that on which you flatter yourselves so much, still what avails it that those men are called *the children of Abraham*, who are enraged against God and his ministers, and who are actuated by such wicked and detestable hatred of the truth, that they rush headlong to shed innocent blood?" Hence it follows that nothing is farther from their true character than what they wished to be called, because they have no resemblance to *Abraham*.

*You seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you.* He means that they are not merely murderers, but are driven to such rage by hatred of God and his truth, which is far more heinous; for such an enormity does not merely extend to men, but likewise dishonors God. He says, *that they cannot receive his words*, because through malice they keep their minds shut, so that they cannot admit anything wholesome.

38. *I speak what I have seen with my Father.* He had already made frequent mention of *his Father*; and now, by an argument drawn from contrary things, he infers that they are enemies to God, and are *the children of the devil*, because they oppose his doctrine. “For my part,” says he, “I bring nothing forward, but what I have learned from my Father. How comes it then that the word of God excites you to such fury, but because you have an opposite *father*?” He says that he *speaks*, and they *do*, because he discharged the office of a teacher, while they labored strenuously to extinguish his doctrine. At the same time, he protects the Gospel against contempt, by showing that it is not wonderful if it be opposed by *the children of the devil*. Instead of *you do*, some render it, Do you *what you have seen with your father*; as if Christ had said, “Come, show that you are the children of the devil, by opposing me; for *I speak* nothing but what God has commanded.”

### John 8:39-42

**39.** They answered, and said to him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. **40.** But now you seek to kill me, a man who have spoken to you the truth which I have heard from God: Abraham did not this. **41.** You do the works of your father. They said therefore to him, We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, who is God. **42.** Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, you would love me: for I proceeded and came from God, for I did not proceed from myself, but he sent me.

**39. *Abraham is our father.*** This altercation shows plainly enough how haughtily and fiercely they despised all Christ's reproofs. What they continually claim and vaunt of is, that they are *Abraham's children*; by which they do not simply mean that they are the lineal descendants of *Abraham*, but that they are a holy race, the heritage of God, and the children of God. And yet they rely on nothing but the confidence of the flesh. But carnal descent, without faith, is nothing more than a false pretense. We now understand what it was that so greatly blinded them, so that they treated Christ with disdain, though armed with deadly thunder. Thus the word of God, which might move stones, is ridiculed in the present day by Papists, as if it were a fable, and fiercely persecuted by fire and sword; and for no other reason but that they rely on their false title of "the Church," and hope that they will be able to deceive both God and man. In short, as soon as hypocrites have procured some plausible covering, they oppose God with hardened obstinacy, as if he could not penetrate into their hearts.

*If you were the children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham.* Christ now distinguishes more plainly between the bastard and degenerate *children of Abraham*, and the true and lawful children;<sup>236</sup> for he refuses to give the very name to all who do not resemble *Abraham* True, it frequently happens that *children* do not resemble, in their conduct, the parents from whom they are sprung; but here Christ does not argue about carnal descent, but only affirms that they who do not retain by faith the grace of adoption are not reckoned among *the children of Abraham* before God. For since God promised to the seed of Abraham that he would be their God, saying,

I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations,  
for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee,

(Genesis 17:7,)

all unbelievers, by rejecting this promise, excluded themselves from the family of *Abraham*.

236 "Entre les enfans d'Abraham qui sont bastars et forlignans, et le vrais et legitimes."

The state of the question therefore is this: Ought they to be accounted Abraham's children who reject the blessing offered to them in the word, so that, notwithstanding of this, they shall be a holy nation, the heritage of God, and a royal priesthood? (Exodus 19:6; Joel 3:2.) Christ denies this, and justly; for they who are the children of the promise must be born again by the Spirit, and all who desire to obtain a place in the kingdom of God ought to be new creatures. Carnal descent from Abraham was not indeed useless, and of no value, provided that the truth were added to it. For election dwells in the seed of Abraham, but it is free, so that all whom God sanctifies by his Spirit are accounted heirs of life.

40. *But now you seek to kill me.* He proves from the effect, that they are not the children of God, as they boasted, because they oppose God. And, indeed, is there any thing in Abraham that is more highly commended than the obedience of faith? <sup>237</sup> This then is the mark of distinction, whenever we are required to distinguish between his children and strangers; for empty titles, whatever estimation they may procure before the world, are of no account with God. Christ therefore concludes again, that they are the children of the devil, because they hate with deadly hatred <sup>238</sup> true and sound doctrine.

41. *We were not born of fornication.* They claim no more for themselves than they did formerly, for it was the same thing with them to be Abraham's children and to be God's children. But they erred grievously in this respect, that they imagined that God was bound to the whole seed of Abraham. For they reason thus: "God adopted for himself the family of Abraham; therefore, since we are Abraham's descendants, we must be the children of God." We now see how they thought that they had holiness from the womb, because they were sprung from a holy root. In short, they maintain that they are the family of God, because they are descended from the holy fathers. In like manner, the Papists in the present day are exceedingly vain of an uninterrupted succession from the fathers. By sorceries of this description Satan deceives them, so that they separate God from his word, the Church from faith, and the kingdom of heaven from the Spirit.

Let us know, therefore, that they who have corrupted the seed of life are at the farthest remove from being the children of God, though, according to the flesh, they are not bastards, but pretend a right to the plausible title of the Church. For let them go about the bush as much as they please, still they will never avoid the discovery that the only ground of their arrogant boasting is, "We have succeeded the holy fathers; therefore, we are the Church." And if the reply of Christ was sufficient for confuting the Jews, it is not less sufficient now for reproving the Papists. Never indeed will hypocrites cease to employ the name of God falsely, with most wicked effrontery; but those false grounds of boasting, on which they

237 "Et de faict, y a-il chose qu'on puisse plustost louer en Abraham?"

238 "Ils haissent de haine mortelle."

plume themselves, will never cease to appear ridiculous in the eyes of all who shall abide by the decision of Christ.

42. *If God were your Father, you would love me.* Christ's argument is this: "Whoever is a child of God will acknowledge his first-born Son; but you hate me, and therefore you have no reason to boast, that you are God's children." We ought carefully to observe this passage, that there is no piety and no fear of God where Christ is rejected. Hypocritical religion, indeed, presumptuously shelters itself under the name of God; but how can they agree with the Father who disagree with his only Son? What kind of knowledge of God is that in which his lively image is rejected? And this is what Christ means, when he testifies that he came from the Father.

*For I proceeded and came from God.* He means that all that he has is divine; and therefore it is most inconsistent that the true worshippers of God should fly from his truth and righteousness. "I did not come," says he, "of myself. You cannot show that anything about me is contrary to God. In short, you will find nothing that is either earthly or human in my doctrine, or in the whole of my ministry." For he does not speak of his essence, but of his office.

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### John 8:43-45

43. Why do you not understand my language, that you cannot hear my word? 44. You are of your father the devil, and you wish to execute the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and he did not remain in the truth, because there is no truth in him. 45. And because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

43. *Why do you not understand my language?* In this passage, he reproaches the Jews with their obstinacy, which was so great, that *they could not even endure to hear him speak*. Hence he infers, that they are actuated and hurried away by diabolical rage. Some make a distinction here between *language* and *speech*, as if *speech* had a more extensive meaning; but I do not see it;<sup>239</sup> and besides, it would not be appropriate that the word which means less should be placed first. Many point this verse in such a manner as to make the question close with the word *language*;<sup>240</sup> as if the question consisted only of these words, *Why do you not understand my language?* So that the reason is immediately assigned, *Because you cannot hear my word*. But I think that it ought rather to be read in immediate connection, as if he had said, “What is the reason why my speech appears to you barbarous and unknown, so that I gain nothing by speaking to you, and so that you do not even deign to open your ears to receive what I say?” In the former clause, therefore, he reproves their stupidity; in the latter, he reproves their obstinate and ungovernable hatred of his doctrine; and he afterwards assigns a reason for both, when he says, that they are sprung *from the devil*. For by putting the question, he intended to take out of their hands what was the subject of their continual boasting, that they are led by reason and judgment to oppose him.

44. *You are of your father the devil*. What he had twice said more obscurely, he now expresses more fully, that they are *the devil’s children*. But we must supply the contrast, that they could not cherish such intense hatred to the Son of God, were it not that they had for *their father* the perpetual enemy of God. He calls them *children of the devil*, not only because they imitate him, but because they are led by his instigation to fight against Christ. For as we are called *the children of God*, not only because we resemble him, but because he governs us by his Spirit, because Christ lives and is vigorous in us, so as to conform us to the image of his Father; so, on the other hand, the devil is said to be the *father* or those whose understandings he blinds, whose hearts he moves to commit all unrighteousness, and on whom, in short, he acts powerfully and exercises his tyranny; as in [2 Corinthians 4:4](#); [Ephesians 2:2](#), and in other passages.

239 “Aucuns font ici difference entre Langage et Parole, pource que la parole emporte plus, mais je n’y en voy point.”

240 “En ce mot Langage.”

The Manicheans foolishly and ineffectually abused this passage to prove their absurd tenets. For since, when Scripture calls us the children of God, this does not refer to the transmission or origin of the substance, but to the grace of the Spirit, which regenerates us to newness of life; so this swing of Christ does not relate to the transmission of substance, but to the corruption of nature, of which man's revolt was the cause and origin. When men, therefore, are born children of the devil, it must not be imputed to creation, but to the blame of sin. Now Christ proves this from the effect, because they willingly, and of their own accord, are disposed to follow the devil.

*He was a murderer from the beginning.* He explains what are those desires, and mentions two instances, cruelty and falsehood; in which the Jews too much resembled Satan. When he says that the devil *was a murderer*, he means that he contrived the destruction of man; for as soon as man was created, Satan, impelled by a wicked desire of doing injury, bent his strength to destroy him. Christ does not mean *the beginning* of the creation, as if God implanted in him the disposition to do injury; but he condemns in Satan the corruption of nature, which he brought upon himself. This appears more clearly from the second clause, in which he says,

*He did not remain in the truth.* For though those who imagine that the devil was wicked by nature, endeavor to make evasions, yet these words plainly state that there was a change for the worse, and that the reason why Satan was *a liar* was, that *he revolted from the truth*. That he is *a liar*, arises not from his nature having been always contrary to truth, but because he fell from it by a voluntary fall. This description of Satan is highly useful to us, that every person for himself may endeavor to beware of his snares, and, at the same time, to repel his violence and fury; for

he goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,

(1 Peter 5:8,)

and has a thousand stratagems at his command for deceiving. So much the more ought believers to be supplied with spiritual arms for fighting, and so much the more earnestly ought they to keep watch with vigilance and sobriety. Now, if Satan cannot lay aside this disposition, we ought not to be alarmed at it, as if it were a new and uncommon occurrence, when errors exceedingly numerous and varied spring up; for Satan stirs up his followers like bellows, to deceive the world by their impostures. And we need not wonder that Satan puts forth such strenuous efforts to extinguish the light of *truth*; for it is the only life of the soul. So, then, the most important and most deadly wound for killing the soul is *falsehood*. As all who have eyes to see perceive, in the present day, such a picture of Satan in Popery, they ought, first, to consider with what enemy they carry on war, and, next, to betake themselves to the protection of Christ their Captain, under whose banner they fight.

*Because the truth is not in him.* This statement, which immediately follows the other, is a confirmation *a posteriori*, as the phrase is; that is, it is drawn from the effect. For Satan

hates the truth, and therefore cannot endure it, but, on the contrary, is entirely covered with falsehoods. Hence Christ infers, that he is entirely fallen from the truth, and entirely turned away from it. Let us not wonder, therefore, if he daily exhibits the fruits of his apostacy.

*When he speaketh falsehood.* These words are generally explained as if Christ affirmed that the blame of *falsehood* does not belong to God, who is the Author of nature, but, on the contrary, proceeds from corruption. But I explain it more simply, that it is customary with the devil to speak *falsehood*, and that he knows nothing but to contrive corruptions, frauds, and delusions. And yet we justly infer from these words, that the devil has this vice from himself, and that, while it is peculiar to him, it may likewise be said to be accidental; for, while Christ makes the devil to be the contriver of *lying*, he evidently separates him from God, and even declares him to be contrary to God. For *he is a liar, and the father of it*. The word *father* has the same object as the preceding statement; for the reason why Satan is said to be the father of *falsehood* is, because he is estranged from God, in whom alone truth dwells, and from whom it flows as from the only fountain.

**45.** *But because I speak the truth.* He confirms the preceding statement; for, since they have no other reason for opposing, but because truth is hateful and intolerable to them, they show plainly that they are the children of Satan.

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### John 8:46-50

46. Which of you convicteth me of sin? And if I speak truth, why do you not believe me? 47. He who is of God heareth the words of God; you hear them not, because you are not of God. 48. The Jews therefore answered, and said to him, Do we not say well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? 49. Jesus answered, I have not a devil, but I honor my Father, and you have dishonored me. 50. But I seek not my own glory; there is one who seeketh it, and judgeth of it.<sup>241</sup>

46. *Which of you?* This question proceeds from perfect confidence; for, knowing that they could not justly bring any reproach against him, he glories over his enemies, as having obtained a victory. And yet he does not say that he is free from their slanders; for, though they had no reason for reproaching, still they did not cease to pour out slanders on Christ; but he means that no crime dwells in him. And such is the import of the Greek word ἐλέγχειν, as the Latins use *coarguere*, (*to convict*,) when a person is held *convicted* of the fact. *Which of you Convicteth me of sin?* Yet those who think that Christ here asserts his complete innocence, because he alone surpassed all men, so far as he was the Son of God, are mistaken. For this defense must be restricted to what belongs to the passage, as if he had asserted that nothing could be brought forward to show that he was not a faithful servant of God. In like manner Paul also glories that he is not conscious of any crime (1 Corinthians 4:4;) for that does not extend to the whole life, but is only a defense of his doctrine and apostleship. It is away from the subject, therefore, to speculate, as some do, about the perfection of righteousness which belongs to the Son of God alone; since the only object which he has in view is, to give authority to his ministry, as appears more clearly from what follows; for he again adds immediately afterwards, *If I speak truth, why do you not believe me?* From which we infer that Christ is rather defending his doctrine than his person.

47. *He who is of God.* As he has a full right to take this for granted, that he is the ambassador of the heavenly Father, and that he discharges faithfully the office which has been committed to him, he kindles into greater indignation against them; for their impiety was no longer concealed, since they were so obstinate in rejecting the word of God. He had showed that they could not bring forward any thing which he had not taught as from the mouth of God. He concludes, therefore, that they have nothing in common with God, for they do not hear the words of God;<sup>242</sup> and, without saying any thing about himself, he charges them with being at war with God. Besides, we are taught by this passage, that there is not a more evident sign of a reprobate mind, than when one cannot endure the doctrine

241 "Il y a qui la cherche, et qui en juge."

242 "Ils n'oyent point les paroles de Dieu."

of Christ, even though, in other respects, it shone with angelic sanctity; as, on the contrary, if we embrace that doctrine cheerfully, we have what may be called a visible seal of our election. For he who has the word enjoys God himself; but he who rejects it excludes himself from righteousness and life. Wherefore, there is nothing which we ought to fear so much as to fall under that dreadful sentence.

48. *Do we not say well?* They show more and more how greatly they are stupified by Satan; for, though they are fully convicted, still they are enraged, and are not ashamed to show that they are utterly desperate.<sup>243</sup> Besides, though they bring a double reproach against Christ, still they wish to do nothing more than to say in a few words, that he is a detestable man, and that he is actuated by a wicked spirit. The Jews reckoned *the Samaritans* to be apostates and corrupters of the Law; and therefore, whenever they wished to stamp a man with infamy, they called him *a Samaritan*. Having no crime more heinous, therefore, to reproach Christ with, they seize at random, and without judgment, this vulgar taunt. To express it in a few words, we see that with effrontery they curse him, as men are wont to do when, infuriated like enraged dogs, they cannot find any thing to say.

49. *I have not a devil.* He passes by the first charge, and clears himself only of the second. Some think that he did so, because he disregarded the insult offered to his person, and undertook only the defense of the doctrine. But they are mistaken, in my opinion; for it is not probable that the Jews were so ingenious in distinguishing between the life and the doctrine of the Lord Jesus.<sup>244</sup> Besides, the dislike of this name arose, as we have said, from this circumstance, that the *Samaritans*, being perverse and degenerate observers of the Law, had debased it by many superstitions and corruptions, and had polluted the whole worship of God by foreign inventions. Augustine flies to allegory, and says that Christ did not refuse to be called a *Samaritan*, because he is a true guardian of his flock. But Christ's intention appears to me to have been different; for since the two reproaches cast upon him had the same object, by refuting the one, he refutes the other; and, indeed, if the matter be duly considered, they insulted him more grievously by calling him *a Samaritan* than by calling him *a demoniac*. But, as I have already said, Christ satisfies himself with a simple refutation, which he draws from what is contrary, when he asserts that he labors to promote the honor of his Father; for he who duly and sincerely honors him must be guided by the Spirit of God, and must be a faithful servant of God.

*You have dishonored me.* This clause may be explained, as if it were a complaint of Christ, that he does not receive the honor due to him on account of his promoting the glory of God. But I think that he looks much higher, and connects the glory of the Father with his own, in this manner. "I claim nothing for myself which does not tend to the glory of

243 "Neantmoins, ils sont enragez, et n'ont point de honte de se monstrent du tout desesperez."

244 "Du Seigneur Jesus."

God; for his majesty shines in me, his power and authority dwells in me; and therefore, when you treat me so disdainfully, you pour contempt on God himself.” He immediately adds, therefore, that God will revenge this insult. For they might have alleged that he was ambitious, if he had not testified that it was not from any personal feelings of a carnal nature that he cared about the honor or contempt showed to himself, but so far as the honor or contempt of God is concerned. Besides, though we are at a great distance from Christ, let every man be fully convinced that, if he be sincerely desirous to promote the glory of God, he will find that God has secured for him abundant commendation; for we shall always find that saying to be true,

Those who honor me, I will render honorable,

(1 Samuel 2:30.)

If men not only despise, but even load him with reproaches, let him calmly wait till the day of the Lord come.

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### John 8:51-55

51. Verily, verily, I say to you, If any man keep my word, he shall never see death. 52. The Jews said therefore to him, Now we know that thou hast the devil,<sup>245</sup> Abraham is dead, and the Prophets, and thou sayest, If any man keep my word, he shall never taste of death. 53. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? The Prophets also are dead. Whom makest thou thyself? 54. Jesus answered, If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifieth me, of whom you say that he is your God. 55. And you know him not, but I know him; and if I say that I do not know him, I shall be a liar like you; but I know him, and keep his word.

51. *Verily, verily, I say to you.* Christ unquestionably knew that some persons in that multitude were curable, and that others of them were not opposed to his doctrine. For this reason, he intended to terrify the wicked whose malice was desperate, but to do so in such a manner as to leave ground of consolation for the good, or to draw to him those who were not yet ruined. Whatever dislike of the word of God, therefore, may be entertained by the greatest part of men, yet the faithful teacher ought not to be wholly employed in reproving the wicked, but ought also to impart the doctrine of salvation to the children of God, and endeavor to bring them to sound views, if there be any of them who are not perfectly incurable. In this passage, therefore, Christ promises eternal life to his disciples, but demands disciples who shall not only prick up their ears, like asses, or profess with the mouth that they approve of his doctrine, but who shall keep his doctrine as a precious treasure. He says that *they shall never see death*; for, when faith quickens the soul of a man, death already has its sting extracted and its venom removed, and so cannot inflict a deadly wound.

52. *Now we know.* The reprobate persist in their stupidity, and are not moved by promises any more than by threatenings; so that they can neither be led nor drawn to Christ. Some think that they slanderously torture his words, by using the expression, *taste of death*, which Christ had not used; but this appears to me to be groundless. I rather think that both of the phrases, *to taste of death* and *to see death*, were used by the Hebrews in the same sense; namely, *to die*. But they are false interpreters in this respect, that they apply the spiritual doctrine of Christ to the body. No believer *shall see death*, because believers, *having been born again of incorruptible seed*, (1 Peter 1:23,) live even when they die; because, united to Christ their Head, they cannot be extinguished by death; because *death* is to them a passage into the heavenly kingdom; because

the Spirit, dwelling in them, is life on account of righteousness,

(Romans 8:10,)

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245 “Que tu as le diable.”

until he swallow up all that remains of death. But those men, being carnal, cannot perceive any deliverance from death, unless it appear manifestly in the body. And it is a disease too common in the world, that the greatest part of men care almost nothing about the grace of Christ, because they judge of it only by their carnal perception. That the same thing may not happen to us, we must arouse our minds, that they may discern spiritual life in the midst of death.

53. *Art thou greater than our father Abraham?* This is another offense, that they endeavor to obscure the glory of Christ by the splendor of *Abraham* and of the saints. But as all the stars are thrown into the shade by the brightness of the sun, so all the glory that is to be found in all the saints must fade away before the incomparable brightness of Christ. They act unjustly and absurdly, therefore, in contrasting the servants with the Lord; and they even act improperly towards *Abraham and the Prophets*, by abusing their name in opposition to Christ. But this wickedness has prevailed in almost every age, and prevails even in the present day, that wicked men, by mangling the works of God, make him appear to be contrary to himself. God glorified himself by the Apostles and Martyrs; the Papists frame idols for themselves out of the Apostles and Martyrs, that they may occupy the place of God; and do they not, in this manner, manufacture engines out of the very favors of God, to destroy his power? For how little remains for God or for Christ, if the saints have all that the Papists so lavishly bestow upon them! Wherefore, we ought to know that the whole order of the Kingdom of God is destroyed, unless Prophets, Apostles, and all that can be called Saints, be placed far below Christ, that he alone may hold the highest rank. And, indeed, we cannot speak of the Saints more respectfully than when we place them below Christ. But the Papists, though they may deceive the ignorant by boasting that they are faithful admirers of the Saints, offer an insult both to God and to them, because, by assigning to them a lofty station, they reduce Christ to a level with them. And, indeed, they are doubly in the wrong, because they prefer the Saints to Christ in doctrine; and because, by clothing themselves with the spoils of Christ, they deprive him of almost all his power.

54. *If I glorify myself.* Before replying to that unjust comparison, he begins by saying that *he does not seek his own glory*, and thus meets their slander. If it be objected, that Christ also glorified himself, the answer is easy, that he did so, not as man, but by the direction and authority of God. For here, as in many other passages, he distinguishes between himself and God, by way of concession. In short, he declares that he desires no glory whatever but what has been given him by the Father. We are taught by these words that, when God glorifies his Son, he will not permit the world to hate or despise him<sup>246</sup> with impunity.

Meanwhile, those voices sounding from heaven, *Kiss the Son*, ([Psalm 2:12](#),) *Let all the angels worship him*, ([Hebrews 1:6](#),) *Let every knee bow to him*, ([Philippians 2:10](#),) *Hear ye*

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246 “En haine et mespris.”



him, ([Matthew 17:5](#)), *Let the Gentiles seek him*, ([Romans 15:11](#)), and *Let all flesh be humbled*, ought greatly to encourage believers to render honor and reverence to Christ. We are also reminded by these words, that all the honor which men procure for themselves is trivial and worthless. How blind then is ambition, when we labor so earnestly about nothing! Let, us continually keep before our eyes that saying of Paul,

Not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom God commendeth,  
([2 Corinthians 10:18](#).)

Besides, as we are destitute of the glory of God, let us learn to glory in Christ alone, so far as by his grace he makes us partakers of his glory.

*Of whom you say that he is your God.* He pulls off from them the false mask of the name of God which they were accustomed to employ. "I know," he says, "how presumptuously you boast that you are the people of God; but it is a false title, for *you know not God*." Hence also we learn what is the true and lawful<sup>247</sup> profession of faith. It is that which proceeds from true knowledge. And whence comes that knowledge, but from the word? Consequently, all who boast of the name of God without the word of God are mere liars. Yet to their audacity Christ opposes the assurance of his conscience; and thus all the servants of God ought to be prepared in their hearts to be satisfied with this alone, that God is on their side, though the whole world should rise against him. Thus anciently the Prophets and Apostles had invincible courage and magnanimity, which stood firm against the dreadful attacks of the whole world, because they knew by whom they were sent. But when solid knowledge of God is wanting, there is nothing to support us.

*And if I shall say that I know him.* By this clause, Christ testifies that the necessity of his office constrains him to speak, because silence would be a treacherous denial of the truth. This is a remarkable statement, that God reveals himself to us for this purpose, that we may confess before men the faith which we have in our hearts, when it is needful. For it ought powerfully to strike terror into our minds, that they who act hypocritically to please men, and either deny the truth of God or disfigure it by wicked glosses, not only are gently reproved, but are sent back to the children of the devil.

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247 "La vraye et legitimo profession."

### John 8:56-59

**56.** Your father Abraham exulted to see my day; and he saw it and rejoiced. **57.** The Jews then said to him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? **58.** Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am. **59.** Then they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus concealed himself, and went out of the temple.

**56.** *Your father Abraham.* He grants to them, in words only, what he formerly took from them, that *Abraham is their father* But he shows how idle is the objection drawn from the name of *Abraham* “He had no other object,” says he, “during his whole life, than to see my kingdom flourish. He longed for me when I was absent, you despise me when I am present.” What Christ here asserts concerning Abraham alone, applies to all the saints. But this doctrine has greater weight in the person of Abraham, because he is the father of the whole Church. Whoever then desires to be reckoned in the number of the godly, let him rejoice, as he ought to do, in the presence of Christ, for which Abraham ardently longed.

*Exulted to see my day.* The word *exult* expresses a vehement zeal<sup>248</sup> and ardent affection. We must now supply the contrast. Though the knowledge of Christ was still so obscure, Abraham was inflamed by so strong a desire, that he preferred the enjoyment of it to everything that was reckoned desirable. How base then is the ingratitude of those who despise and reject him, when he is plainly offered to them? The word *day* does not, in this passage, denote eternity, (as Augustine thought,) but the time of Christ’s kingdom, when he appeared in the world clothed with flesh, to fulfill the office of Redeemer.

But a question now arises, How did Abraham behold, even with the eyes of faith, the manifestation of Christ? For this appears not to agree with another statement of Christ,

Many kings and prophets desired to see the things which you see,  
and yet did not see them,

(Luke 10:24.)

I reply, faith has its degrees in beholding Christ. Thus the ancient prophets beheld Christ at a distance, as he had been promised to them, and yet were not permitted to behold him present, as he made himself familiarly and completely visible, when he came down from heaven to men.

Again, we are taught by these words that, as God did not disappoint the desire of *Abraham*, so he will not now permit any one to breathe after Christ, without obtaining some good fruit which shall correspond to his holy desire. The reason why he does not grant the enjoyment of himself to many is — the wickedness of men; for few desire him. *Abraham’s joy* testifies that he regarded the knowledge of the kingdom of Christ as an incomparable

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248 “Un vehement ze.”

treasure; and the reason why we are told that he *rejoiced to see the day of Christ* is, that we may know that there was nothing which he valued more highly. But all believers receive this fruit from their faith, that, being satisfied with Christ alone, in whom they are fully and completely happy and blessed, their consciences are calm and cheerful. And indeed no man knows Christ aright, unless he gives him this honor of relying entirely upon him.

Others explain it to mean, that Abraham, being already dead, enjoyed the presence of Christ, when he appeared to the world; and so they make the time of *desiring* and the time of *seeing* to be different. And indeed it is true, that the coming of Christ was manifested to holy spirits after death, of which coming they were held in expectation during the whole of their life; but I do not know if so refined an exposition agrees with Christ's words.

57. *Thou art not yet fifty years old.* They endeavor to refute Christ's saying, by showing that he had asserted what was impossible, when he *who was not yet fifty years of age makes himself equal to Abraham*, who died many centuries before. Though Christ was not yet thirty-four years of age, yet they allow him to be somewhat older, that they may not appear to be too rigid and exact in dealing with him; as if they had said, "Thou certainly wilt not make thyself so old, though thou wert to boast that thou art already *fifty years of age.*" Consequently, those who conjecture that he looked older than he actually was, or that the *years* mentioned in this passage are not solar years, in either case labor to no purpose. The notion of Papias, who says that Christ lived more than forty years, cannot at all be admitted.

58. *Before Abraham was.* As unbelievers judge only from the appearance of the flesh, Christ reminds them that he has something greater and higher than human appearance, which is hidden from the senses of the flesh, and is perceived only by the eyes of faith; and that, in this respect, he might be seen by the holy fathers, before he was manifested in the flesh. But he uses different verbs. *Before Abraham was,*<sup>249</sup> or, *Before Abraham was born,*<sup>250</sup> *I am.*<sup>251</sup> But by these words he excludes himself from the ordinary rank of men, and claims for himself a power more than human,<sup>252</sup> a power heavenly and divine, the perception of which reached from the beginning of the world through all ages.

Yet these words may be explained in two ways. Some think that this applies simply to the eternal Divinity of Christ, and compare it with that passage in the writings of Moses, *I am what I am*, ([Exodus 3:14](#).) But I extend it much farther, because the power and grace of Christ, so far as he is the Redeemer of the world, was common to all ages. It agrees therefore

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249 "Avant qu'Abraham fust."

250 "Priusquam Abraham nasceretur."

251 πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι, ἐγὼ εἰμι. Our Author's idea, to which he merely alludes, appears to be that, instead of saying, ἐγὼ ἐγενόμην, or, ἐγὼ γίνομαι, Christ purposely said, ἐγὼ εἰμι, because the verb εἰμι, standing contrasted with γενέσθαι, would convey the idea of underived existence. — *Ed*

252 "Une vertu plus qu'humaine."

with that saying of the apostle, *Christ yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*, ([Hebrews 13:8](#).) For the context appears to demand this interpretation. He had formerly said that Abraham longed for his day with vehement desire; and as this seemed incredible to the Jews, he adds, that he himself also existed at that time. The reason assigned will not appear sufficiently strong, if we do not understand that he was even then acknowledged to be the Mediator, by whom God was to be appeased. And yet the efficacy which belonged, in all ages, to the grace of the Mediator depended on his eternal Divinity; so that this saying of Christ contains a remarkable testimony of his Divine essence.

We ought also to observe the solemn form of an oath, *Verily, verily*. Nor do I disapprove of the opinion of Chrysostom, that the present tense of the verb is emphatic; for he does not say, *I was*, but *I am*; by which he denotes a condition uniformly the same from the beginning to the end. And he does not say, *Before Abraham was*, but, *Before Abraham was made*; which implies that Abraham had a beginning.

**59.** *Then they took up stones.* There is reason to believe that they did this, as if Christ ought to be stoned according to the injunction of the Law, ([Leviticus 24:16](#).) Hence we infer how great is the madness of inconsiderate zeal; for they have no ears to know the cause, but they have hands ready to commit murder. I have no doubt that Christ rescued himself by his secret power, but yet under the appearance of a low condition; for he did not intend to make a clear display of his Divinity without leaving something for human infirmity. Some copies have the words, *And so Jesus passed through the midst of them*; which Erasmus justly considers to have been borrowed from the Gospel by [Luke 4:30](#). It deserves notice also, that the wicked priests and scribes, after having banished Christ,

in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead,

|([Colossians 2:9](#)),

retain possession of the outward temple; but they are greatly deceived, when they think that they have a temple in which God does not dwell. Such is the course now pursued by the Pope and his followers. After having banished Christ, and in this manner profaned the Church, they foolishly glory in the false disguise of a Church.

# CHAPTER 9

## John 9:1-5

1. And Jesus, passing by, saw a man blind from his birth. 2. And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? 3. Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God may be displayed in him. 4. I must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work. 5. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

1. *Jesus saw a man blind.* In this chapter, the Evangelist describes the restoration of sight to the blind man, at the same time mingling doctrine, to point out the fruit of the miracle. *From his birth.* This circumstance gives an additional display of the power of Christ; for *blindness*, which he had brought from his mother's womb, and which he had endured till he arrived at the age of a man, could not be cured by human remedies. This gave occasion to the disciples to propose a question, Of whose sin was this the punishment?

2. *Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man, or his parents?* In the first place, as Scripture testifies that all the sufferings to which the human race is liable proceed from sin, whenever we see any person wretched, we cannot prevent the thought from immediately presenting itself to our minds, that the distresses which fall heavily upon him are punishments inflicted by the hand of God. But here we commonly err in three ways.

First, while every man is ready to censure others with extreme bitterness, there are few who apply to themselves, as they ought to do, the same severity. If my brother meets with adversity, I instantly acknowledge the judgment of God; but if God chastises me with a heavier stroke, I wink at my sins. But in considering punishments, every man ought to begin with himself, and to spare himself as little as any other person. Wherefore, if we wish to be candid judges in this matter, let us learn to be quick in discerning our own evils rather than those of others.

The second error lies in excessive severity; for no sooner is any man touched by the hand of God, than we conclude that this shows deadly hatred, and we turn small offenses into crimes, and almost despair of his salvation. On the contrary, by extenuating our sins, we scarcely think that we have committed very small offenses, when we have committed a very aggravated crime.

Thirdly, we do wrong in this respect, that we pronounce condemnation on all, without exception, whom God visits with the cross or with tribulation.<sup>253</sup> What we have lately said is undoubtedly true, that all our distresses arise from sin; but God afflicts his own people for various reasons. For as there are some men whose crimes he does not punish in this world, but whose punishment he delays till the future life, that he may inflict on them more

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253 "Par croix ou tribulation."

dreadful torments; so he often treats his believing people with greater severity, not because they have sinned more grievously, but that he may mortify the sins of the flesh for the future. Sometimes, too, he does not look at their sins, but only tries their obedience, or trains them to patience; as we see that holy Job — a righteous man, and one that feareth God,<sup>254</sup> is miserable beyond all other men; and yet it is not on account of his sins that he is sore distressed, but the design of God was different, which was, that his piety might be more fully ascertained even in adversity. They are false interpreters, therefore, who say that all afflictions, without any distinction, are sent on account of sins; as if the measure of punishments were equal, or as if God looked to nothing else in punishing men than to what every man deserves.

Wherefore, there are two things here that ought to be observed: that  
 judgment begins, for the most part, at the house of God,  
 (1 Peter 4:17;)

and, consequently, that while he passes by the wicked, he punishes his own people with severity when they have offended, and that, in correcting the sinful actions of the Church, his stripes are far more severe. Next, we ought to observe that there are various reasons why he afflicts men; for he gave Peter and Paul, not less than the most wicked robbers, into the hands of the executioner. Hence we infer, that we cannot always put our finger on the causes of the punishments which men endure.

When the disciples, following the common opinion, put the question, what kind of sin it was that the God of heaven punished, as soon as this man was born, they do not speak so absurdly as when they ask *if he sinned* before he was born. And yet this question, absurd as it is, was drawn from a common opinion which at that time prevailed; for it is very evident from other passages of Scripture, that they believed the *transmigration* (μετεμψύχωσις) of which Pythagoras dreamed, or that souls passed from one body into another.<sup>255</sup> Hence we see that the curiosity of men is an exceedingly deep labyrinth, especially when presumption is added to it. They saw that some were born lame, some squint-eyed, some entirely blind, and some with a deformed body; but instead of adoring, as they ought to have done, the hidden judgments of God, they wished to have a manifest reason in his works. Thus through their rashness they fell into those childish fooleries, so as to think that a soul, when it has completed one life, passes into a new body, and there endures the punishment due on account of the life which is already past. Nor are the Jews in the present day ashamed to proclaim this foolish dream in their synagogues, as if it were a revelation from heaven.

We are taught by this example, that we ought to be exceedingly careful not to push our inquiries into the judgments of God beyond the measure of sobriety, but the wanderings and errors of our understanding hurry and plunge us into dreadful gulfs. It was truly mon-

254 “Homme juste, et craignaut Dieu.”

255 “Que les ames passoyent d’un corps eu l’autre.”

strous, that so gross an error should have found a place among the elect people of God, in the midst of which the light of heavenly wisdom had been kindled by the Law and the Prophets. But if God punished so severely their presumption, there is nothing better for us, in considering the works of God, than such modesty that, when the reason of them is concealed, our minds shall break out into admiration, and our tongues shall immediately exclaim, “Thou art righteous, O Lord, and thy judgments are right though they cannot be comprehended.”

It is not without reason that the disciples put the question, *Did his parents sin?* For though the innocent son is not punished for his father’s fault, but

the soul which hath sinned shall itself die,

(Ezekiel 18:20,)

yet it is not an empty threatening, that the Lord throws the crimes of the parents into the bosom of the children, and

revenge them to the third and fourth generation,

(Exodus 20:5.)

Thus it frequently happens that the anger of God rests on one house for many generations; and, as he blesses the children of believers for the sake of their fathers, so he also rejects a wicked offspring, destining the children, by a just punishment, to the same ruin with their fathers. Nor can any man complain, on this account, that he is unjustly punished on account of the sin of another man; for, where the grace of the Spirit is wanting, from bad crows — as the proverb says<sup>256</sup> — there must be produced bad eggs. This gave reason to the apostles to doubt if the Lord punished, in the son, some crime of *his parents*.

3. Neither did this man sin, nor his parents. Christ does not absolutely say that the blind man, and his parents, were free from all blame; but he declares that we ought not to seek the cause of the blindness in sin. And this is what I have already said, that God has sometimes another object in view than to punish the sins of men, when he sends afflictions to them. Consequently, when the causes of afflictions are concealed, we ought to restrain curiosity, that we may neither dishonor God nor be malicious towards our brethren. Wherefore, Christ assigns another reason. This man, he says, was born blind, —

*That the works of God might be manifested in him.* He does not, say a single work, but uses the plural number, *works*; for, so long as he was blind, there was exhibited in him a proof of the severity of God, from which others might learn to fear and to humble themselves. It was afterwards followed by the benefit of his cure and deliverance,<sup>257</sup> in which the astonishing goodness of God was strikingly displayed. So then Christ intended, by these words, to excite in his disciples the expectation of a miracle; but at the same time reminds them in

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256 “Comme dit le proverbe.”

257 “De sa guairison et delivrance.”



a general manner, that this must be abundantly exhibited on the theater of the world, as the true and lawful cause, when God glorifies his name. Nor have men any right to complain of God, when he makes them the instruments of his glory in both ways, whether he shows himself to be merciful or severe.

4. *I must work the works of him who hath sent me.* He now testifies that he has been sent for the purpose of manifesting the kindness of God in giving sight to the blind man. He borrows also a comparison from the ordinary custom of life; for, when the sun is risen, man rises to labor, but the night is allotted to repose, as it is said,

The sun riseth; man goeth forth to his work, and to his labor, till the evening  
(Psalm 104:22, 23.)

He therefore employs the word *Day* to denote the time which the Father had fixed, during which he must finish *the work* assigned him; in the same manner as every man who has been called to some public office ought to be employed in what may be called his *daily* task, to perform what the nature of his office demands. Hence too we ought to deduce a universal rule, that to every man the course of his life may be called his *day*. Wherefore, as the short duration of the light ought to excite laborers to industry and toil, that the darkness of the night may not come on them by surprise, ere their exertions are well begun, so, when we see that a short period of life is allotted to us, we ought to be ashamed of languishing in idleness. In short, as soon as God enlightens us by calling us, we ought to make no delay, that the opportunity may not be lost.

5. *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* I consider this to have been added, by way of anticipation; for it might have been thought strange that Christ should speak of his time of working as limited, as if there were danger that the night should come upon him by surprise, as it does on other men. Thus, while he makes a distinction between himself and others, still he says that his time of working is limited. For he compares himself to the sun which, though it illuminates the whole earth by its brightness, yet, when it sets, takes away the day along with it. In this manner he states that his death will resemble the setting of the sun; not that his death extinguishes or obscures his light, but that it withdraws the view of it from the world. At the same time, he shows that, when he was manifested in flesh, that was truly the time of the day-light of the world. For though God gave light in all ages, yet Christ, by his coming, diffused a new and unwonted splendor. Hence he infers that this was an exceedingly fit and proper time, and that it might be said to be a very bright day, for illustrating the glory of God, when God intended to make a more striking exhibition of himself in his wonderful works.

But here arises another question. After the death of Christ, the power of God shone more illustriously, both in the fruit of the doctrine and in miracles; and Paul applies this strictly to the time of his own preaching, that

God, who from the beginning of the world commanded the light to shine out of darkness,  
at that time shone in the face of Christ by the Gospel,

(2 Corinthians 4:6.)

And does Christ now give less light to the world than when he was in the presence of men, and conversed with them? I reply, when Christ had finished the course of his office, he labored not less powerfully by his ministers than he had labored by himself, while he lived in the world. This I acknowledge to be true; but, first, it is not inconsistent with what he had said, that he was bound to perform, in his own person, what had been enjoined on him by the Father, and at the time when he was manifested in the flesh for that purpose. Secondly, it is not inconsistent with what he said, that his bodily presence was the true and remarkable *day of the world*, the lustre of which was diffused over all ages. For whence did the holy fathers in ancient times, or whence do we now, desire *light and day*, but because the manifestation of Christ always darted its rays to a great distance, so as to form one continued day? Whence it follows, that all who have not Christ for their guide grope in the dark like the blind, and wander about in confusion and disorder. Yet we must hold by this meaning of the words, that, as the sun discovers to our view the lovely spectacle of earth and heaven, and the whole arrangement of nature, so God has visibly displayed the chief glory of his works in his Son.

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## John 9:6-12

6. Having said this, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7. And said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, which, being interpreted, means Sent. He went, therefore, and washed, and came seeing. 8. Then the neighbors, and they who had formerly seen him, and that he was a beggar, said, Is not this he who sat and begged? 9. Some said, This is he. And others, He is like him. But he said, I am he. 10. They said, therefore, to him, How were thine eyes opened? 11. He answered and said, A man, who is called Jesus, made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said to me, Go into the pool of Siloam, and wash; and after I had gone and washed, I saw. 12. They said, therefore, to him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

6. *He spat on the ground.* The intention of Christ was, to restore sight to *the blind man*, but he commences the operation in a way which appears to be highly absurd; for, by *anointing his eyes with clay*, he in some respects doubles the *blindness*. Who would not have thought either that he was mocking the wretched man, or that he was practising senseless and absurd fooleries? But in this way he intended to try the faith and obedience of *the blind man*, that he might be an example to all. It certainly was no ordinary proof of faith, that *the blind man*, relying on a bare word, is fully convinced that his sight will be restored to him, and with this conviction hastens to go to the place where he was commanded. It is an illustrious commendation of his obedience, that he simply obeys Christ, though there are many inducements to an opposite course. And this is the trial of true faith, when the devout mind, satisfied with the simple word of God, promises what otherwise appears incredible. Faith is instantly followed by a readiness to obey, so that he who is convinced that God will be his faithful guide calmly yields himself to the direction of God. There can be no doubt that some suspicion and fear that he was mocked came into the mind of *the blind man*; but he found it easy to break through every obstruction, when he arrived at the conclusion that it was safe to follow Christ. It may be objected that *the blind man* did not know Christ; and, therefore, could not render the honor which was due to him as the Son of God. I acknowledge this to be true; but as he believed that Christ had been sent by God, he submits to him, and not doubting that he speaks the truth, he beholds in him nothing but what is Divine; and, in addition to all this, his faith is entitled to the greater commendation, because, while his knowledge was so small, he devoted himself wholly to Christ.

7. *Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.* Unquestionably, there was not, either in *the clay*, or in *the water of Siloam*, any power or fitness for curing the eyes; but Christ freely made use of those outward symbols, on various occasions, for adorning his miracles, either to accustom believers to the use of signs, or to show that all things were at his disposal, or to testify that every one of the creatures has as much power as he chooses to give them. But some inquire

what is meant by *the clay* composed of *dust* and *spittle*, and they explain it to have been a figure of Christ, because *the dust* denotes the earthly nature of the flesh, and *the spittle*, which came from his mouth, denotes the Divine essence of the Word. For my part, I lay aside this allegory as being more ingenious than solid, and am satisfied with this simple view, that as man was at first made of *clay*, so in restoring the eyes Christ made use of *clay*, showing that he had the same power over a part of the body which the Father had displayed in forming the whole man. Or, perhaps, he intended to declare, by this sign, that it was not more difficult for him to remove the obstruction, and to open the eyes of *the blind man*, than to wash away *clay* from any man whatever; and, on the other hand, that it was as much in his power to restore sight to the man as it was to *anoint his eyes with clay* I prefer the latter interpretation.

As to *the pool of Siloam*, he perhaps ordered *the blind man* to *wash in it*, in order to reprove the Jews for not being able to discern the power of God when present; as Isaiah reproaches the men of his time, that they

despise the waters of Siloam, which flow softly,  
(Isaiah 8:6,)

and prefer rapid and impetuous streams. This was also the reason, I think, why Elisha ordered Naaman the Syrian to *go and wash in Jordan*, (2 Kings 5:10.) This *pool*, if we may believe Jerome, was formed by waters which flowed at certain hours from Mount Zion.

*Which, if you interpret it, means Sent.* The Evangelist purposely adds the interpretation of the word *Siloam*; because that fountain, which was near the temple, daily reminded the Jews of Christ who was to come, but whom they despised when he was exhibited before them. The Evangelist, therefore, magnifies the grace of Christ, because he alone enlightens our darkness, and restores sight to the blind. For the condition of our nature is delineated in the person of one man, that we are all destitute of light and understanding from the womb, and that we ought to seek the cure of this evil from Christ alone.

Let it be observed that, though Christ was present then, yet he did not wish to neglect signs; and that for the sake of reproofing the stupidity of the nation, which laid aside the substance, and retained only an empty shadow of signs. Besides, the astonishing goodness of God is displayed in this respect, that he comes of his own accord to cure the blind man, and does not wait for his prayers to bestow help. And, indeed, since we are by nature averse to him, if he do not meet us before we call on him, and anticipate by his mercy us who are plunged in the forgetfulness of light and life, we are ruined.

**8.** *Then the neighbors, and those who had formerly seen him.* *The blind man* was known not only to *the neighbors*, but to all the inhabitants of the town, having been wont to sit and beg at the gate of the temple; and the common people look more readily at such persons than at others. This circumstance — of the man being *known* — contributed to make many people acquainted with the fame of the miracle. But, as impiety is ingenious in obscuring

the works of God, many thought that it was not the same man, because a new power of God openly appeared in him. Thus we find that the more brightly the majesty of God is displayed in his works, the less credit do they obtain among men. But the doubts of those men aided in proving the miracle, for, in consequence of those doubts, the blind man celebrated more highly the grace of Christ by his testimony. It is not without good reason, therefore, that the Evangelist brings together all those circumstances which seemed to exhibit more clearly the truth of the miracle.

**11.** *And after I had gone and washed.* So happy a result of obedience warns us to surmount every obstacle, and to proceed courageously wherever the Lord calls us, and not even to entertain a doubt that every thing which we undertake by his authority, and under his guidance, will have a prosperous issue.

### John 9:13-17

**13.** They bring to the Pharisees him who formerly had been blind. **14.** Now it was the Sabbath when Jesus had made the clay, and opened his eyes. **15.** The Pharisees also, therefore, asked him again, how he had received his sight. And he said to them, He put clay on mine eyes, and I washed, and I see. **16.** Wherefore some of the Pharisees said, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath. Others said, How can a man who is a sinner do these signs? And there was a division among them. **17.** They say to him who had been formerly blind,<sup>258</sup> What sayest thou of him, for having opened thine eyes? And he said, He is a Prophet.

**13.** *They bring to the Pharisees.* The following narrative shows that wicked men are so far from profiting by the works of God, that, the more they are urged by their power, so much the more are they constrained to pour out the venom which dwells within their breasts. The restoration of sight to the blind man ought undoubtedly to have softened even hearts of stone; or, at least, the Pharisees ought to have been struck with the novelty and greatness of the miracle, so as to remain in doubt for a short time, until they inquired if it were a divine work; but their hatred of Christ drives them to such stupidity, that they instantly condemn what they are told that he has done.

The Evangelist mentions *the Pharisees*; not that other sects were favorable to Christ, but because this sect was more zealous than the rest in maintaining the present condition. Hypocrisy is always proud and cruel. Being swelled with a false opinion of their holiness, they were chiefly wounded by the doctrine of the Gospel, which condemned all their counterfeit righteousnesses; and above all, they fought for their power and kingdom, under the pretense of endeavoring to maintain the Law.

When the Evangelist says that the multitude *brought the blind man to the Pharisees*, it is difficult to determine with what disposition or with what intention they did so. Scarcely an individual among them could then be ignorant of the inveterate hostility of *the Pharisees* to Christ; and therefore it is possible that many flatterers, in order to obtain their favor, purposely attempted to conceal the glory of the miracle. Yet I think it is probable that the greater part of the people, suspending their judgment, as usually happens, determined to refer to the arbitration and decision of those who held the government. But wilfully shutting their eyes, while the sun is shining, they bring darkness on themselves to obscure its light. It is a foolish superstition of the common people that, under the pretense of honoring God, they adore the wicked tyrants of the Church, and despise God himself, both in his word and in his works, or, at least, do not deign to look at him.

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258 “Ils disent derechef a l’aveugle;” — “they say again to the blind man.”

14. *Now it was the Sabbath.* Christ purposely selected *the Sabbath-day*, which must have given ground of offense to the Jews. He had already found, in the case of the paralytic, that this work was liable to slander. Why then does he not avoid the offense — which he could easily have done — but because the defense malignantly undertaken by men would tend to magnify the power of God? *The Sabbath-day* serves as a whetstone to sharpen them, to inquire more eagerly into the whole matter. And yet what advantage do they reap from a careful and earnest examination of the question but this, that the truth of the Gospel shines more brightly? We are taught by this example that, if we would follow Christ, we must excite the wrath of the enemies of the Gospel; and that they who endeavor to effect a compromise between the world and Christ, so as to condemn every kind of offenses, are altogether mad, since Christ, on the contrary, knowingly and deliberately provoked wicked men. We ought to attend, therefore, to the rule which he lays down, that they who are *blind, and leaders of the blind*, ([Matthew 15:14](#),) ought to be disregarded.

15. *The Pharisees also asked him.* The people had already heard this confession from the mouth of the blind man; and now the Pharisees also are made witnesses of it, who might have objected that a report had been groundlessly circulated by the common people, and had been as groundlessly believed. And, first, leaving out of view the question as to the fact, they dispute only about the law of the case; for they do not deny that Christ restored sight to the blind man, but they find a crime in the circumstance of the time when it was done, and assert that it is not a work of God, because it violated *the Sabbath*. But we ought first to inquire if a work of God was a violation of the Sabbath. And what hinders them from seeing this, but that, in consequence of having been blinded by sinful motives and by malice, they see nothing? Besides, they had already been abundantly instructed by Christ, that the benefits which God bestows on men are not more inconsistent with the Sabbath than circumcision; and the words of the Law enjoin men to abstain from their own works only, and not from the works of God, ([Exodus 20:8](#); [23:12](#).) When they take for granted an error which has been so frequently refuted, it must be imputed to obstinate malice; or at least there is no other reason why they go wrong but because they choose to go wrong.

Thus the Palmists do not cease to bring forward, with hardened effrontery, their idle and foolish slanders, which have been answered a hundred times. What, then, must we do with them? When an opportunity occurs, we must endeavor, as far as lies in our power, to oppose the wicked attempts of those who, actuated by false zeal, reproach and slander the gospel. If no defense, however just, shut their mouth, we have no reason to be discouraged, but ought to trample under foot, with boldness and magnanimity, that eagerness to slander by which they wish to oppress us. They take up maxims which we readily grant to them, that we ought not to listen to those who revolt from the Church, and break up the unity of the faith. But they pass by, and pretend not to have observed — that which ought to form the principal subject of inquiry, and which we have explained clearly in many passages —

that nothing can be farther removed from the Church than the Pope with all his band; that a medley composed of lies and impositions, and stained by so many superstitious inventions, is widely distant from the purity of faith. But with all their furious arrogance, they will never hinder the truth, which has been so frequently and so firmly maintained by us, from being at length successful. In like manner, *the Pharisees* brought against Christ a plausible maxim, *That he who does not keep the Sabbath is not from God*; but they unjustly and falsely asserted that the work of God is a violation of the Sabbath.

**16.** *How can a man who is a sinner do these things?* The word *sinner* is employed here, as in many other passages, to denote a person of immoral conduct and a despiser of God.

Why doth your Master eat with publicans and sinners?

(Mark 2:16.)

That is, “Why doth your Master eat with men of ungodly and wicked lives, whose baseness is stamped with universal infamy?” For from the violation of the Sabbath the enemies of Christ inferred that he was a profane person, and destitute of all religion. Those who stand neutral and judge more candidly, on the other hand, conclude that he is a good and religious man, because God has endued him with remarkable power to work miracles. And yet the argument does not appear to be quite conclusive; for God sometimes permits false prophets to perform some miracles, and we know that Satan, like an ape, counterfeits the works of God so as to deceive the incautious.

Suetonius relates that, when Vespasian was in Alexandria, and was seated on his tribunal to dispense justice in the open court, a blind man requested him to anoint his eyes with spittle, and said that one Serapis<sup>259</sup> had pointed out to him that cure in a dream; that Vespasian, being unwilling to expose himself to contempt without any good reason, was slow and reluctant to comply; but that, when his friends urged him on all sides, he granted to the blind man what he asked, and that in this way his eyes were instantly opened. Who would reckon Vespasian among the servants of God on that account, or adorn him with the applause of piety? I reply, among good men and those who fear God, miracles are undoubted pledges of the power of the Holy Spirit; but it happens by a just judgment of God, that Satan deceives unbelievers by false miracles, as by enchantments. What I have just now quoted from Suetonius I do not reckon to be fabulous; but I rather ascribe it to the righteous vengeance of God, that the Jews, having despised so many and so illustrious miracles of Christ, were at length — as they deserved to be — sent away to Satan. For they ought to have profited in the pure worship of God by the miracles of Christ; they ought to have been confirmed by them in the doctrine of the Law, and to have risen to the Messiah himself, who was the end of the Law. And undoubtedly Christ, by giving sight to the blind man, had clearly proved that he was the Messiah.

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259 “Un certain Serapis.”



They who refuse to acknowledge God in his works make this refusal, not only through indifference, but through malicious contempt; and do they not deserve that God should give them up to the delusions of Satan? Let us then remember that we ought to seek God with a sincere disposition of heart, that he may reveal himself to us by the power of his Spirit; and that we ought to lend our ears submissively to his word, that he may clearly point out true prophets by miracles that are not delusive. Thus shall we profit, as we ought to do, by miracles, and not be exposed to the frauds of Satan.

As to the men themselves, though they act commendably in this respect, that they speak with reverence about the miracles in which the power of God is displayed, still they do not bring forward a sufficiently strong argument, to prove that Christ ought to be reckoned a Prophet of God. And even the Evangelist did not intend that their answer should be regarded as an oracle. He only exhibits the wicked obstinacy of the enemies of Christ, who maliciously pick a quarrel with what they cannot but acknowledge to be the works of God, and, when warned, do not even attend to them for a short time.

*And there was a division among them.* A schism is a highly pernicious and destructive evil in the Church of God; and how comes it then that Christ sows the occasion of discord among the very teachers of the Church? The answer is easy. Christ had no other object in view than to bring all men to God the Father, by stretching out his hand to them. The *division* arose from the obstinate malice <sup>260</sup> of those who had no disposition to go to God. All who do not yield obedience to the truth of God, therefore, rend the Church by schism. Yet it is better that men should differ among themselves, than that they should all, with one consent, revolt from the true religion. <sup>261</sup> Wherefore, whenever *differences* arise, we ought always to consider their source.

17. *They say to him who had been blind.* The more diligently they inquire, the more impressively does the truth of God appear; for they act as if one were endeavoring to extinguish a strong flame <sup>262</sup> by his breath. Thus, when we see wicked men contrive all that they can to crush the truth of God, we have no reason to be afraid, or to be excessively anxious about the result, for all that they can gain in this way will be to cause its light to burn with greater brightness.

*What sayest thou of him?* When they ask the blind man what is his opinion, they do so, not because they wish to abide by his judgment, or set any value on it, but because they hope that the man, struck with fear, will reply according to their wish. In this respect the Lord disappoints them; for when a poor man disregards their threatenings, and boldly maintains that Christ is a Prophet, we ought justly to ascribe it to the grace of God; so that this boldness

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260 “De la malice obstinee.”

261 “De la vraye religion.”

262 “Une grande flamme.”

is another miracle. And if he so boldly and freely acknowledged Christ to be a Prophet, though he did not as yet know that the Lord Jesus<sup>263</sup> was the Son of God, how shameful is the treachery of those who, subdued by fear, either deny him, or are silent respecting him, though they know that he sitteth at the right hand of the Father, and that he will come thence to be the Judge of the whole world! Since this blind man did not quench a small spark of knowledge, we ought to endeavor that an open and full confession may blaze forth from the full brightness which has shone into our hearts.

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263 "Le Seigneur Jesus."

### John 9:18-23

**18.** But the Jews did not believe respecting him, that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. **19.** And they asked them, saying, Is this your son who, you say, was born blind? How then doth he now see? **20.** His parents answered and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. **21.** But how he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not; he is of age, ask him, he will speak of himself. **22.** These things said his parents, because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had already determined that, if any man confessed that he was the Christ, he should be thrown out of the synagogue. **23.** On this account his parents said, He is of age, ask him.

**18.** *But the Jews did not believe.* There are two things here which ought to be observed; that *they do not believe* that a miracle has been performed, and that, being wilfully blinded through a perverse hatred of Christ, they do not perceive what is manifest. The Evangelist tells us that *they did not believe*. If the reason be asked, there can be no doubt that their blindness was voluntary. For what prevents them from seeing an obvious work of God placed before their eyes; or, after having been fully convinced, what prevents them from believing what they already know, except that the inward malice of their heart keeps their eyes shut? Paul informs us that the same thing takes place in the doctrine of the Gospel; for he says that it is not *hidden* or obscure, except to the reprobate,

whose understandings the god of this world hath blinded,

(2 Corinthians 4:3, 4.)

Warned by such examples, let us learn not to bring upon ourselves those obstacles which drive us away from the faith. By *the Jews*, the Evangelist means that part of them which held the government of the people.

**19.** *Is this your son?* Not having succeeded in the former way, they now attempt another; but the Lord not only defeats their attempts in a wonderful manner, but turns them even to an opposite purpose. They do not merely put a single question, but cunningly put a multitude of questions involved in each other, with the view of preventing a reply. But out of a variety of entangled and captious questions, *the parents of the blind man* select only the half, to which they reply:

**20.** *We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind.* Hence it follows that he does not see naturally, but that his eyes have been miraculously opened; but this latter point — that his sight had been miraculously restored — they pass by, because it would give offense. By their silence they show their ingratitude; for, having received so distinguished a gift of God, they ought to have burned with desire to celebrate his name. But, struck with terror, they bury the grace of God, as far as lies in their power, with this exception, that they substi-

tute in their room, as a witness, their son, who will explain the whole matter as it happened, and who will be heard with less prejudice, and will be more readily believed. But though they prudently avoid danger, and continue this middle path, of testifying indirectly about Christ by the mouth of their son, yet this does not prevent the Holy Spirit from condemning their cowardice by the mouth of the Evangelist, because they fail to discharge their own duty. How much less excuse then will they have, who, by treacherous denial, utterly bury Christ, with his doctrine, with his miracles, with his power and grace!

22. *The Jews had determined.* This passage shows that the custom of excommunication is ancient, and has been observed in all ages; for excommunication was not then for the first time invented, but it was a custom which had been anciently used against apostates and despisers of the Law, and was turned against the disciples of Christ. We learn, therefore, that the practice of excommunication arose out of the most ancient discipline of the Church. We learn also that it is a crime which has not been of recent origin, and has not been peculiar to a single age, that wicked and unbelieving<sup>264</sup> men should corrupt the holy ordinances of God by their deeds of sacrilege. God determined, from the beginning of the world,<sup>265</sup> that there should be some form of correction, by which rebels should be restrained. The priests and scribes not only abused this power in a tyrannical manner to oppress innocent men; but at length they basely attacked God himself and his doctrine. The truth of Christ being so powerful that they were not able to put it down by law, or by a regular course of proceedings, they launched the thunders of excommunications to crush it.

The same thing has also been done with the Christian people; for it is impossible to express the barbarous tyranny which the pretended bishops have exercised in enslaving the people, so that no man dared to whisper; and now we see with what cruelty they throw this dart of excommunication against all who worship God. But we ought to believe that excommunication, when it is violently applied to a different purpose by the passions of men, may safely be treated with contempt. For when God committed to his Church the power of excommunicating, he did not arm tyrants or executioners to strangle souls, but laid down a rule for governing his people; and that on the condition that he should hold the supreme government, and that he should have men for his ministers. Let the pretended bishops then thunder as they think fit, by their empty noises they will not terrify any but those who wander about in doubt and uncertainty, not having yet been instructed, by the voice of the Chief Shepherd, what is the true fold.

In short, nothing can be more certain than that those who, we see, are not subject to Christ are deprived of the lawful power of excommunicating. Nor ought we to dread being excluded by them from their assembly, since Christ, who is our life and salvation, is banished

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264 "Les infideles."

265 "Des le commencement du monde."

from it. So far are we from having any reason to dread being thrown out, that, on the contrary, if we desire to be united to Christ, we must, of our own accord, withdraw from the synagogues of Satan. Yet though the ordinance of excommunication was so basely corrupted in the ancient Church, still Christ did not intend that it should be abolished by his coming, but restored it to its purity, that it might be in full vigor amongst us. Thus, though at the present day there prevails in Popery a base profanation of this holy discipline, yet, instead of abolishing it, we ought rather to give the utmost diligence to restore it to its former completeness. There never will be so good order the world, that even the holiest Laws of God shall not degenerate into corruption, through the fault of men. Assuredly, it would give too much power to Satan, if he could reduce to nothing every thing that he corrupts. We would then have no Baptism, no Lord's Supper, and, in short, no religion; for there is no part of it which he has left uncontaminated by its pollutions.

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### John 9:24-33

24. A second time, therefore, they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner. 25. Therefore he answered and said, Whether he be a sinner, I know not; one thing I know, that though I was blind, I now see. 26. Again, therefore, they said to him, What did he to thee? How did he open thine eyes? 27. He answered them, I told you already, and you did not hear; why do you wish to hear it again? Do you wish also to become his disciples? 28. Then they upbraided him, and said, Be thou his disciple; as for us,<sup>266</sup> we are the disciples of Moses. 29. We know that God spoke to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know whence he is. 30. The man answered, and said to them, Certainly this is wonderful, that you do not know whence he is, and yet<sup>267</sup> he hath opened mine eyes. 31. Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth. 32. Never before was it heard<sup>268</sup> that any man opened the eyes of him who had been born blind. 33. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

24. *A second time, therefore, they called the man who had been blind.* There can be no doubt that they were constrained by shame to call the blind man, whom they had previously found to be too firm and steady. In this way, the more fiercely they struggle against God, the more numerous are the cords which they put about their neck,<sup>269</sup> and the more strongly do they bind themselves. Besides, they put the questions in such a manner as to endeavor to make the man say what they wish. It is a plausible preface, indeed, when they exhort him to *give glory to God*; but immediately afterwards they strictly forbid him to answer according to the conviction of his mind; and therefore, under the pretense of the name of God, they demand from him servile obedience.

*Give glory to God.* Though this adjuration may be referred to what is connected with the present cause, that the blind man should not obscure *the glory of God* by ascribing to man the benefit which he had received, yet I rather agree with those who think that it was a solemn form, which was wont to be employed when an oath was administered to any person. For in those very words does Joshua adjure Achan, when he wishes to draw from him a true confession of having taken away *the accursed thing*, (*Joshua 7:19.*) By these words they reminded him that no slight insult is offered to God, when any person, in His name, commits falsehood. And, indeed, whenever we are called to swear, we ought to remember

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266 “Quant a nous.”

267 “Et toutesfois.”

268 “Il ne fut jamais ouy.”

269 “Tant plus de lags se mettent-ils au Col.”

this preface, so that truth may not be less highly valued by us than *the glory of God*. If this were done, the sacredness of an oath would be viewed in a very different light. Now, since the greater part of men — not considering that they deny God, when they invoke His name for upholding a falsehood — rashly and daringly rush forward to swear, the consequence is, that every place is full of perjuries. Meanwhile, we see how hypocrites, though they pretend to have the greatest reverence for God, are guilty not only of hypocrisy, but of insolent mockery; for they at the same time express a wish that the blind man should wickedly swear according to their direction, with open contempt of God. Thus God drags to light their wicked designs, whatever attempts they may make to give them a plausible appearance, or to conceal them by hypocritical pretences.

25. *Whether he be a sinner, I know not.* The blind man appears not to have been at all prevented by fear from giving a sincere testimony. For there is no reason to believe that he had any doubts about Christ, as his words seem to imply; but I rather think that he spoke ironically, in order to wound them more deeply. He had already confessed that Christ was *a Prophet*, (verse 17.) Perceiving that he gains nothing by doing so, he suspends his judgment about the person, and brings forward the fact itself, so that, while he makes this admission in their favor, he is not free from ridiculing them.

26. *Again, therefore, they said to him.* When we see wicked men so delighted in performing their own base actions, we ought to be ashamed of our slothfulness, in acting with such coolness about the affairs of Christ. Though they search on all sides to obtain grounds of slander, the Lord defeats their attempts, in a remarkable manner, by the unshaken firmness of the blind man; for not only does he persist in his opinion, but he freely and severely reproaches them, that after having abundantly ascertained and known the truth, they endeavor to bury it by their continual inquiries. He charges them also with wicked hatred of Christ, when he says,

*Do you also wish to become his disciples?* For he means that, though they were a hundred times convinced, they are so strongly prejudiced by wicked and hostile dispositions, that they will never yield. It is an astonishing display of freedom, when a man of mean and low condition, and especially liable to be reproached on account of his poverty, fearlessly provokes the rage of all the priests against himself. If that which was nothing more than a small preparation for faith gave him so much boldness, when he came to the struggle, what excuse can be pleaded by great preachers of the Gospel, who, though they are beyond the reach of darts, are silent as soon as danger is threatened? This question is likewise ironical; for he means that they are prompted by malice, and not by a sincere desire of the truth, to press him so earnestly to reply as to this fact.<sup>270</sup>

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270 “Quand ils le pressent si instamment a respondre sur ce fait.”

28. *Then they upbraided him.* It is probable that all the reproaches which were prompted by the violence of their rage and indignation were eagerly cast upon him; but there was this one reproach among men, that they called him an apostate from the Law. For, in their opinion, he could not be a disciple of Christ without revolting from the Law of Moses; and they expressly represent these two things as inconsistent with each other. It is a very plausible pretence, that they are afraid of revolting from the doctrine of Moses. For this is the true rule of piety, that we ought to listen to the prophets, by whom we certainly know that God has spoken; that our faith may not be carried about by any doctrines of men. From this principle they deduce their certainty as to the Law of Moses; but they lie when they say that they are *the disciples of Moses*, for they have turned aside from the end of the Law. Thus hypocrites are wont to tear God in pieces,<sup>271</sup> when they wish to shelter themselves under his name. If Christ be the soul of the Law, as Paul tells us, ([Romans 10:4](#)), what will the Law be when separated from him, but a dead body? We are taught by this example, that no man truly hears God, unless he be an attentive hearer of his word, so as to understand what God means and says.

29. *As for this man, we know not whence he is.* When they say so, they refer not to his country or the place of his birth, but to the prophetic office. For they allege that they have no knowledge of his calling, so as to receive him as having proceeded from God.

30. *Certainly this is wonderful.* He indirectly reproves them for remaining unmoved by a miracle so illustrious, and for pretending that they did not know Christ's calling; as if he had said, that it was highly improper that such a testimony of Divine power should be held in no estimation, and that the calling of Christ, so proved and attested, should obtain no credit among them. And, in order to show more clearly their stupidity or malice, he magnifies the excellence of the miracle from this consideration, that, as far as the memory of men reaches, none was ever heard to say that such a thing was done by a man. Hence it follows that they are malicious and ungrateful, because they voluntarily shut their eyes on a manifest work of God. He infers from this, that Christ was sent by God, because he is endued with so great power of the Spirit of God, to procure credit for himself and for his doctrine.

31. *Now we know that God heareth not sinners.* Those who think that the man spoke this, in accordance with the opinion of the people, are mistaken; for the word *sinner*, in this passage, as in another which lately occurred, means an ungodly and immoral person. It is the uniform doctrine of Scripture, that God does not listen to any but those who call upon him with truth and sincerity. For while faith alone opens the door to us to go to God, it is certain that all wicked men are excluded from approaching to him; and he even declares that *he detests their prayers*, ([Proverbs 28:9](#)), as *he abhors their sacrifices*, ([Proverbs 15:8](#)). It is by a special privilege that he invites his children to himself; and it is *the Spirit of adoption*

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271 "De deschirer Dieu par pieces."



alone *that crieth out in our hearts, Abba, Father,* ([Romans 8:15](#); [Galatians 4:6](#).) In short, no man is properly disposed to pray to God, unless his heart be purified by faith. But wicked men profane the sacred name of God by their prayers, and therefore they deserve rather to be punished for this sacrilege, than to obtain any thing for salvation. Accordingly, the blind man does not reason inconclusively, that Christ has come from God, because God lends a favorable ear to his prayers.

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### John 9:34-41

34. They answered, and said to him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. 35. Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him, he said to him, Dost thou believe in the Son of God? 36. He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I should believe in him? 37. And Jesus said to him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he who talketh with thee. 38. And he said, Lord, I believe; and he worshipped him. 39. Then Jesus said, For judgment am I come into this world, that they who see not may see, and that they who see may become blind. 40. Some of the Pharisees, who were with him, heard these things, and said to him, And are we blind also? 41. Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would not have sin;<sup>272</sup> but now you say, We see: therefore your sin remaineth.

34. *Thou wast altogether born in sins* They alluded, I doubt not, to his blindness; as proud men are wont to tease those who have any distress or calamity; and, therefore, they continually insult him, as if he had come out of his mother's womb, bearing the mark of his *sins* For all the scribes were convinced in their hearts, that souls, after having finished one life, entered into new bodies, and there suffered the punishment of their former crimes. Hence they conclude that he who was born blind was, at that very time, covered and polluted by his sins.

This undeserved censure ought to instruct us to be exceedingly cautious, not always to estimate the sins of any person by the chastisements of God; for, as we have already seen, God has various ends to accomplish, by inflicting calamities on men. But not only do those hypocrites insult the wretched man; they likewise reject disdainfully his warnings, though they are holy and good; as indeed it very frequently happens that one cannot endure to be taught by him whom he despises. Now, since we ought always to hear God, by whomsoever he may talk to us, let us learn not to despise any man, that God may find us always mild and submissive, even though he employ a person altogether mean and despicable to instruct us. For there is not a more dangerous plague than when pride stops our ears, so that we do not deign to hear those who warn us for our profit; and it frequently happens that God purposely selects vile and worthless persons to instruct and warn us, in order to subdue our pride.

*And they cast him out.* Though it is possible that those haughty Rabbis<sup>273</sup> cast him, with violence, out of the temple, yet I think that the Evangelist has a different meaning, that *they excommunicated him*; and thus the *casting of him out* would have the semblance of law. This agrees better also with what follows; for if they had only cast him out in a disdainful

272 "Vous n'auriez point de peche;" — "you would have no sin."

273 "Ces Rabbins orgueilleux."

and furious manner, it would not have been of so great importance as to make it probable that the report of it would reach Christ.

**35.** *Jesus heard that they had cast him out.* From this circumstance I conjecture that they proceeded to it in a solemn manner, as an affair of great importance, By this example, we are taught how trivial and how little to be dreaded are the excommunications of the enemies of Christ. If we are *cast out* from that assembly in which Christ reigns, it is a dreadful judgment which is executed against us, that we are *delivered to Satan*, ([1 Corinthians 5:5](#).) because we are banished from the kingdom of the Son of God. But so far are we from having any reason to dread that tyrannical judgment by which wicked men insult the servants of Christ, that, even though no man should drive us out, we ought of our own accord to flee from that place in which Christ does not preside by his word and Spirit.

*And having found him.* If he had been allowed to remain in the synagogue, he would have been in danger of becoming gradually alienated from Christ, and plunged in the same destruction with wicked men. Christ now meets him, when he is no longer in the temple, but wandering hither and hither; receives and embraces him, when he is *cast out* by the priests; raises him up from the ground, and offers to him life, when he has received the sentence of death. We have known the same thing by experience in our own time; for when Dr Martin Luther,<sup>274</sup> and other persons of the same class, were beginning to reprove the grosser abuses of the Pope, they scarcely had the slightest relish for pure Christianity; but after that the Pope had thundered against them, and *cast them out* of the Roman synagogue by terrific bulls, Christ stretched out his hand, and made himself fully known to them. So there is nothing better for us than to be at a very great distance from the enemies of the Gospel, that Christ may approach nearer to us.

*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?* He speaks to a Jew, who had been from his infancy instructed in the doctrine of the Law, and had learned that God had promised the Messiah. This question, therefore, has the same meaning as if Christ had exhorted him to follow the Messiah and to devote himself to him; though he employs a more honorable name than they were wont at that time to employ, for the Messiah was reckoned to be only *the son of David*, ([Matthew 22:42](#).)

**36.** *Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?* From this reply of the blind man it is evident that, though he had not yet attained any clear or certain knowledge of Christ, still he was obedient and ready to receive instruction; for these words mean, “As soon as he is pointed out to me, I am ready to embrace him.” But it ought to be observed that the blind man desires to be instructed by Christ as a Prophet; for he was already convinced that Christ had been sent by God, and therefore he does not at random place reliance on his doctrine.

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274 “Le Docteur Martin Luther.”

37. *Thou hast both seen him.* By these words of Christ the blind man could not be carried higher than to a very small and cold portion of faith. For Christ does not mention his power, or the reason why he was sent by the Father, or what he has brought to men. But what principally belongs to faith is, to know that, by the sacrifice of his death, atonement has been made for our sins, and we are reconciled to God; that his resurrection was a triumph over vanquished death; that we are renewed by his Spirit, in order that, being dead to the flesh and to sin, we may live to righteousness; that he is the only Mediator; that the Spirit is the earnest of our adoption; in short, that in him is found every thing that belongs to eternal life. But the Evangelist either does not relate the whole of the conversation which Christ held with him, or he only means that the blind man professed his attachment to Christ, so that henceforth he began to be one of his disciples. For my own part, I have no doubt that Jesus intended to be acknowledged by him as the Christ, that from this beginning of faith he might afterwards lead him forward to a more intimate knowledge of himself.

38. *And he worshipped him.* It may be asked, Did the blind man honor or worship Christ as God? <sup>275</sup> The word which the Evangelist employs (προσέκυνησεν) means nothing more than to express respect and homage by bending the knee, or by other signs. For my own part, certainly, I think that it denotes something rare and uncommon; namely, that the blind man gave far more honor to Christ than to an ordinary man, or even to a prophet. And yet I do not think that at that time he had made such progress as to know that Christ was God manifested in the flesh. What then is meant by *worship*? The blind man, convinced that Jesus was *the Son of God*, nearly lost the command of himself, and, in rapturous admiration, bowed down before him.

39. *For judgment am I come into this world.* The word *judgment* cannot be understood, in this passage, to denote simply the punishment which is inflicted on unbelievers, <sup>276</sup> and on those who despise God; for it is made to include the grace of illumination. Christ, therefore, calls it *judgment*, because he restores to proper order what was disordered and confused; but he means that this is done by a wonderful purpose of God, and contrary to the ordinary opinion of men. And, indeed, human reason considers nothing to be more unreasonable than to say, that *they who see are made blind* by the light of the world. This then is one of the secret judgments of God, by which he casts down the pride of men. It ought to be observed, that the *blindness* which is here mentioned, does not proceed so much from Christ as from the fault of men. For by its own nature, it does not strictly *blind* any man, but as there is nothing which the reprobate desire more earnestly than to extinguish its light, the eyes of their mind, which are diseased through malice and depravity, must be dazzled by the light which is exhibited to them. In short, since Christ is, by his own nature,

275 "Si l'aveugle a honore ou adore Christ comme Dieu."

276 "Aux infideles."

*the light of the world*, (John 8:12,) it is an accidental result, that some *are made blind* by his coming.

But again it may be asked, Since all are universally accused of *blindness*, who are *they that see*? I reply, this is spoken ironically by way of concession, because unbelievers, though they are blind, think that their sight is uncommonly acute and powerful; and elated by this confidence, they do not deign to listen to God. Besides, out of Christ the wisdom of the flesh has a very fair appearance, because the world does not understand what it is to be truly wise. So then, they *see*, says our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>277</sup> who, deceiving themselves and others under a foolish confidence in their wisdom, are guided by their own opinion, and reckon their vain imaginations to be great wisdom.<sup>278</sup> Such persons, as soon as Christ appears in the brightness of his Gospel, *are made blind*; not only because their folly, which was formerly concealed amidst the darkness of unbelief, is now discovered, but because, being plunged in deeper darkness by the righteous vengeance of God, they lose that small remnant of I know not what light which they formerly possessed.

It is true that we are all born *blind*, but still, amidst the darkness of corrupted and depraved nature, some sparks continue to shine, so that men differ from brute beasts. Now, if any man, elated by proud confidence in his own opinion, refuses to submit to God, he will seem — apart from Christ — to be wise, but the brightness of Christ will strike him with dismay; for never does the vanity of the human mind begin to be discovered, until heavenly wisdom is brought into view. But Christ intended, as I have already suggested, to express something more by these words. For hypocrites do not so obstinately resist God before Christ shines; but as soon as the light is brought near them, then do they, in open war, and — as it were, with unfurled banner,<sup>279</sup> — rise up against God. It is in consequence of this depravity and ingratitude, therefore, that they become doubly *blind*, and that God, in righteous vengeance, entirely puts out their eyes, which were formerly destitute of the true light.

We now perceive the amount of what is stated in this passage, that Christ came into the world to give sight to the *blind*, and to drive to madness those who think that they are wise. In the first part of it, he mentions illumination, *that they who see not may see*; because this is strictly the cause of his coming, for he did not come to *judge* the world, but rather *to save that which was lost*, (Matthew 18:11.) In like manner Paul, when he declares that he has *vengeance prepared against all rebels*, at the same time adds, that this punishment will take place

after that believers shall have fulfilled their obedience,

277 “Ceux voyent, dit nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ.”

278 “Pour une grande sagesse.”

279 “Et comme a enseigne desployee.”

(2 Corinthians 10:6.)

And this vengeance ought not to be limited to the person of Christ, as if he did not perform the same thing daily by the ministers of his Gospel.

We ought to be the more careful that none of us, through a foolish and extravagant opinion of his wisdom, draw down upon himself this dreadful punishment. But experience shows us the truth of this statement which Christ uttered; for we see many persons struck with giddiness and rage, for no other reason but because they cannot endure the rising of the Sun of righteousness. Adam lived, and was endued with the true light of understanding, while he lost that divine blessing by desiring to see more than was allowed him. Now if, while we are plunged in *blindness* and thus humbled by the Lord, we still flatter ourselves in our darkness, and oppose our mad views to heavenly wisdom, we need not wonder if the vengeance of God fall heavily upon us, so that we are rendered doubly *blind*. This very punishment was formerly inflicted on the wicked and unbelievers<sup>280</sup> under the Law; for Isaiah is sent to blind the ancient people, that

seeing they may not see: blind the heart of this people, and shut their ears,

(Isaiah 6:9.)

But in proportion as the brightness of the divine light is more fully displayed in Christ than in the Prophets, so much the more remarkably must this example of *blindness* have been manifested and perceived; as even now the noon-day light of the Gospel drives hypocrites to extreme rage.

**40.** *Some of the Pharisees heard.* They instantly perceived that they were smitten by this saying of Christ, and yet they appear not to have belonged to the worst class; for the open enemies had so strong an abhorrence of Christ that they did not at all associate with him. But those men submitted to listen to Christ, yet without any advantage, for no man is qualified to be a disciple of Christ, until he has been divested of self, and they were very far from being so.

*Are we also blind?* This question arose from indignation, because they thought that they were insulted by being classed with *blind* men; and, at the same time, it shows a haughty contempt of the grace of Christ accompanied by mockery, as if they had said, "Thou canst not rise to reputation without involving us in disgrace; and is it to be endured that thou shouldst obtain honor for thyself by upbraiding us? As to the promise thou makest of giving new light to *the blind*, go hence and leave us with thy benefit; for we do not choose to receive sight from thee on the condition of admitting that we have been hitherto *blind*." Hence we perceive that hypocrisy has always been full of pride and of venom. The *pride* is manifested by their being satisfied with themselves, and refusing to have any thing taken from them; and the *venom*, by their being enraged at Christ and arguing with him, because he has

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280 "Les mechans et infideles."

pointed out their wound, as if he had inflicted on them a grievous wound. Hence arises contempt of Christ and of the grace which he offers to them.

The word *also* is emphatic; for it means that, though all the rest be *blind*, still it is improper that they should be reckoned as belonging to the ordinary rank. It is too common a fault among those who are distinguished above others, that they are intoxicated with pride, and almost forget that they are men.

41. *If you were blind.* These words may be explained in two ways; either, that ignorance would, in some degree, alleviate their guilt, if they were not fully convinced, and did not deliberately fight against the truth; or, that there was reason to hope that their disease of ignorance might be cured, if they would only acknowledge it. The former view is supported by the words of Christ,

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin,  
(John 15:22.)

But as it is added in this passage, *but now you say you see*, in order that the points of contrast may correspond to each other, it appears to be more consistent to explain them to mean, that he is *blind* who, aware of his own blindness, seeks a remedy to cure his disease.<sup>281</sup> In this way the meaning will be, “If you would acknowledge your disease, it would not be altogether incurable; but now because you think that you are in perfect health, you continue in a desperate state.” When he says that *they who are blind have no sin*, this does not excuse ignorance, as if it were harmless, and were placed beyond the reach of condemnation. He only means that the disease may easily be cured, when it is truly felt; because, when a *blind* man is desirous to obtain deliverance, God is ready to assist him; but they who, insensible to their diseases, despise the grace of God, are incurable.

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281 “Pour guairir son mal.”

# CHAPTER 10



### John 10:1-6

1. Verily, verily, I say to you, He who entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth by another way, is a thief and a robber. 2. But he who entereth by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3. To him the porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. 4. And having put out his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice. 5. But they will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers. 6. Jesus spoke this parable to them; but they did not understand what those things were which he spoke to them.

1. *Verily, verily, I say to you.* As Christ had to do with scribes and priests, who were reckoned pastors of the Church, it was necessary that they should be divested of the honor of this title, if he wished his doctrine to be received. The small number of believers might also diminish greatly the authority of his doctrine. He therefore contends that we ought not to reckon, in the number of *shepherds* or of *sheep*, all who outwardly claim a place in the Church. But we shall never be able, by means of this mark, to distinguish the lawful *shepherds* from the reprobate, and the true *sheep* from the counterfeit, if all have the same object, and beginning, and end.

This warning has been highly useful in all ages, and in the present day it is especially necessary. No plague is more destructive to the Church, than when wolves ravage under the garb of *shepherds*. We know also how grievous an offense it is, when bastard or degenerate Israelites pretend to be the sons of the Church, and, on this pretense, insult believers. But in the present day, there is nothing by which weak and ignorant persons are more alarmed, than when they see the sanctuary of God occupied by the greatest enemies of the Church; for it is not easy to make them understand, that it is the doctrine of Christ which the *shepherds* of the Church so fiercely resist. Besides, as the greater part of men are led into various errors by false doctrines, while the views and expectations of each person are directed to others, scarcely any person permits himself to be conducted into the right path.

We must therefore, above all things, guard against being deceived by pretended *shepherds* or counterfeit *sheep*, if we do not choose, of our own accord, to expose ourselves to *wolves* and *thieves*. The name of "The Church" is highly honorable, and justly so; but the greater the reverence which it deserves, so much the more careful and attentive ought we to be in marking the distinction between true and false doctrine. Christ here declares openly, that we ought not to reckon as *shepherds* all who boast of being such, and that we ought not to reckon as *sheep* all who boast of outward marks. He speaks of the Jewish Church, but what he says applies equally well to our own. We ought also to consider his purpose and design, that weak consciences may not be alarmed or discouraged, when they perceive that they

who rule in the Church, instead of *pastors* or *shepherds*, are hostile or opposed to the Gospel; and that they may not turn aside from the faith, because they have few fellow-disciples, in listening to Christ, among those who are called Christians.

*He who entereth not by the door.* It is useless, I think, to scrutinize too closely every part of this parable. Let us rest satisfied with this general view, that, as Christ states a resemblance between the Church and a *sheepfold*, in which God assembles all his people, so he compares himself to a *door*, because there is no other entrance into the Church but by himself. Hence it follows that they alone are good *shepherds* who lead men straight to Christ; and that they are truly gathered into the *fold* of Christ, so as to belong to his flock, who devote themselves to Christ alone.

But all this relates to doctrine; for, since  
 all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ,  
 (Colossians 2:3,)

he who turns aside from him to go elsewhere neither keeps the road nor *enters by the door*. Now, whoever shall not despise Christ or his instructor will easily rid himself of that hesitation which keeps so many in a state of perplexity, what is the Church, and who are they to whom we ought to listen as *shepherds*. For if they who are called shepherds attempt to lead us away from Christ, we ought to flee from them, at the command of Christ, as we would flee from *wolves* or *thieves*; and we ought not to form or maintain intercourse with any society but that which is agreed in the pure faith of the Gospel. For this reason Christ exhorts his disciples to separate themselves from the unbelieving multitude of the whole nation, not to suffer themselves to be governed by wicked priests, and not to allow themselves to be imposed upon by proud and empty names.

3. *To him the porter openeth.* If by the word *Porter*<sup>282</sup> any one choose to understand God, I do not object; and Christ even appears expressly to contrast the judgment of God with the false opinion of men in approving of pastors, as if he had said, "There are others, indeed, whom the world generally applauds, and on whom it willingly confers honor; but God, who holds the reins of government, does not acknowledge or approve of any but those who lead *the sheep* by this road."

*He calleth his own sheep by name.* I consider this as referring to the mutual consent of faith; because the disciple and the teacher are united together by the one Spirit of God, so that the teacher goes before, and the disciple follows. Some think that it denotes the intimate knowledge which every *shepherd* ought to have of each of his flock, but I do not know if this rests on solid grounds.

4. *Because they know his voice.* Though he speaks here of ministers, yet, instead of wishing that they should be *heard*, he wishes that God should be *heard* speaking by them;

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282 "Si par ce mot de *Portier*."

for we must attend to the distinction which he has laid down, that he alone is a faithful *pastor* or *shepherd*<sup>283</sup> of the Church, who conducts and governs his sheep by the direction of Christ. We must attend to the reason why it is said that *the sheep follow*; it is, because *they know* how to distinguish *shepherds* from wolves by *the voice*. This is the spirit of discernment, by which the elect discriminate between the truth of God and the false inventions of men. So then, in *the sheep* of Christ a knowledge of the truth goes before, and next follows an earnest desire to obey, so that they not only understand what is true, but receive it with warm affection. And not only does he commend the obedience of the faith, because the sheep assemble submissively at *the voice* of the shepherd, but also because they do not listen to the voice of *strangers*, and do not disperse when any one cries to them.

**6. This parable.** This is the reason why, proudly vaunting of their wisdom, they rejected the light of Christ; for in a matter not very obscure they are exceedingly dull of apprehension.

*But they did not understand what things they were which he spoke to them.* In this clause the Greek manuscripts differ. Some copies might be literally rendered, *they did not understand what he said*. Another reading, which I have followed, is more full, though it amounts to the same meaning. The third reading is, that *they did not know that he who spoke of himself was the Son of God*; but this is not much approved.

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283 The word *pastor* signifies *shepherd*, but, for the sake of the reader, who may not be aware of its etymology, it has been found necessary, in some cases, to employ both of the words, especially where the figure holds so prominent a place in the discussion. — *Ed.*

### John 10:7-10

7. And Jesus again said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, that I am the door of the sheep. 8. All who have entered before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. 9. I am the door. If any man enter by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. 10. The thief cometh not but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come, that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

7. *I am the door.* If this explanation had not been added, the whole discourse would have been allegorical. He now explains more clearly what was the chief part of the parable when he declares that *he is the door*. The amount of what is stated is, that the principal point of all spiritual doctrine, on which souls are fed, consists in Christ. Hence also Paul, one of the shepherds, says:

I reckon nothing to be worth knowing but Jesus Christ,

(1 Corinthians 2:2.)

And this mode of expression conveys the same meaning as if Christ had testified that to him alone we must all be gathered together. Therefore, he invokes and exhorts all who desire salvation to come to him. By these words, he means that in vain do they wander about who leave him to go to God, because there is but one open *door*, and all approach in any other way is prohibited.

8. *All who came before me.* The words πάντες ὅσοι may be literally rendered, all as many as *came before me*. They who restrict this expression to Judas the Galilean, and such persons, depart widely, in my opinion, from Christ's meaning; for he contrasts all false doctrine, in general, with the Gospel, and all false prophets with faithful teachers. Nor would it even be unreasonable to extend this statement to the Gentiles, that all who, from the beginning of the world, have professed to be teachers, and have not labored to gather *sheep* to Christ, have abused this title for destroying souls. But this does not at all apply to Moses and the Prophets, who had no other object in view than to establish the kingdom of Christ. For it ought to be observed, that a contrast is here made between the words of Christ and those things which are opposed to them. But so far are we from discovering any contradiction between the Law and the doctrine of the Gospel, that the Law is nothing else than a preparation for the Gospel. In short, Christ testifies that all the doctrines, by which the world has been led away from him, are so many deadly plagues; because, apart from him, there is nothing but destruction and horrible confusion. Meanwhile, we see of what importance antiquity is with God, and in what estimation it ought to be held by us, when it enters, as it were, into a contest with Christ. That no man may be moved by the consideration, that there have been teachers, in all ages, who gave themselves no concern whatever about directing men to Christ, Christ expressly states that it is of no consequence how many there have

been of this description, or how early they began to appear; for it ought to be considered that there is but *one door*, and that they who leave it, and make openings or breaches in the walls, are *thieves*

*But the sheep did not hear them.* He now confirms more clearly what he had already spoken more obscurely and in the figure of an allegory, that they who were led out of the way by impostors did not belong to the Church of God. This is said, first, that when we see a great multitude of persons going astray, we may not resolve to perish through their example; and, next, that we may not waver, when God permits impostors to deceive many. For it is no light consolation, and no small ground of confidence, when we know that Christ, by his faithful protection, has always guarded his *sheep*, amidst the various attacks and crafty devices of wolves and robbers, so that there never was one of them that deserted him.<sup>284</sup>

But here a question arises, When does a person begin to belong to the flock of the Son of God?<sup>285</sup> For we see many who stray and wander through deserts during the greater part of their life, and are at length brought into the fold of Christ. I reply, the word *sheep* is here used in two ways. When Christ says afterwards, that he has *other sheep* besides, he includes all the elect of God, who had at that time no resemblance to *sheep*. At present, he means *sheep* which bore the shepherd's mark. By nature, we are at the greatest possible distance from being *sheep*; but, on the contrary, are born lions, tigers, wolves, and bears,<sup>286</sup> until the Spirit of Christ tames us, and from wild and savage beasts forms us to be mild *sheep*. Thus, according to the secret election of God, we are already *sheep* in his heart, before we are born; but we begin to be *sheep* in ourselves by the calling, by which he gathers us into his fold. Christ declares that they who are called into the order of believers are so firmly bound together, that they cannot stray or wander, or be carried about by any wind of new doctrine.

It will perhaps be objected, that even those who had been devoted to Christ frequently go astray, and that this is proved by frequent experience, and that it is not without good reason that Ezekiel ascribes it to the good Shepherd, that he gathers *the scattered sheep*, (Ezekiel 34:12.) I readily acknowledge that it frequently happens, that they who had belonged to the household of faith are, for a time, estranged; but this is not at variance with Christ's statement, for, so far as they go astray, they cease, in some respects, to be *sheep*. What Christ means is simply this, that all the elect of God, though they were tempted to go astray in innumerable ways, were kept in obedience to the pure faith, so that they were not exposed as a prey to Satan, or to his ministers. But this work of God is not less astonishing, when he

284 "En sorte qu'il n'y en a pas eu une seule qui l'ait laisse."

285 "Du troupeau du Fils de Dieu."

286 "Lions, tygres, loups, et ours."

again gathers *the sheep* which had wandered for a little, than if they had all along continued to be shut up in the fold. It is always true, and without a single exception, that

they who go out from us were not of us,  
but that they who were of us remain with us to the end,

(1 John 2:19.)

This passage ought to strike us with the deepest shame; first, because we are so ill accustomed to *the voice* of our *Shepherd*, that there are hardly any who do not listen to it with indifference; and, next, because we are so slow and indolent to follow him. I speak of the good, or of those who are at least passable; for the greater part of those who boast that they are Christ's disciples kick fiercely against him. Lastly, as soon as the voice of any *stranger* has sounded in our ears, we are hurried to and fro; and this lightness and unsteadiness sufficiently shows how little progress we have hitherto made in the faith. But if the number of believers is smaller than might be desired, and if out of this small number a large proportion be continually dropping off, faithful teachers have this consolation to support them, that the elect of God, who are Christ's *sheep*, listen to them. It is our duty, indeed, to labor diligently, and to strive by every possible method, that the whole world may be brought, if possible, into the unity of the faith; but let us, in the meantime, be well satisfied with belonging to the number.

**9.** *If any man enter by me.* The highest consolation of believers is, that when they have once embraced Christ, they learn that they are out of danger; for Christ promises to them salvation and happiness. He afterwards divides it into two parts.

*He shall go in and out, and find pasture.* First, they shall go safely wherever they find necessary; and, next, they shall be fed to the full. By *going in and out*, Scripture often denotes all the actions of the life, as we say in French, *aller et venir*, (*to go and come*),<sup>287</sup> which means, *to dwell*. These words, therefore, present to us a twofold advantage of the Gospel, that our souls shall find pasture in it, which otherwise become faint and famished, and are fed with nothing but wind; and, next, because he will faithfully protect and guard us against the attacks of wolves and robbers.

**10.** *The thief cometh not.* By this saying, Christ — if we may use the expression — pulls our ear, that the ministers of Satan may not come upon us by surprise, when we are in a drowsy and careless state; for our excessive indifference exposes us, on every side, to false doctrines. For whence arises credulity so great, that they who ought to have remained fixed in Christ, fly about in a multitude of errors, but because they do not sufficiently dread or guard against so many false teachers? And not only so, but our insatiable curiosity is so delighted with the new and strange inventions of men, that, of our own accord, we rush with

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287 A phrase in Scottish law, denoting a full right to occupy a house or any property, is, *free ish* (issue) and *entrance*, or, in other words, a right to *go out and to come in*, as the occupant pleases. — *Ed.*

mad career to meet thieves and wolves. Not without reason, therefore, does Christ testify that false teachers, whatever may be the mildness and plausibility of their demeanour, always carry about a deadly poison, that we may be more careful to drive them away from us. A similar warning is given by Paul,

See that no man rob you through vain philosophy,

(Colossians 2:8.)

*I am come.* This is a different comparison; for Christ, having hitherto called himself *the door*, and declared that they who bring sheep to this *door* are true *shepherds*, now assumes the character of a shepherd, and indeed affirms that he is the only *shepherd*. Indeed, there is no other to whom this honor and title strictly belongs; for, as to all the faithful *shepherds* of the Church, it is he who raises them up, endows them with the necessary qualifications, governs them by his Spirit, and works by them; and therefore they do not prevent him from being the only Governor of his Church, or from holding the distinction of being the only *Shepherd*. For, though he employs their ministry, still he does not cease to fulfill and discharge the office of a *shepherd* by his own power; and they are masters and teachers in such a manner as not to interfere with his authority as a Master. In short, when the term *shepherd* is applied to men, it is used, as we say, in a subordinate sense; and Christ shares the honor with his ministers in such a manner, that he still continues to be the only *shepherd* both of themselves and of the whole flock.

*That they may have life.* When he says that *he is come, that the sheep may have life*, he means that they only who do not submit to his *staff and crook* (Psalm 23:4) are exposed to the ravages of wolves and thieves; and — to give them greater confidence — he declares that *life* is continually increased and strengthened in those who do not revolt from him. And, indeed, the greater progress that any man makes in faith, the more nearly does he approach to fullness of *life*, because the Spirit, who is life, grows in him.

## John 10:11-15

**11.** I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. **12.** But the hireling, and he who is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf teareth them, and scattereth the sheep. **13.** The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. **14.** I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known by mine. **15.** As the Father knoweth me, I also know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

**11.** *The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.* From the extraordinary affection which he bears towards the *sheep*, he shows how truly he acts towards them as a *shepherd*; for he is so anxious about their salvation, that he does not even spare his own life. Hence it follows, that they who reject the guardianship of so kind and amiable a *shepherd* are exceedingly ungrateful, and deserve a hundred deaths, and are exposed to every kind of harm. The remark of Augustine is exceedingly just, that this passage informs us what we ought to desire, what we ought to avoid, and what we ought to endure, in the government of the Church. Nothing is more desirable than that the Church should be governed by good and diligent *shepherds*. Christ declares that *he is the good shepherd*, who keeps his Church safe and sound, first, by himself, and, next, by his agents. Whenever there is good order, and fit men hold the government, then Christ shows that he is actually *the shepherd*. But there are many wolves and thieves who, wearing the garb of *shepherds*, wickedly scatter the Church. Whatever name such persons may assume, Christ threatens that we must avoid them.

**12.** *But the hireling.* By *hirelings* we are to understand those who retain the pure doctrine, and who proclaim the truth, as Paul says, to serve a purpose rather than from pure zeal. Though such persons do not serve Christ faithfully, yet we ought to hear them; for Christ wished that *the Pharisees* should be heard, *because they sat in Moses' seat*, ([Matthew 23:2](#);) and, in like manner, we ought to give such honor to the Gospel, as not to shrink from its ministers, though they be not good men. And as even the slightest offenses render the Gospel distasteful to us, that we may not be hindered by such false delicacy, let us always remember what I have formerly suggested, that if the Spirit of Christ does not operate so powerfully in ministers, as to make it plainly evident that he is their *shepherd*, we suffer the punishment of our sins, and yet our obedience is proved.

*And he who is not the shepherd.* Though Christ claims for himself alone the name of a *shepherd*, yet he indirectly states that, in some respects, he holds it in common with the agents by whom he acts. For we know that there have been many, since the time of Christ, who did not hesitate to shed their blood for the salvation of the Church; and even the prophets, before his coming, did not spare their own life. But in his own person he holds out a perfect example, so as to lay down a rule for his ministers. For how base and shameful



is our indolence, if our life is more dear to us than the salvation of the Church, which Christ preferred to his own life!

What is here said about *laying down life for the sheep*, may be viewed as an undoubted and principal mark of paternal affection. Christ intended, first, to demonstrate what a remarkable proof he gave of his love toward us, and, next, to excite all his ministers to imitate his example. Yet we must attend to the difference between them and him. He *laid down his life* as the price of satisfaction, shed his blood to cleanse our souls, offered his body as a propitiatory sacrifice, to reconcile the Father to us. Nothing of all this can exist in the ministers of the Gospel, all of whom need to be cleansed, and receive atonement and reconciliation to God by that single sacrifice. But Christ does not argue here about the efficacy or benefit of his death, so as to compare himself to others, but to prove with what zeal and affection<sup>288</sup> he is moved towards us, and, next, to invite others to follow his example. In short, as it belongs exclusively to Christ to procure life for us by his death, and to fulfill all that is contained in the Gospel, so it is the universal duty of all *pastors* or *shepherds*, to defend the doctrine which they proclaim, even at the expense of their life, and to seal the doctrine of the Gospel with their blood, and to show that it is not in vain that they teach that Christ has procured salvation for themselves and for others.

But here a question may be put. Ought we to reckon that man a *hireling*, who, for any reason whatever, shrinks from encountering the wolves? This was anciently debated as a practical question, when tyrants raged cruelly against the Church. Tertullian, and others of the same class, were, in my opinion, too rigid on this point. I prefer greatly the moderation of Augustine, who allows pastors to flee on the condition that, by their flight, they contribute more to the public safety than they would do by betraying the flock committed to their charge. And he shows that this is done, when the Church is not deprived of well-qualified ministers, and when the life of the pastor in particular is so eagerly sought, that his absence mitigates the rage of enemies. But if the flock — as well as the pastor — be in danger,<sup>289</sup> and if there be reason to believe that the pastor flees, not so much from a desire to promote the public advantage as from a dread of dying, Augustine contends that this is not at all lawful, because the example of his flight will do more injury than his life can do good in future. The reader may consult the Epistle to Bishop Honoratus, (Ep. 108) On this ground it was lawful for Cyprian to flee, who was so far from shuddering at death, that he nobly refused to accept the offer of saving his life by a treacherous denial of his Master. Only it must be held that a pastor ought to prefer his flock, or even a single sheep, to his own life.

*Whose own the sheep are not.* Christ appears here to make all *shepherds* besides himself to be, without exception, *hirelings*; for, since he alone is *shepherd*, none of us have a right

288 “De quel zele et affection.”

289 “Que s’il y a danger aussi bien pour les brebis que pour la personne du pasteur.”

to say that the sheep which he feeds are *his own*. But let us remember that they who are guided by the Spirit of God reckon that to be *their own* which belongs to their Head; and that not in order to claim power for themselves, but to keep faithfully what has been committed to their charge. For he who is truly united to Christ will never cease to take an interest in that which He valued so highly. This is what he afterwards says:

**13.** *The hireling fleeth.* The reason is, *because he careth not for the sheep*, which means, that his heart is not moved by the scattering of the flock, because he thinks that it does not at all belong to him. For he who looks to the *hire*, and not to the flock, though he may deceive others, when the Church is in a state of tranquillity, yet when he comes into the contest, will give proof of his treachery.

**14.** *And I know my sheep, and am known by mine.* In the former clause, he again holds out his love towards us; for *knowledge* proceeds from love, and is accompanied by care. But it means also that he utterly disregards all who do not obey the Gospel, as he repeats in the second clause, and confirms what he had formerly said, that — on the other hand — *he is known by the sheep*

**15.** *As the Father knoweth me.* It is unnecessary, and is not even expedient, that we should enter into those thorny questions, How is it that the Father knows his Wisdom? For Christ simply declares that, so far as he is the bond of our union with God, he is placed between Him and us; as if he had said, that it is no more possible for him to forget us, than that he should be rejected or disregarded by the Father. At the same time, he demands the duty which we mutually owe to him, because, as he employs all the power which he has received from the Father for our protection, so he wishes that we should be obedient and devoted to him, as he is wholly devoted to his Father, and refers everything to him.

### John 10:16-18

**16.** And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd. **17.** On this account the Father loveth me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. **18.** No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received from my Father.

**16.** *And I have other sheep.* Though some refer this indiscriminately to all, both Jews and Gentiles, who were not yet disciples of Christ, yet I have no doubt that he had in his eye the calling of the Gentiles. For he gives the appellation *fold* to the assemblage of the ancient people, by which they were separated from the other nations of the world, and united into one body as the heritage of God. The Jews had been adopted by God in such a manner, that he surrounded them with certain enclosures, which consisted of rites and ceremonies, that they might not be confounded with unbelievers, though the door of the *fold* was the gracious covenant of eternal life confirmed in Christ. For this reason he calls those *sheep* which had not the same mark, but belonged to a different class, *other sheep*. In short, the meaning is, that the pastoral office of Christ is not confined within the limits of Judea, but is far more extensive.

Augustine's observation on this passage is undoubtedly true, that, as there are many wolves *within* the Church, so there are many sheep *without*. But this is not applicable, in every respect, to the present passage, which relates to the outward aspect of the Church, because the Gentiles, who had been strangers for a time, were afterwards invited into the kingdom of God, along with the Jews. Yet I acknowledge that Augustine's statement applies in this respect, that Christ gives the name of *sheep* to unbelievers, who in themselves were the farthest possible from being entitled to be called *sheep*. And not only does he point out, by this term, what they will be, but rather refers this to the secret election of God, because we are already God's *sheep*, before we are aware that He is our shepherd. In like manner, it is elsewhere said that *we were enemies, when he loved us*, ([Romans 5:10](#);) and for this reason Paul also says that *we were known by God, before we knew him*, ([Galatians 4:9](#).)

*Them also I must bring.* He means that the election of God will be secure, so that nothing of all that he wishes to be saved shall perish. <sup>290</sup> For the secret purpose of God, by which men were ordained to life, is at length manifested in his own time by the calling, — the effectual calling, when he regenerates by his Spirit, to be his sons, those who formerly were begotten of flesh and blood.

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290 "Rien de tout ce qu'il veut estre sauve."

But it may be asked, How were the Gentiles brought to be associated with the Jews? For the Jews were not under the necessity of rejecting the covenant which God made with their fathers, in order to become Christ's disciples; and the Gentiles, on the other hand, were not under the necessity of submitting to the yoke of the Law, that, being ingrafted in Christ, they might be associated with the Jews. Here we must attend to the distinction between the substance of the covenant and the outward appendages. For the Gentiles could not assent to the faith of Christ in any other way than by embracing that everlasting covenant on which the salvation of the world was founded. In this manner were fulfilled the predictions,

Strangers shall speak the language of Canaan,  
(Isaiah 19:18.)

Again,

Ten men of the Gentiles shall take hold of the cloak of one Jew, and say,  
We will go with you,  
(Zechariah 8:23.)

Again,

Many nations shall come, and say,  
Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
(Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:2.)

Abraham was also called  
*a father of many nations*, (Genesis 17:5; Romans 4:17,) because they shall come from the East and from the West, who shall sit down with him in the kingdom of God,  
(Matthew 8:11.)

As to ceremonies, they are *the middle wall of partition*, which, Paul informs us, *hath been thrown down*, (Ephesians 2:14.) Thus, we have been associated with the Jews in the unity of the faith, as to the substance; and the ceremonies were abolished, that there might be nothing to prevent the Jews from stretching out their hand to us.

*And there shall be one fold*<sup>291</sup> *and one shepherd* That is, that all the children of God may be gathered and united<sup>292</sup> into one body; as we acknowledge that there is one holy universal Church,<sup>293</sup> and there must be one body with one head.

There is one God, says Paul, one faith, one baptism.  
Therefore we ought to be one, as we are called into one hope,  
(Ephesians 4:4, 5.)

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291 So it runs in the French version, "*Et il y aura une bergerie et un Pasteur.*" But in the Latin original, our Author, either through choice or inadvertency, has altered the translation, by substituting *grex* (flock) for *ovile*, (fold.) "*Et fiet unus grex;*" — "*and there shall be one flock.*" — *Ed.*

292 "Assemblez et unis."

293 "Une sainte Eglise universelle."

Now though this *flock* appears to be divided into different *folds*, yet they are kept within enclosures which are common to all believers who are scattered throughout the whole world; because the same word is preached to all, they use the same sacraments, they have the same order of prayer, and every thing that belongs to the profession of faith.

*And they shall hear my voice.* We must observe the way in which the flock of God is gathered. It is, when all have *one shepherd*, and when *his voice alone*<sup>294</sup> *is heard* These words mean that, when the Church submits to Christ alone, and obeys his commands, and hears *his voice* and his doctrine,<sup>295</sup> then only is it in a state of good order. If Papists can show us that there is any thing of this sort among them, let them enjoy the title of The Church, of which they vaunt so much. But if Christ is silent there, if his majesty is trodden under foot, if his sacred ordinances are held up to scorn, what else is their unity but a diabolical conspiracy, which is worse and far more to be abhorred than any dispersion? Let us therefore remember that we ought always to begin with the Head. Hence also the Prophets, when they describe the restoration of the Church, always join David the king with God; as if they said, that there is no Church where Christ does not reign, and that there is no kingdom of God, but where the honor of *shepherd* is granted to Christ.

17. *On this account the Father loveth me.* There is, indeed, another and a higher reason why *the Father loveth the Son*; for it was not in vain that a voice was heard from heaven,

This is my beloved Son, in whom the good-pleasure of God dwells,

(Matthew 3:17; 17:5.)

But as he was made man on our account, and as the Father delighted in him, in order that he might reconcile us to himself, we need not wonder if he declares it to be the reason why *the Father loveth him*, that our salvation is dearer to him than his own life. This is a wonderful commendation of the goodness of God to us, and ought justly to arouse our whole souls into rapturous admiration, that not only does God extend to us the love which is due to the only-begotten Son, but he refers it to us as the final cause. And indeed there was no necessity that Christ should take upon him our flesh, in which he was *beloved*, but that it might be the pledge of the mercy of *his Father* in redeeming us.

*That I may take it again.* As the disciples might be deeply grieved on account of what they had heard about the death of Christ, and as their faith might even be greatly shaken, he comforts them by the hope of his resurrection, which would speedily take place; as if he said, that he would not die on the condition of being swallowed up by death, but in order that he might soon rise again as a conqueror. And even at the present day, we ought to contemplate the death of Christ, so as to remember, at the same time, the glory of his resur-

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294 “Sa voix seule.”

295 “Sa voix et sa doctrine.”

rection. Thus, we know that he is *life*, because, in his contest with death, he obtained a splendid victory, and achieved a noble triumph.

18. *No man taketh it from me.* This is another consolation, by which the disciples may take courage as to the death of Christ, that he does not die by constraint, but offers himself willingly for the salvation of his flock. Not only does he affirm that men have no power to put him to death, except so far as he permits them, but he declares that he is free from every violence of necessity. It is otherwise with us, for we are laid under a necessity of dying on account of our sins. True, Christ himself was born a mortal man; but this was a voluntary submission, and not a bondage laid upon him by another. Christ intended, therefore, to fortify his disciples, that, when they saw him shortly afterwards dragged to death, they might not be dismayed, as if he had been oppressed by enemies, but might acknowledge that it was done by the wonderful Providence of God, that he should die for the redemption of his flock. And this doctrine is of perpetual advantage, that the death of Christ is an expiation for our sins, because it was a voluntary sacrifice, according to the saying of Paul,

By the obedience of one many were made righteous,

(Romans 5:19.)

*But I lay it down of myself.* These words may be explained in two ways; either that Christ divests himself of life, but still remains what he was, just as a person would lay aside a garment from his body, or, that he dies by his own choice.

*This commandment have I received from my Father.* He recalls our attention to the eternal purpose of the Father, in order to inform us that He had such care about our salvation, that he dedicated to us his only-begotten Son great and excellent as he is;<sup>296</sup> and Christ himself, who came into the world to be in all respects obedient to *the Father*, confirms the statement, that he has no other object in view than to promote our benefit.

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296 “Aussi grand et excellent qu’il peut estre.”

### John 10:19-30

**19.** A division therefore arose again among the Jews on account of those sayings. **20.** And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad: why do you hear him? **21.** Others said, These are not the words of a demoniac. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? **22.** And it was the feast of Dedication at Jerusalem, and it was winter. **23.** And Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's porch. **24.** The Jews then surrounded him, and said to him, How long dost thou keep our soul in suspense? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. **25.** Jesus answered them, I have told you, but you do not believe. The works which I do in my Father's name testify of me. **26.** But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. **27.** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28.** And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, nor shall any one wrest them out of my hand. **29.** My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all; and none can wrest them out of my Father's hand. **30.** I and my Father are one.

**19.** *A division therefore arose again.* The advantage gained by Christ's discourse was, that it procured him some disciples; but as his doctrine has also many adversaries, hence arises a *division*, so that they are split into parties, who formerly appeared to be one body of the Church. for all, with one consent, professed that they worshipped the God of Abraham and complied with the Law of Moses; but now, when Christ comes forward, they begin to differ on his account. If that profession had been sincere, Christ, who is the strongest bond of charity, and whose office it is to gather those things which are scattered, would not break up their agreement. But Christ, by the light of his Gospel, exposes the hypocrisy of many who, while they had nothing but a false and hypocritical pretense, boasted that they were the people of God.

Thus, the wickedness of many is still the reason why the Church is troubled by *divisions*, and why contentions are kindled. Yet those who disturb the peace, throw the blame on us, and call us Schismatics; for the principal charge which the Papists bring against us is, that our doctrine has shaken the tranquillity of the Church. Yet the truth is, that, if they would yield submissively to Christ, and give their support to the truth, all the commotions would immediately be allayed. But when they utter murmurs and complaints against Christ, and will not allow us to be at rest on any other condition than that the truth of God shall be extinguished, and that Christ shall be banished from his kingdom, they have no right to accuse us of the crime of schism; for it is on themselves, as every person sees, that this crime ought to be charged. We ought to be deeply grieved that the Church is torn by *divisions* arising among those who profess the same religion; but it is better that there are some who separate themselves from the wicked, to be united to Christ their Head, than that all should be of

one mind in despising God. Consequently, when schisms arise, we ought to inquire who they are that revolt from God and from his pure doctrine.

**20.** *He hath a devil.* They employ the most offensive reproach which they can devise, in slandering Christ, that all may shudder at the thought of hearing him. For wicked men, that they may not be forced to yield to God, in a furious manner, and with closed eyes, break out into proud contempt of him, and excite others to the same rage, so that not a single word of Christ is heard in silence. But the doctrine of Christ has sufficient power in itself to defend it against slanders. And this is what believers mean by their reply,

**21.** *These are not the words of a demoniac.* It is as if they demanded that men should judge from the fact itself; for the truth, as we have said, is strong enough to maintain itself. And this is the only protection of our faith, that wicked men will never be able to hinder the power and wisdom of God, and his goodness also,<sup>297</sup> from shining in the Gospel.

**22.** *And it was the feast of Dedication.* The Greek word (ἐγκαίνια) which we have translated *dedication*,<sup>298</sup> properly signifies *renovations*; because the temple, which had been polluted, was again consecrated by the command of Judas Maccabaeus; and at that time it was enacted that the day of the new *dedication* or *consecration* should be celebrated every year as a festival, that the people might recall to remembrance the grace of God, which had put an end to the tyranny of Antiochus. Christ appeared *in the temple* at that time, according to custom, that his preaching might yield more abundant fruit amidst a large assembly of men.

**23.** *And Jesus was walking in the temple, in Solomon's porch.* The Evangelist gives to *Solomon's porch* the designation of *the temple*; not that it was the sanctuary, but only an appendage to *the temple*. Nor does he mean the ancient *porch* which was built by *Solomon*, which had been altogether destroyed by the Chaldeans, but that which the Jews — perhaps immediately after their return from the Babylonish captivity — built after the pattern of the ancient *porch*, and gave it the same name, that it might be more highly honored; and Herod afterwards built a new temple.

**24.** *The Jews therefore surrounded him.* This was undoubtedly a cunning attack on Christ, at least on the part of those with whom the scheme originated. For the common people might, without any fraud, desire that Christ would openly declare that God had sent him to be a deliverer; but a few persons, by trick and stratagem, wished to draw this word from him amidst the crowd, that he might be killed by a mob, or that the Romans might lay hands on him.

*How long dost thou keep our soul in suspense?* By complaining of being *kept in suspense*, they pretend that they are so ardently desirous of the promised redemption, that their minds

297 “Et aussi sa bonte.”

298 “Le mot Grec pour lequel nous avons mis Dedicace.”



are eagerly and incessantly occupied by the expectation of Christ. And this is the true feeling of piety, to find nowhere else than in Christ alone, what will satisfy our minds, or give them true composure; as he himself says,

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you, and your souls shall find rest,

(Matthew 11:28, 29.)

Therefore, those who come to Christ ought to be prepared in the same manner as those men pretend to be. But they are wrong in accusing Christ, as if he had not hitherto confirmed their faith; for it was entirely their own fault that they had not a full and perfect knowledge of him. But this is always the case with unbelievers, that they choose rather to remain in doubt than to be founded on the certainty of the word of God. Thus, in our own day, we see many who voluntarily shut their eyes, and spread the clouds of their doubt, in order to darken the clear light of the Gospel. We see also many light spirits, who fly about in idle speculations, and never find, throughout their whole life, a permanent abode.

*Tell us plainly.* When they demand that Christ shall declare himself *freely*, or openly and boldly, their meaning is, that he may no longer convey his meaning indirectly, and in a circuitous manner. Thus they charge his doctrine with obscurity, which, on the contrary, was abundantly plain and distinct, if the men who heard it had not been deaf. Now this history warns us, that we cannot avoid the artifices and slanders of wicked men, if we are called to preach the Gospel. Wherefore, we ought to be on the watch, and not to be surprised at it as a new thing, when the same thing happens to us as to our Master.

**25. *I have told you.*** Our Lord Jesus<sup>299</sup> does not conceal that he is the Christ, and yet he does not teach them as if they were willing to learn, but rather reproaches them with obstinate malice, because, though they had been taught by the word and works of God, they had not yet made any progress. Accordingly, that they do not know him, he imputes to their own fault, as if he said: "My doctrine is easily enough understood, but the blame lies with you, because you maliciously resist God."

*The works which I do.* He speaks of his *works*, in order to convict them of being doubly obstinate; for, besides the doctrine, they had a striking testimony in his miracles, if they had not been ungrateful to God. He twice repeats the words, *You do not believe*, in order to prove that, of their own accord, they were deaf to doctrine, and blind to works; which is a proof of extreme and desperate malice. He says that *he did the works in the name of his Father*; because his design was, to testify the power of God in them, by which it might be openly declared that he came from God.

**26. *Because you are not of my sheep.*** He assigns a higher reason why they do not believe either in his miracles or in his doctrine. It is, because they are reprobate. We must observe

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299 "Nostre Seigneur Jesus."

Christ's design; for, since they boasted of being the Church of God, that their unbelief may detract nothing from the authority of the Gospel, he affirms that the gift of *believing* is a special gift. And, indeed, *before that men know God, they must first be known by him*, as Paul says, (*Galatians 4:9*.) On the other hand, those to whom God does not look must always continue to look away from him. If any one murmur at this, arguing that the cause of unbelief dwells in God, because he alone has power to make *sheep*; I reply, He is free from all blame, for it is only by their voluntary malice that men reject his grace. God does all that is necessary to induce them to believe, but who shall tame wild beasts? <sup>300</sup> This will never be done, till the Spirit of God change them into *sheep*. They who are wild will in vain attempt to throw on God the blame of their wildness, for it belongs to their own nature. In short, Christ means that it is not wonderful, if there are few who obey his Gospel, because all whom the Spirit of God does not subdue to the obedience of faith are wild and fierce beasts. So much the more unreasonable and absurd is it, that the authority of the Gospel should depend on the belief of men; but believers ought rather to consider, that they are the more strongly bound to God, because, while others remain in a state of blindness, they are drawn to Christ by the illumination of the Spirit. Here, too, the ministers of the Gospel have ground of consolation, if their labor be not profitable to all.

27. *My sheep hear my voice*. He proves by an argument drawn from contraries, that they are not *sheep*, because they do not obey the Gospel. For God effectually calls all whom he has elected, so that the *sheep* of Christ are proved by their faith. And, indeed, the reason why the name of *sheep* is applied to believers is, that they surrender themselves to God, to be governed by the hand of the Chief Shepherd, and, laying aside the fierceness of their nature, become mild and teachable. It is no small consolation to faithful teachers, that, though the greater part of the world do not listen to Christ, yet he has his *sheep whom he knows, and by whom he is also known*. Let them do their utmost to bring the whole world into the fold of Christ; but when they do not succeed according to their wish, let them be satisfied with this single consideration, that they who are *sheep* will be gathered by their agency. The rest has been already explained.

28. *And they shall never perish*. It is an inestimable fruit of faith, that Christ bids us be convinced of our security when we are brought by faith into his fold. But we must also observe on what foundation this certainty rests. It is because he will be a faithful guardian of our salvation, for he testifies that our salvation is in *his hand*. And if this were not enough, he says that they will be safely guarded by the power of *his Father*. This is a remarkable passage, by which we are taught that the salvation of all the elect is not less certain than the power of God is invincible. Besides, Christ did not intend to throw this word foolishly into the air, but to give a promise which should remain deeply axed in their minds; and, therefore, we

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300 "Mais qui apprivoisera des bestes sauvages?"

infer that the statement of Christ is intended to show that the elect are absolutely certain of their salvation. We are surrounded, indeed, by powerful adversaries, and so great is our weakness, that we are every moment in imminent danger of death; but as He who *keeps what we have committed to him* (2 Timothy 1:12) is *greater* or more powerful *than all*, we have no reason to tremble as if our life were in danger.

Hence, too, we infer how mad is the confidence of the Papists, which relies on free-will, on their own virtue, and on the merits of their works. Widely different is the manner in which Christ instructs his followers, to remember that, in this world, they may be said to be in the midst of a forest, surrounded by innumerable robbers, and are not only unarmed and exposed as a prey, but are aware that the cause of death is contained in themselves, so that, relying on the guardianship of God alone, they may walk without alarm. In short, our salvation is certain, because it is *in the hand* of God; for our faith is weak, and we are too prone to waver. But God, who has taken us under his protection, is sufficiently powerful to scatter, with his breath alone, all the forces of our adversaries. It is of great importance for us to turn our eye to this, that the fear of temptations may not dismay us; for Christ even intended to point out the way in which *sheep* are made to live at ease in the midst of wolves.

*And none can wrest them out of my Father's hand.* The word *and*, in this passage, means *therefore* For, since the power of God is invincible, Christ infers that the salvation of believers is not exposed to the ungovernable passions of their enemies, because, ere they perish, God must be overcome, who has taken them under the protection of *his hand*.

**30. *I and my Father are one.*** He intended to meet the jeers of the wicked; for they might allege that the power of God did not at all belong to him, so that he could promise to his disciples that it would assuredly protect them. He therefore testifies that his affairs are so closely united to those of the Father, that the Father's assistance will never be withheld from himself and his *sheep* The ancients made a wrong use of this passage to prove that Christ is (ὁμοούσιος) of the same essence with the Father. For Christ does not argue about the unity of substance, but about the agreement which he has with the Father, so that whatever is done by Christ will be confirmed by the power of his Father.

### John 10:31-36

**31.** Then the Jews again took up stones to stone him. **32.** Jesus answered them, Many good works I have shown you from my Father. For which of those works do you stone me? **33.** The Jews answered him, We stone thee not for the sake of a good work, but for blasphemy, and, because thou, being a man, makest thyself God. **34.** Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your Law, I said, You are gods? **35.** If it called them gods, to whom the word of God was addressed, and Scripture cannot, be broken, **36.** Do you say that I, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, blaspheme, because I said, I am the Son of God?

**31.** *Then the Jews again took up stones.* As true religion, in maintaining the glory of God, burns with its own zeal which the Spirit of God directs, so unbelief is the mother of rage, and the devil hurries on the wicked in such a manner, that they breathe nothing but slaughter. This result shows with what intention they put the question to Christ; for the open confession, of which they pretended to be desirous, instantly drives them to madness. And yet, though they are hurried along, with such violence, to oppress Christ, there can be no doubt that they assigned some plausible reason for their judgment, as if they were acting according to the injunction of the Law, by which God commands that false prophets shall be stoned, ([Deuteronomy 13:5](#).)

**32.** *Many good works I have shown you.* Here Christ not only says that they have no reason for their cruelty, but accuses them of ingratitude, in making so unjust a requital for God's favors. Nor does he only state that he has done them a service by one or two works, but that in many ways he has been kind to them. Next, he upbraids them with being ungrateful, not only to himself, but rather to God, when he says that he is the minister of the Father, who openly manifested his power, that it might be known and attested to them. For when he says that *the good works were from the Father*, he means that God was the Author of them. The meaning may be thus summed up, "God intended to make known to you, by me, distinguished benefits; he has conferred them upon you by my hand. Banish me as much as you please, I have done nothing that does not deserve praise and good-will. In persecuting me, therefore, you must show your rage against the gifts of God." But the question has greater force to pierce their consciences than if he had made a direct assertion.

**33.** *We stone thee not for a good work.* Though wicked men carry on open war with God, yet they never wish to sin without some plausible pretense. The consequence is, that when they rage against the Son of God, they are not content with this cruelty, but bring an unprovoked accusation against him, and constitute themselves advocates and defenders of the glory of God. A good conscience must therefore be to us a wall of brass, by which we boldly repel the reproaches and calumnies with which we are assailed. For whatever plausibility

may adorn their malice, and whatever reproach they may bring on us for a time, if we fight for the cause of God, he will not refuse to uphold his truth. But as the wicked never want pretences for oppressing the servants of God, and as they have also hardened impudence, so that, even when vanquished, they do not cease to slander, we have need of patience and meekness, to support us to the end.

*But for blasphemy.* The word *blasphemy*, which among profane authors denotes generally every kind of reproach, Scripture refers to God, when his majesty is offended and insulted.

*Because thou, being a man, makest thyself God.* There are two kinds of *blasphemy*, either when God is deprived of the honor which belongs to him, or when anything unsuitable to his nature, or contrary to his nature, is ascribed to him. They argue therefore that Christ is a *blasphemer* and a sacrilegious person, because, *being a mortal man*, he lays claim to Divine honor. And this would be a just definition of *blasphemy*, if Christ were nothing more than a man. They only err in this, that they do not design to contemplate his Divinity, which was conspicuous in his miracles.

**34.** *Is it not written in your Law?* He clears himself of the crime charged against him, not by denying that he is the Son of God, but by maintaining that he had justly said so. Yet he adapts his reply to the persons, instead of giving a full explanation of the fact; for he reckoned it enough for the present to expose their malice. In what sense he called himself the Son of God he does not explain fully, but states indirectly. The argument which he employs is not drawn from equals, but from the less to the greater.

*I said, You are gods.* Scripture gives the name of *gods* to those on whom God has conferred an honorable office. He whom God has separated, to be distinguished above all others, is far more worthy of this honorable title. Hence it follows, that they are malicious and false expounders of Scripture, who admit the first, but take offense at the second. The passage which Christ quotes is in [Psalm 82:6](#),

I have said, You are gods,  
and all of you are children of the Most High;

where God expostulates with the kings and judges of the earth, who tyrannically abuse their authority and power for their own sinful passions, for oppressing the poor, and for every evil action. He reproaches them that, unmindful of Him from whom they received so great dignity, they profane the name of God. Christ applies this to the case in hand, that they receive the name of *gods*, because they are God's ministers for governing the world. For the same reason Scripture calls the angels *gods*, because by them the glory of God beams forth on the world. We must attend to the mode of expression:

**35.** *To whom the word of God was addressed.* For Christ means that they were authorized by an undoubted command of God. Hence we infer that empires did not spring up at random, nor by the mistakes of men, but that they were appointed by the will of God, because he

wishes that political order should exist among men, and that we should be governed by usages and laws. For this reason Paul says, that all who resist the power are rebels against God, because there is no power but what is ordained by God,

(Romans 13:1, 2.)

It will, perhaps, be objected, that other callings also are from God, and are approved by him, and yet that we do not, on that account, call farmers, or cowherds, or cobblers, *gods* I reply, this is not a general declaration, that all who have been called by God to any particular way of living are called *gods*; but Christ speaks of kings, whom God has raised to a more elevated station, that they may rule and govern. In short, let us know that magistrates are called *gods*, because God has given them authority. Under the term *Law*, Christ includes the whole doctrine by which God governed his ancient Church; for since the prophets were only expounders of the Law, the Psalms are justly regarded as an appendage to the Law. That *the Scripture cannot be broken* means, that the doctrine of Scripture is inviolable.

**36.** *Whom the Father hath sanctified.* There is a *sanctification* that is common to all believers. But here Christ claims for himself something far more excellent, namely, that he alone was separated from all others, that the power of the Spirit and the majesty of God might be displayed in him; as he formerly said, that *him hath God the Father sealed*, (John 6:27.) But this refers strictly to the person of Christ, so far as he is manifested in the flesh. Accordingly, these two things are joined, that he has been *sanctified and sent into the world*. But we must also understand for what reason and on what condition *he was sent* It was to bring salvation from God, and to prove and exhibit himself, in every possible way, to be *the Son of God*.

*Do you say that I blaspheme?* The Arians anciently tortured this passage to prove that Christ is not God by nature, but that he possesses a kind of borrowed Divinity. But this error is easily refuted, for Christ does not now argue what he is in himself, but what we ought to acknowledge him to be, from his miracles in human flesh. For we can never comprehend his eternal Divinity, unless we embrace him as a Redeemer, so far as the Father hath exhibited him to us. Besides, we ought to remember what I have formerly suggested, that Christ does not, in this passage, explain fully and distinctly what he is, as he would have done among his disciples; but that he rather dwells on refuting the slander of his enemies.

## John 10:37-42

37. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. 38. But if I do,<sup>301</sup> though you believe not me, believe the works; that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him. 39. Therefore they sought again to seize him, but he escaped<sup>302</sup> out of their hands. 40. And again he went away beyond Jordan, to the place where John first baptized, and abode there. 41. And many came to him, and said, John indeed did no miracle; but all that John spoke about this man was true. 42. And many believed on him there.

37. *If I do not the works* Lest the Jews might reply that it was in vain for him to boast of *sanctification*, and of all that depended on it, he again draws their attention to his miracles, in which there was a sufficiently evident proof of his Divinity. This is in the shape of a concession, as if he had said, “I do not wish you to be bound to give me credit on any other condition than that you see the fact plainly before your eyes.”<sup>303</sup> You may safely reject me, if God has not openly given testimony to me.”

*The works of my Father.* He gives them this name, because those works were truly Divine, and because so great power shone in them, that they could not be ascribed to a man.

38. *But if I do.* He shows that they are held plainly convicted of unbelieving and sacrilegious contempt, because they render no reverence or honor<sup>304</sup> to what are undoubtedly the works of God. This is a second concession, when he says, “Though I allow you to doubt of my doctrine, you cannot deny, at least, that the miracles which I have performed are from God. You therefore openly reject God, and not a man.”

*That you may know and believe.* Though he places *knowledge* before faith, as if *faith* were inferior to it, he does so, because he has to do with unbelieving and obstinate men, who never yield to God, until they are vanquished and constrained by experience; for rebels wish to *know* before they *believe*. And yet our gracious God indulges us so far, that he prepares us for *faith* by a *knowledge* of his works. But the *knowledge* of God and of his secret wisdom comes after *faith*, because the obedience of *faith* opens to us the door of the kingdom of heaven.

*That the Father is in me, and I in him.* He repeats the same thing which he had said before in other words, *I and my Father are one*. All tends to this point, that in his ministry there is nothing contrary to his Father. “*The Father*, he says, *is* in me; that is, Divine power is manifested in me.”

301 “Et si je les fay;” — “and if I do them.”

302 “Mais il eschappa.”

303 “Sinon que vous voyez le fait evident devant vos yeux.”

304 “Aucune reverence ni honneur.”

*And I am in my Father*; that is, “I do nothing but by the command of God, so that there is a mutual connection between me and my Father.” For this discourse does not relate to the unity of essence, but to the manifestation of Divine power in the person of Christ, from which it was evident that he was sent by God.

**39.** *Therefore they sought again to seize him.* This was undoubtedly that they might drive him out of the temple, and immediately stone him; for their rage was not at all abated by the words of Christ. As to what the Evangelist says, that *he escaped out of their hands*, this could not be accomplished in any other way than by a wonderful exertion of Divine power. This reminds us that we are not exposed to the lawless passions of wicked men, which God restrains by his bridle, whenever he thinks fit.

**40.** *He went away beyond Jordan.* Christ passed *beyond Jordan*, that he might not have to fight continually without any advantage. He has therefore taught us, by his example, that we ought to avail ourselves of opportunities, when they occur. As to the place of his retreat, the reader may consult the observations which I have made at Chapter 1, verse 28.<sup>305</sup>

**41.** *And many came to him.* This large assembly shows that Christ did not seek solitude, in order to cease from the discharge of his duty, but to erect a sanctuary of God in the wilderness, when Jerusalem, which was his own abode and dwelling-place,<sup>306</sup> had obstinately driven him out. And indeed this was a dreadful vengeance of God, that, while the temple chosen by God was *a den of robbers*, ([Jeremiah 7:11](#); [Matthew 21:13](#)), the Church of God was collected in a despised place.

*John indeed did no miracle.* They infer that Christ is more excellent than *John*, because he has distinguished himself by so many miracles, while *John did not perform a single miracle*. Not that we ought always to judge from *miracles*, but that *miracles*, when united with doctrine, have no small weight, as has already been repeatedly mentioned. Their argument is defective; for they compare Christ with John, but they express only one part of the comparison. Besides, they take for granted, that John was an eminent prophet of God, and that he was endued with extraordinary grace of the Holy Spirit. They justly argue, therefore, that Christ ought to be preferred to John, because it was only by the fixed Providence of God that it was brought about that *John*, though in other respects a very great prophet, yet was not honored by performing any miracle. Hence they conclude, that this was done on Christ’s account, that he might be more highly esteemed.

*But all that John said.* It appears that this was not spoken by themselves, but was added by the Evangelist, in order to show that there were two reasons which induced them to believe in Christ. On the one hand,<sup>307</sup> they saw that the testimony which John had given to him

305 See [page 62](#) of this volume.

306 “Qui estoit le propre siege et habitation de celuy.”

307 “D’un coste.”



was true; and, on the other hand,<sup>308</sup> the miracles of Christ procured for him greater authority.

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308 "D'autrepart."

# CHAPTER 11

### John 11:1-10

1. Now one named Lazarus, of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha, was sick. 2. And it was that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3. The sisters therefore sent to him, saying, Lord, lo, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4. And Jesus, having heard this, said, This sickness is not to death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it. 5. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6. Having therefore heard that he was sick, he then remained two days in the place where he was. 7. And after this he saith to his disciples, Let us go into Judea again. 8. The disciples say to him, The Jews but lately sought to stone thee, and dost thou go thither again? 9. Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk by day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. 10. But if any man walk by night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

1. *And one named Lazarus was sick.* The Evangelist passes on to another narrative, which contains a miracle eminently worthy of being recorded. For not only did Christ give a remarkable proof of his Divine power in raising Lazarus, but he likewise placed before our eyes a lively image of our future resurrection. This might indeed be said to be the latest and concluding action of his life, for the time of his death was already at hand. We need not wonder, therefore, if he illustrated his own glory, in an extraordinary manner, in that work, the remembrance of which he wished to be deeply impressed on their minds, that it might seal, in some respects, all that had gone before. There were others whom Christ had raised from the dead, but he now displays his power on a rotting corpse. But the circumstances which tend to magnify the glory of God in this miracle shall be pointed out in their proper place and order.

*Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.* The probable reason why this circumstance is mentioned is, that *Lazarus* had not acquired so great celebrity among believers as his sisters had; for these holy women were accustomed to entertain Christ with their hospitality, as is evident from what is related by the Evangelist Luke, ([Luke 10:38](#).) It is really too ridiculous a blunder, to suppose that Monks, and such fry as the Papists have, made this small town or village a castle.

2. *It was that Mary who anointed the Lord.* It is a similar display of ignorance, to imagine that this *Mary, the sister of Lazarus*, was that woman of wicked and infamous life, who is mentioned by Luke, ([Luke 7:37](#).) This mistake was occasioned by the *anointing*; as if it were not evident enough that Christ was anointed on various occasions, and even at different places. *The woman who was a sinner*, of whom Luke gives an account, *anointed* Christ at Jerusalem, where he dwelt; but Mary afterwards *anointed* him at Bethany, which was her

own village. The past tense employed by the Evangelist, *who* anointed, must be referred, not to the time of the occurrence which he is now relating, but to the time when he wrote; as if he had said, "It was this Mary who afterwards poured on the head of Christ the *ointment*, on account of which a murmuring arose among the disciples," ([Matthew 26:7](#).)

3. *Lo, he whom thou lovest is sick.* The message is short, but Christ might easily learn from it what the two sisters wished; for, under this complaint, they modestly state their request that he would be pleased to grant them relief. We are not forbidden, indeed, to use a longer form of prayer; but our principal object ought to be, to pour into the bosom of God all our cares, and every thing that distresses us, that he may afford deliverance. Such is the manner in which the women act towards Christ: they plainly tell him their distress, in consequence of which they expect some alleviation. We ought also to observe that, from Christ's *love*, they are led to entertain a confident hope of obtaining assistance, *he whom thou lovest*; and this is the invariable rule of praying aright; for, where the *love* of God is, there deliverance is certain and at hand, because God cannot forsake him *whom he loveth*

4. *Now Jesus, having heard this, said, This sickness is not to death.* He intended by this reply to free his disciples from anxiety, that they might not take it amiss, when they saw him giving himself so little concern about the danger of his friend. That they might not be alarmed, therefore, about the life of Lazarus, he declares that the disease is not deadly, and even promises that it will be an additional occasion of promoting his own glory. Though Lazarus died, yet as Christ soon afterwards restored him to life, he now declares, looking to this result, that *the disease is not to death*

*But for the glory of God.* This clause is not contrasted with *death*, as if it were an argument that would always hold; for we know that, even though the reprobate die, the glory of God is not less strikingly displayed in their destruction than in the salvation of believers. But Christ strictly meant, in this passage, *the glory of God*, which was connected with his office. The power of God, which was displayed in the miracles of Christ, was not fitted to strike terror, but was kind and gentle. When he says that there is no danger of *death*, because he intends to display in it his own *glory* and the glory of his Father, we ought to inquire for what purpose, and with what intention, he was sent by the Father; which was, to save, and not to destroy.

*For the glory, of God, that the Son of God may be glorified.* This expression is highly emphatic; for we learn from it that God wishes to be acknowledged in the person of his Son in such a manner, that all the reverence which he requires to be given to his own majesty<sup>309</sup> may be ascribed to the Son. Hence we were told formerly,

He who doth not honor the Son doth not honor the Father,

([John 5:23](#).)

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309 "A sa majeste."

It is in vain for Mahometans and Jews, therefore, to pretend to worship God; for they blaspheme against Christ, and even endeavor, in this manner, to rob God of himself.

5. *And Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus.* These two things appear to be inconsistent with each other, that Christ *remains two days* beyond Jordan, as if he did not care about the life of Lazarus, and yet the Evangelist says, that Christ *loved him and his sisters*; for, since *love* produces anxiety, he ought to have hastened immediately. As Christ is the only mirror of the grace of God, we are taught by this delay on his part, that we ought not to judge of the love of God from the condition which we see before our eyes. When we have prayed to him, he often delays his assistance, either that he may increase still more our ardor in prayer, or that he may exercise our patience, and, at the same time, accustom us to obedience. Let believers then implore the assistance of God, but let them also learn to suspend their desires, if he does not stretch out his hand for their assistance as soon as they may think that necessity requires; for, whatever may be his delay, he never sleeps, and never forgets his people. Yet let us also be fully assured that he wishes all whom he loves to be saved.

7. *And after this, he saith to his disciples.* At length he now shows that he cared about Lazarus, though the disciples thought that he had forgotten him, or, at least, that there were other matters which he reckoned of more importance than the life of Lazarus. He therefore enjoins them to cross the Jordan, and *go to Judea*

8. *Rabbi, the Jews but lately sought to stone thee.* When the disciples dissuade him from going, they do so, not so much perhaps on his account as on their own, for each of them is alarmed about himself, as the danger was common to all. Avoiding the cross, and being ashamed to own it, they allege — what is more plausible — that they are anxious about their Master. The same thing happens every day with many. For they who, through a dread of the cross, shrink from the performance of their duty, eagerly seek excuses to conceal their indolence, that they may not be thought to rob God of the obedience due to him, when they have no good cause to do so.

9. *Are there not twelve hours in the day?* This passage has been explained in various ways. Some have thought the meaning of these words to be, that men sometimes adopt a new and different resolution every hour. This is very far from Christ's meaning; and indeed I would not have reckoned it worthy of being mentioned, had it not been that it has passed into a common proverb. Let us therefore be satisfied with the simple and natural meaning.

First, Christ borrows a comparison from Day and Night. For if any man perform a journey in the dark, we need not wonder if he frequently stumble, or go astray, or fall; but the light of the sun *by day* points out the road, so that there is no danger. Now the calling of God is like the light of day, which does not allow us to mistake our road or to stumble. Whoever, then, obeys the word of God, and undertakes nothing but according to his com-

mand, always has God to guide and direct him from heaven, and with this confidence he may safely and boldly pursue his journey. For, as we are informed,  
Whosoever walketh in his ways hath angels to guard him, and, under their direction, is safe,  
so that he cannot strike his foot against a stone,

(Psalm 91:11.)

Relying on this protection, therefore, Christ advances boldly into Judea, without any dread of being stoned; for there is no danger of going astray, when God, performing the part of the sun, shines on us, and directs our course.

We are taught by these words, that whenever a man allows himself to be guided by his own suggestions, without the calling of God, his whole life is nothing else than a course of wandering and mistake; and that they who think themselves exceedingly wise, when they do not inquire at the mouth of God, and have not his Spirit to govern their actions, are blind men groping in the dark; that the only proper way is, to be fully assured of our divine calling, and to have always God before our eyes as our guide.<sup>310</sup> This rule of regulating our life well is followed by a confident expectation of a prosperous result, because it is impossible that God shall not govern successfully. And this knowledge is highly necessary to us; for believers can scarcely move a foot to follow him, but Satan shall immediately interpose a thousand obstructions, hold out a variety of dangers on every side, and contrive, in every possible way, to oppose their progress. But when the Lord invites us to go forward, by holding out, as it were, his lamp to us, we ought to go forward courageously, though many deaths besiege our path; for he never commands us to advance without at the same time adding a promise to encourage us, so that we may be fully convinced, that whatever we undertake agreeably to his command will have a good and prosperous issue. This is our chariot, and whoever betakes himself to it will never fail through weariness; and even though the obstacles were so formidable that we could not be conveyed through them by a chariot, yet, furnished with these wings, we shall always succeed, till we reach the goal. Not that believers never meet with any adversity, but because adverse occurrences are aids to their salvation.

It amounts to this, that the eyes of God will always be attentive to guard those who shall be attentive to his instructions. Hence we learn also that, whenever men overlook and disregard the word of God, and consequently indulge themselves foolishly, and undertake whatever they think right, the whole course of their life is accursed by God, and vengeance is always ready to punish their presumption and their blind passions. Again, Christ here divides *the day* into *twelve hours*, according to ancient custom; for though the days are longer in summer and shorter in winter,<sup>311</sup> yet they had always *twelve hours of the day*, and *twelve* of the night.

310 “Quand nous avons tousjours Dieu devant nos yeux pour nostre guide.”

311 “Combien que les jours soyent plus grands en este, et plus petits en hyver.”

## John 11:11-17

**11.** He spoke these things, and after this he saith to them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him. **12.** Then his disciples said, Lord, if he sleepeth, he will recover. **13.** Now Jesus spoke of his death; but they thought that he spoke of the repose of sleep. **14.** Then Jesus, therefore, said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead. **15.** And I rejoice, on your account, that I was not there, that you may believe. But let us go to him. **16.** Then Thomas, who is called Didymus,<sup>312</sup> said to his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. **17.** Jesus therefore came, and found that he had been already four days in the tomb.

**11.** *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.* Having formerly asserted that the disease was not deadly, that his disciples may not be too much distressed at seeing what they did not expect, he now informs them also that Lazarus is dead, and excites a hope of his resurrection. It is a proof of amazing ignorance, that they believe that Christ spoke about *sleep*; for, though it is a metaphorical form of expression, still it is so frequent and common in Scripture, that it ought to have been familiarly known to all the Jews.

**12.** *If he sleepeth, he will recover.*<sup>313</sup> Replying that *sleep* will have a salutary effect on Lazarus, they thus endeavor indirectly to dissuade Christ from going thither. And yet they do not craftily or deceitfully turn aside Christ's words to suit their own purpose, on the pretense of not understanding what he said;<sup>314</sup> but, thinking that he spoke about sleep, they gladly seize this opportunity of avoiding danger. Augustine, and many writers since his time, speculate about the word *sleep*, alleging that the reason why it is applied to death is, because it is as easy for God to raise the dead to life, as it is for us to perform the customary act of awaking those who are asleep. But that nothing of this sort came into the mind of Christ, may be inferred from the constant use of the term in Scripture; and since even profane writers usually apply this word *Sleep* to *Death*,<sup>315</sup> there was unquestionably no other reason why it came into use, but because a lifeless corpse lies without feeling, just as the body of a man who is in a profound sleep. Hence, also, *sleep* is not inappropriately called *the image of death*, and Homer calls it *the brother of death*, (κασίγνητος θανάτου.) Since this word denotes only the sleep of the body, it is prodigiously absurd to apply it — as some fanatics have done — to souls, as if, by being deprived of understanding, they were subject to death.

312 “Adonc Thomas, qui est a dire Gemeau;” — “then Thomas, which means Twin.”

313 “Il sera guairi.”

314 “Comme faisans semblant de n'entendre point ce que Christ dit.”

315 “Et mesmers veu que les autheurs profanes transferent coustumierement ce mot de Dormir a la Mort.”

*But I go to awake him.* Christ asserts his own power, when he says that he will come to awake Lazarus; for, though, as we have said, the word *sleep* does not express the facility of the resurrection, yet Christ shows that he is Lord of *death*, when he says, that he *awakes* those whom he restores to life.

**14.** *Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus is dead.* The goodness of Christ was astonishing, in being able to bear with such gross ignorance in the disciples. And indeed the reason why he delayed, for a time, to bestow upon them the grace of the Spirit in larger measure, was, that the miracle of renewing them in a moment might be the greater.

**15.** *And I rejoice, on your account, that I was not there.* He means that his absence was profitable to them, because his power would have been less illustriously displayed, if he had instantly given assistance to Lazarus. For the more nearly the works of God approach to the ordinary course of nature, the less highly are they valued, and the less illustriously is their glory displayed. This is what we experience daily; for if God immediately stretches out his hand, we do not perceive his assistance. That the resurrection of Lazarus, therefore, might be acknowledged by the disciples to be truly a Divine work, it must be delayed, that it might be very widely removed from a human remedy.

We ought to remember, however, what I formerly observed, that the fatherly kindness of God towards us is here represented in the person of Christ. When God permits us to be overwhelmed with distresses, and to languish long under them, let us know that, in this manner, he promotes our salvation. At such a time, no doubt, we groan and are perplexed and sorrowful, but the Lord rejoices on account of our benefit, and gives a twofold display of his kindness to us in this respect, that he not only pardons our sins, but gladly finds means of correcting them.

*That you may believe.* He does not mean that this was the first feeble commencement of faith in them, but that it was a confirmation of faith already begun, though it was still exceedingly small and weak. Yet he indirectly suggests that, if the hand of God had not been openly displayed, they would not have believed.

**16.** *Then Thomas.* Hitherto the disciples had endeavored to hinder Christ from going. *Thomas* is now prepared to follow, but it is without confidence; or, at least, he does not fortify himself by the promise of Christ, so as to follow him with cheerfulness and composure.

*Let us go, that we may die with him.* This is the language of despair, for they ought to have entertained no fears about their own life. The phrase, *with him*, may be explained as referring either to Lazarus or to Christ. If we refer it to Lazarus, it will be ironical, as if *Thomas* had said, "Of what use will it be to go thither, unless it be that we cannot discharge the duty of friends in any other manner than by seeking *to die along with him?*" Yet I greatly prefer the other meaning, that *Thomas* does not refuse *to die with Christ*. But this, as I have said, proceeds from inconsiderate zeal; for he ought rather to have taken courage from faith in the promise.

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## John 11:18-27

**18.** Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs. **19.** And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. **20.** When Martha, therefore, heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. **21.** Martha then said to Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died. **22.** But I know that even now, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it thee. **23.** Jesus saith to her, Thy brother shall rise again. **24.** Martha saith to him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. **25.** Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believeth in me, though he were dead, shall live. **26.** And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? **27.** She saith to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.

**18.** *Now Bethany was near Jerusalem.* The Evangelist diligently follows out all that contributes to the certainty of the narrative. He relates how *near Jerusalem was to the village of Bethany*, that no one may be astonished that, for the purpose of comforting the sisters, many friends came from Jerusalem, whom God intended to be witnesses of the miracle. For, though the desire of performing an office of kindness was their inducement to go, yet they were assembled there, by a secret decree of God, for another purpose, that the resurrection of Lazarus might not remain unknown, or that the witnesses might not be only those who belonged to the family. Now it is a convincing proof of the base ingratitude of the nation, that this striking demonstration of Divine power at a well-known place, amidst a vast crowd of men, and near the gates of the city, and which might almost be said to be erected on a stage, instantly vanishes from the eyes of men. We should rather say that the Jews, by maliciously shutting their eyes, intentionally do not see what is before their eyes. Nor is it a new or uncommon occurrence, that men who, with excessive eagerness, continually gape for miracles, are altogether dull and stupid in the consideration of them.

*About fifteen furlongs* This distance between the two places was somewhat less than *two thousand paces*, or, two miles; for the *Stadium*, or *furlong*, contains six hundred feet; that is, one hundred and twenty-five paces.<sup>316</sup>

**19.** *To comfort them concerning their brother.* This was, no doubt, the object which they had in view, but God had another object to accomplish, as we have stated. It is evident from

<sup>316</sup> The Roman *Passus*, or pace — measured from the spot where either foot was planted to the spot where the same foot was planted after two ordinary steps — was five feet; so that the *Mille*, or *thousand paces*, contained five thousand feet, rather less than an English *mile*; and the *Stadium*, or *furlong*, which contained, as Calvin states, “one hundred and twenty-five paces,” was equal to six hundred and twenty-five feet. — *Ed.*

what is here mentioned, that the house of Lazarus and his sisters was greatly respected and honored. Again, as it is natural that the death of friends should occasion grief and mourning to men, this duty, which the Evangelist mentions, ought not to be blamed, unless on this ground, that sinful excess, which prevails in this and in other departments of life, corrupts what is not in itself sinful.

**20.** *Martha having heard that Jesus was coming.* Martha travels beyond the village, as we shall afterwards see, not only perhaps on account of the reverence which she bore to Christ, but that she might meet him more secretly; for his danger was fresh in his recollection, and the rage of enemies had not well subsided, which had been a little abated by Christ's departure into Galilee, but might, on their hearing of his arrival, break out anew with greater violence.

**21.** *Lord, if thou hadst been here.* She begins with a complaint, though in doing so she modestly expresses her wish. Her meaning may be expressed thus — "By thy presence thou mightst have delivered my brother from death, and even now thou canst do it, for God will not refuse thee any thing." By speaking in this manner, she gives way to her feelings, instead of restraining them under the rule of faith. I acknowledge that her words proceeded partly from faith, but I say that there were disorderly passions mixed with them, which hurried her beyond due bounds. For when she assures herself that her brother would not have died, if Christ had been present, what ground has she for this confidence? Certainly, it did not arise from any promise of Christ.

The only conclusion therefore is, that she inconsiderately yields to her own wishes, instead of subjecting herself to Christ. When she ascribes to Christ power and supreme goodness, this proceeds from faith; but when she persuades herself of more than she had heard Christ declare, that has nothing to do with faith;<sup>317</sup> for we must always hold the mutual agreement between the word and faith, that no man may rashly forge anything for himself, without the authority of the word of God. Besides, Martha attached too much importance to the bodily presence of Christ. The consequence is, that Martha's faith, though mixed up and interwoven with ill-regulated desires, and even not wholly free from superstition, could not shine with full brightness; so that we perceive but a few sparks of it in these words.

**23.** *Thy brother shall rise again.* The kindness of Christ is amazing, in forgiving those faults of Martha which we have mentioned, and in promising her, of his own accord, more than she had ventured plainly and directly to ask.

**24.** *I know that he shall rise again.* We now see Martha's excessive timidity in extenuating the meaning of Christ's words. We have said that she went farther than she had a right to do, when she fabricated a hope for herself out of the feelings of her own mind. She now falls

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317 "Cela n'a rien de commun avec la foy."

into an opposite fault; for when Christ stretches forth his hand, she stops short, as if she were alarmed. We ought, therefore to guard against both of these extremes. On the one hand, we must not, without the authority of God's word, drink in empty hopes, which will prove to be nothing but wind; and, on the other hand, when God opens his mouth, it is not proper that he should find our hearts either blocked up, or too firmly closed. Again, by this reply, Martha intended to ascertain more than she ventured to expect from the words of Christ, as if she had said: "If you mean the last resurrection, I have no doubt that *my brother will be raised again at the last day*, and I comfort myself with this confident expectation, but I do not know if you direct my attention to something greater."

25. *I am the resurrection and the life.* Christ first declares that *he is the resurrection and the life*, and then he explains, separately and distinctly, each clause of this sentence. His first statement is, that *he is the resurrection*, because the restoration from death to life naturally comes before the state of life. Now the whole human race is plunged in death; and, therefore, no man will be a partaker of life until he is risen from the dead. Thus Christ shows that he is the commencement of life, and he afterwards adds, that the continuance of life is also a work of his grace. That he is speaking about spiritual life, is plainly shown by the exposition which immediately follows,

*He who believeth in me, though, he were dead, shall live.* Why then is Christ *the resurrection*? Because by his Spirit he regenerates the children of Adam, who had been alienated from God by sin, so that they begin to live a new life. On this subject, I have spoken more fully under [John 5:21](#) and 24;<sup>318</sup> and Paul is an excellent interpreter of this passage, ([Ephesians 2:5](#), and [Ephesians 5:8](#).) Away now with those who idly talk that men are prepared for receiving the grace of God by the movement of nature. They might as well say that the dead walk. For that men live and breathe, and are endued with sense, understanding, and will, all this tends to their destruction, because there is no part or faculty of the soul that is not corrupted and turned aside from what is right. Thus it is that death everywhere holds dominion, for the death of the soul is nothing else than its being estranged and turned aside from God.<sup>319</sup> Accordingly, they who believe in Christ, though they were formerly dead, begin to live, because faith is a spiritual resurrection of the soul, and — so to speak — animates the soul itself that it may live to God; according to that passage,

The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who hear shall live  
([John 5:25](#).)

This is truly a remarkable commendation of faith, that it conveys to us the life of Christ, and thus frees us from death.

318 See pp. 200 and 204 of this volume.

319 "N'est autre chose qu'estre estrange et detourne de Dieu."

26. *And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me.* This is the exposition of the second clause, how *Christ is the life*; and he is so, because he never permits *the life* which he has once bestowed to be lost, but preserves it to the end. For since flesh is so frail, what would become of men, if, after having once obtained life, they were afterwards left to themselves? The perpetuity of *the life* must, therefore, be founded on the power of Christ himself, that he may complete what he has begun.

*Shall never die.* The reason why it is said that believers *never die* is, that their souls, being born again of *incorruptible seed*, (1 Peter 1:23,) have Christ dwelling in them, from whom they derive perpetual vigor; for, though

the body be subject to death on account of sin,  
yet the spirit is life on account of righteousness,

(Romans 8:10.)

That *the outward man daily decays in them* is so far from taking anything away from their true *life*, that it aids the progress of it, because *the inward man is renewed from day to day*, (2 Corinthians 4:16.) What is still more, death itself is a sort of emancipation from the bondage of death.

*Dost thou believe this?* Christ seems, at first sight, to discourse about spiritual life, for the purpose of withdrawing the mind of Martha from her present desire. Martha wished that her brother should be restored to *life* Christ replies, that he is the Author of a more excellent *life*; and that is, because he quickens the souls of believers by divine power. Yet I have no doubt that he intended to include both favors; and therefore he describes, in general terms, that spiritual life which he bestows on all his followers, but wishes to give them some opportunity of knowing this power, which he was soon afterwards to manifest in raising Lazarus.

27. *Yes, Lord.* To prove that she believes what she had heard Christ say about himself, that *he is the resurrection and the life*, Martha replies, that *she believes that he is the Christ, and the Son of God*; and indeed this knowledge includes the sum of all blessings; for we ought always to remember for what purpose the Messiah was promised, and what duty the prophets ascribe to him. Now when Martha confesses that *it was he who was to come into the world*, she strengthens her faith by the predictions of the prophets. Hence it follows, that we ought to expect from him the full restoration of all things and perfect happiness; and, in short, that he was sent to erect and prepare the true and perfect state of the kingdom of God.

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### John 11:28-38

**28.** Having said these things, she went away, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is here, and calleth for thee. **29.** As soon as she heard it, she immediately arose, and came to him. **30.** Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was in the place where Martha met him. **31.** Then the Jews, who were with her in the house, and comforted her, perceiving that Mary suddenly arose and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth to the tomb, to weep there. **32.** Mary therefore, having come where Jesus was, and having seen him, fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died. **33.** Jesus therefore, when he saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also <sup>320</sup> weeping, groaned in his spirit, and was troubled, **34.** And said, Where have you laid him? They say to him, Lord, come and see. **35.** Jesus wept. **36.** The Jews therefore said, Behold how he loved him? <sup>321</sup> **37.** And some of them said, Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not die? **38.** Then Jesus, again groaning within himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was placed on it.

**28.** *And called Mary, her sister.* It was probably at the request of Martha, that Christ remained on the outside of the village, that he might not enter into so great an assembly of people; for she dreaded the danger, because Christ had but lately escaped with difficulty from instant death. Accordingly, that the rumor about his arrival might not spread farther, she makes it known privately to her sister.

*The Master is here.* The word *Master* shows in what estimation Christ was held among those pious women. Though they had not hitherto profited so much as they might have done, still it was a great matter that they were entirely devoted to him as his disciples; and Mary's sudden departure, to come and meet him, was a proof that she regarded him with no ordinary reverence.

**31.** *Then the Jews who were with her.* Though Martha was permitted by Christ to return home for the purpose of withdrawing her sister from the numerous assembly, yet Christ had another design in view, which was, that the Jews might be witnesses of the miracle. True, they have no thought of it, but it was no new thing that men should be led, as it were in darkness, and by the secret providence of God, where they did not intend to go. They think that Mary is *going to the tomb*, according to the custom of those who seek excitements of their grief. For it is a very prevalent disease, that husbands deprived of their wives, parents deprived of their children, and, on the other hand, wives deprived of their husbands, and

320 "Aussi."

321 "Voyez comme il l'aimoit!" — "see how he loved him!"

children deprived of their parents or other relatives and friends, are eager to increase their grief by every possible method. It is also customary to resort to various contrivances for this purpose. The affections of men are already sufficiently disordered; but it is still worse,<sup>322</sup> that they inflame them by new excitements, that they may rush against God with greater ardor and violence. It was their duty to dissuade Mary from going, that the sight of the tomb might not give fresh occasion for her grief; yet they do not venture to apply so harsh a remedy, but even themselves contribute to the excess of her grief, by accompanying her to the tomb. Thus it frequently happens, that they who treat too gently the excesses of their friends do them little good by their consolations.

**32. *She fell at his feet.*** From her *falling down at his feet* we learn that Christ was honored in that house beyond the ordinary custom of men. For, though it was customary to throw themselves down on the ground in the presence of kings and great men, yet as Christ had nothing about him, according to the flesh, that was royal or magnificent, it was for a different purpose that Mary *fell down at his feet*. Indeed, she would not have done so, if she had not been convinced that he was the Son of God.

*Lord, if thou hadst been here.* Though she appears to speak of Christ respectfully, yet we have lately pointed out what is faulty in these words; for the power of Christ, which filled heaven and earth, ought not to have been limited to his bodily presence.

**33. *He groaned in his spirit.*** If Christ had not been excited to compassion by their tears, he would rather have kept his countenance unmoved, but when, of his own accord, he conforms to those mourners, so far as to weep along with them,<sup>323</sup> he gives proof that he has sympathy, (συμπάθεια.) For the cause of this feeling is, in my opinion, expressed by the Evangelist, when he says that *Christ saw Mary and the rest weeping*. Yet I have no doubt that Christ contemplated something higher, namely, the general misery of the whole human race; for he knew well what had been enjoined on him by the Father, and why he was sent into the world, namely, to free us from all evils. As he has actually done this, so he intended to show that he accomplished it with warmth and earnestness. Accordingly, when he is about to raise Lazarus, before granting deliverance or aid, by *the groaning of his spirit*, by a strong feeling of grief, and by *tears*, he shows that he is as much affected by our distresses as if he had endured them in his own person.

But how do *groaning* and *trouble of mind* belong to the person of the Son of God? As some reckon it absurd to say that Christ, as one of the number of human beings, was subject to human passions, they think that the only way in which he experienced grief or joy was, that he received in himself those feelings, whenever he thought proper, by some secret dispensation. It is in this sense, Augustine thinks, that the Evangelist says that *he was troubled*,

322 “Mais voyci le pis.”

323 “Quand de son bon gre il se conforme a ces pleurans, jusques pleurer avec eux.”

because other men are hurried along by their feelings, which exercise dominion, or rather tyranny, to *trouble* their minds. He considers the meaning therefore to be, that Christ, though otherwise tranquil and free from all passion, brought *groaning* and *grief* upon himself of his own accord. But this simplicity will, in my opinion, be more agreeable to Scripture, if we say that the Son of God, having clothed himself with our flesh, of his own accord clothed himself also with human feelings, so that he did not differ at all from his brethren, sin only excepted. In this way we detract nothing from the glory of Christ, when we say that it was a voluntary submission, by which he was brought to resemble us in the feelings of the soul. Besides, as he submitted from the very commencement, we must not imagine that he was free and exempt from those feelings; and in this respect he proved himself to be our brother, in order to assure us, that we have a Mediator, who willingly pardons our infirmities, and who is ready to assist those infirmities which he has experienced in himself.

It will perhaps be objected, that the passions of men are sinful, and therefore it cannot be admitted that we have them in common with the Son of God. I reply, there is a wide difference between Christ and us. For the reason why our feelings are sinful is, that they rush on without restraint, and suffer no limit; but in Christ the feelings were adjusted and regulated in obedience to God, and were altogether free from sin. To express it more fully,<sup>324</sup> the feelings of men are sinful and perverse on two accounts; first, because they are hurried along by impetuous motion, and are not regulated by the true rule of modesty; and, secondly, because they do not always arise from a lawful cause, or, at least, are not directed to a lawful end. I say that there is excess, because no person rejoices or grieves, so far only as is sufficient, or as God permits, and there are even some who shake themselves loose from all restraint. The vanity of our understanding brings us grief or sadness, on account of trifles, or for no reason whatever, because we are too much devoted to the world. Nothing of this nature was to be found in Christ; for he had no passion or affection of his own that ever went beyond its proper bounds; he had not one that was not proper, and founded on reason and sound judgment.

To make this matter still more clear, it will be of importance for us to distinguish between man's first nature, as it was created by God, and this degenerate nature, which is corrupted by sin. When God created man, he implanted affections in him, but affections which were obedient and submissive to reason. That those affections are now disorderly and rebellious is an accidental fault; that is, it proceeds from some other cause than from the Creator.<sup>325</sup> Now Christ took upon him human affections, but without (*ἀταξία*) disorder; for he who obeys the passions of the flesh is not obedient to God. Christ was indeed *troubled* and vehemently agitated; but, at the same time, he kept himself in subjection to the will of the

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324 "Pour mieux dire."

325 "C'est a dire, venant d'ailleurs que du Createur."

Father. In short, if you compare his passions with ours, they will differ not less than pure and clear water, flowing in a gentle course, differs from dirty and muddy foam.

The example of Christ ought to be sufficient of itself for setting aside the unbending sternness which the Stoics demand; for whence ought we to look for the rule of supreme perfection but from Christ? We ought rather to endeavor to correct and subdue that obstinacy which pervades our affections on account of the sin of Adam, and, in so doing, to follow Christ as our leader, that he may bring us into subjection. Thus Paul does not demand from us hardened stupidity, but enjoins us to observe moderation

in our mourning, that we may not abandon ourselves to grief, like unbelievers who have no  
hope

(1 Thessalonians 4:13;)

for even Christ took our affections into himself, that by his power we may subdue every thing in them that is sinful.

**36.** *Behold, how he loved him!* The Evangelist John here describes to us two different opinions which were formed about Christ. As to the former, who said, *Behold, how he loved him!* though they think less highly of Christ than they ought to have done, since they ascribe to him nothing but what may belong to a man, yet they speak of him with greater candor and modesty than the latter, who maliciously slander him for not having hindered Lazarus from dying. For, though they applaud the power of Christ, of which the former said nothing, yet they do so, not without bringing against him some reproach. It is evident enough from their words, that the miracles which Christ had performed were not unknown to them; but so much the more base is their ingratitude, that they do not scruple to complain, because now, in a single instance, he abstained from working. Men have always been ungrateful to God in the same manner, and continue to be so. If he does not grant all our wishes, we immediately launch into complaints: "Since he has been accustomed to aid us hitherto, why does he now forsake and disappoint us?" There is here a twofold disease. First, though we rashly desire what is not expedient for us, yet we wish to subject God to the perverse desires of the flesh. Secondly, we are rude in our demands, and the ardor of impatience hurries us before the time.

**38.** *Jesus therefore again groaning within himself.* Christ does not approach the sepulcher as an idle spectator, but as a champion who prepares for a contest; and therefore we need not wonder that he *again groans*; for the violent tyranny of death, which he had to conquer, is placed before his eyes. Some explain this groan to have arisen from indignation, because he was offended at that unbelief of which we have spoken. But another reason appears to me far more appropriate, namely, that he contemplated the transaction itself rather than the men. Next follow various circumstances, which tend to display more fully the power of Christ in raising Lazarus. I refer to the time of *four days*, during which *the tomb* had been secured by *a stone*, which Christ commands to be removed in presence of all.



### John 11:39-44

**39.** Jesus saith, Remove the stone. Martha, the sister of him who was dead, saith to him, Lord, he already stinketh, for this is the fourth day. **40.** Jesus saith to her, Did I not tell thee that, if thou believe, thou shalt see the glory of God? **41.** They therefore removed the stone from the place where he who was dead lay. And Jesus again lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. **42.** And I knew that thou hearest me always, but, on account of the multitude around me, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. **43.** Having spoken these words, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. **44.** And he who had been dead came forth, bound hand and foot with bandages, and his face was wrapped in a napkin. Jesus saith to them, Loose him, and let him go.

**39.** *Lord, he already stinketh.* This is an indication of distrust, for she promises herself less from the power of Christ than she ought to have done. The root of the evil consists in measuring the infinite and incomprehensible power of God by the perception of her flesh. There being nothing more inconsistent with life than putrefaction and offensive smell, *Martha* infers that no remedy can be found. Thus, when our minds are preoccupied by foolish thoughts, we banish God from us, if we may be allowed the expression, so that he cannot accomplish in us his own work. Certainly, it was not owing to *Martha*, that her brother did not lie continually in the tomb, for she cuts off the expectation of life for him, and, at the same time, endeavors to hinder Christ from raising him; and yet nothing was farther from her intention. This arises from the weakness of faith. Distracted in various ways, we fight with ourselves, and while we stretch out the one hand to ask assistance from God, we repel, with the other hand, that very assistance, as soon as it is offered. <sup>326</sup> True, *Martha* did not speak falsely, when she said, *I know that whatsoever thou shalt ask from God he will give thee*; but a confused faith is of little advantage, unless it be put in operation, when we come to a practical case.

We may also perceive in *Martha* how various are the effects of faith, even in the most excellent persons. She was the first that came to meet Christ; this was no ordinary proof of her piety; and yet she does not cease to throw difficulties in his way. That the grace of God may have access to us, let us learn to ascribe to it far greater power than our senses can comprehend; and, if the first and single promise of God has not sufficient weight with us, let us, at least, follow the example of *Martha* by giving our acquiescence, when he confirms us a second and third time.

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<sup>326</sup> “Ceste mesme aide, si tost qu’il nous la presente.”

**40.** *Did not I tell thee?* He reproves Martha's distrust, in not forming a hope sufficiently vigorous from the promise which she had heard. It is evident from this passage, that something more was said to Martha than John has literally related; though, as I have suggested, this very thing was meant by Christ, when he called himself *the resurrection and the life* Martha is therefore blamed for not expecting some Divine work.

*If thou believe.* This is said, not only because faith opens our eyes, that we may be able to see the power of God shining in his works, but because our faith prepares the way for the power, mercy, and goodness of God, that they may be displayed towards us, as it is said, *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it,* ([Psalm 81:10](#).) In like manner, unbelief, on the other hand, hinders God from approaching us, and may be said to keep his hands shut. On this account it is said elsewhere, that Jesus

could not perform any miracle there on account of their unbelief, ([Matthew 13:58](#).)

Not that the power of God is bound by the caprice of men, but because, as far as they are able, their malice opposes the exercise of that power, and therefore they do not deserve that it should be manifested to them. Frequently, indeed, does God overcome such obstacles; but yet, whenever he withdraws his hand, so as not to assist unbelievers, this is done because, shut up within the narrow limits of their unbelief, they do not allow it to enter.

*Thou shalt see the glory of God.* Observe, that a miracle is called *the glory of God*, because God, displaying in it the power of his hand, glorifies his name. But Martha, now satisfied with Christ's second declaration, permits the stone to be removed. As yet she sees nothing, but, hearing the Son of God, not without a good reason, give this order, she willingly relies on his authority alone.

**41.** *And Jesus again raised his eyes.* This was the token of a mind truly prepared for prayer; for before any one calls on God aright, he must be brought into communication with him, and this can only be done when, raised above the earth, he ascends even to heaven. True, this is not done by the eyes; for hypocrites, who are plunged in the deep filth of their flesh, appear to draw down heaven to them by their stern aspect; but what they only pretend to do must be sincerely accomplished by the children of God. And yet he who *raises his eyes* to heaven ought not, in his thoughts, to limit God to heaven; for He is present everywhere, and *fills heaven and earth,* ([Jeremiah 23:24](#).) But as men can never free themselves from gross imaginations, so as not to form some low and earthly conception about God, unless when they are raised above the world, Scripture sends them to heaven, and declares that *heaven is the habitation of God,* ([Isaiah 66:1](#).)

So far as relates to the eyes, it is not a custom that must be perpetually observed, so that without it prayer is not lawful; for the publican, who prays with his face cast down to the ground, does not the less, on this account, pierce heaven by his faith, ([Luke 18:13](#).) Yet this exercise is profitable, because men are aroused by it to seek God; and not only so, but the ardor of prayer often affects the body in such a manner that, without thinking of it, the body

follows the mind of its own accord. Certainly, we cannot doubt that, when Christ *raised his eyes to heaven*, he was carried towards it with extraordinary vehemence. Besides, as all his thoughts were with the Father, so he also wished to bring others to the Father along with him.

*Father, I thank thee.* He begins with *thanksgiving*, though he has asked nothing; but though the Evangelist does not relate that he prayed in a form of words, yet there can be no doubt whatever that, before this, there was a prayer, for otherwise it could not have been heard. And there is reason to believe that he prayed amidst those *groanings* which the Evangelist mentions; for nothing could be more absurd than to suppose that he was violently agitated within himself, as stupid men are wont to be. Having obtained the life of Lazarus, he now *thanks the Father* By saying that he has received this power from *the Father*, and by not ascribing it to himself, he does nothing more than acknowledge that he is the servant of *the Father* For, accommodating himself to the capacity of men, he at one time openly proclaims his Divinity, and claims for himself whatever belongs to God; and, at another time, he is satisfied with sustaining the character of a man, and yields to *the Father* the whole glory of Divinity. Here both are admirably brought together by the Evangelist in one word, when he says that the Father *heard* Christ, but that he *gives thanks*, that men may know that *he was sent by the Father*, that is, that they may acknowledge him to be the Son of God. The majesty of Christ being incapable of being perceived in its true elevation, the power of God, which appeared in his flesh, gradually raised to this elevation the gross and dull senses of men. For since he intended to be wholly ours, we need not wonder if he accommodates himself to us in various ways; and as he even allowed himself to be *emptied* ([Philippians 2:7](#)) for us, there is no absurdity in saying that he abases himself on our account.

**42.** *And I knew that thou hearest me always.* This is an anticipation, lest any one should think that he did not stand so high in favor with *the Father*, as to be able easily to perform as many miracles as he chose. He means, therefore, that there is so great an agreement between him and the Father, that the Father refuses him nothing; and even that he had no need to pray, because he only executed what he knew that the Father had enjoined; but in order that men may be more fully assured that this is truly a divine work, for this reason he called on the name of the Father. It will perhaps be objected, Why then did he not raise all the dead? The reply is easy. A certain fixed limit was assigned to miracles by the purpose of God, so far as he knew to be sufficient for confirming the Gospel.

**43.** *He cried with a loud voice.* By not touching with the hand, but only *crying with the voice*, his Divine power is more fully demonstrated. At the same time, he holds out to our view the secret and astonishing efficacy of his word. For how did Christ restore life to the dead but by the word? And therefore, in raising Lazarus, he exhibited a visible token of his spiritual grace, which we experience every day by the perception of faith, when he shows that his voice gives life.

**44. Bound hand and foot with bandages.** The Evangelist is careful to mention the *napkin* and *bandages*, in order to inform us that Lazarus went out of the tomb, in the same manner that he was laid in it. This mode of burying is retained to the present day by the Jews, who cover the body with a shroud, and wrap the head separately in a handkerchief.

*Loose him, and let him go.* To magnify the glory of the miracle, it only remained that the Jews should even touch with their hands that Divine work which they had beheld with their eyes. For Christ might have removed the *bandages* with which Lazarus was bound, or made them to give way of themselves; but Christ intended to employ the hands of the spectators as his witnesses.

The Papists act an excessively ridiculous part, by endeavoring to draw auricular confession from this passage. They say, “Christ, after having restored Lazarus to life, commanded his disciples *to loose him*; and therefore it is not enough for us to be reconciled to God, unless the Church also pardon our sins.” But whence do they conjecture that the disciples were enjoined to *loose Lazarus*? On the contrary, we may infer that the order was given to the Jews, in order to take from them every ground of doubt or hesitation.

## John 11:45-52

45. Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. 46. But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them what Jesus had done. 47. Then the chief priests and Pharisees assembled the council, and said, What do we? for this man doth many miracles. 48. If we let him go on thus, all will believe on him; and the Romans will come, and will take away our place and nation. 49. But one of them, named Caiaphas, who was the high priest of that year, said to them, You know nothing at all, 50. Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish. 51. Now this he spoke, not of himself, but being the high priest of that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation; 52. And not for that nation only, but that he might assemble, in one body, the children of God who were scattered abroad.

45. *Many therefore of the Jews believed on him.* Christ did not permit the miracle which he had wrought to be without fruit, for by means of it he drew some persons to the faith. For we ought to understand that miracles have a twofold use. They are intended either to prepare us for faith, or to confirm us in faith. The former is here denoted by the Evangelist; for he means that those of whom he speaks regarded Christ with admiration and reverence, so as to submit to be his disciples; otherwise the bare miracle could not have been sufficient to produce faith. Accordingly, by the word *believe* we must not suppose anything else to be meant than a willingness to embrace the doctrine of Christ.

46. *But some of them went away to the Pharisees.* In those who accuse Christ we behold detestable ingratitude, or rather horrible rage, from which we infer how blind and mad is their impiety. The resurrection of Lazarus ought undoubtedly to have softened even hearts of stone; but there is no work of God which impiety will not infect and corrupt by the bitterness of its poison. So then, before men can profit by miracles, their hearts must be purified; for they who have no fear of God, and no reverence for him, though they saw heaven and earth mingled, will never cease to reject sound doctrine through obstinate ingratitude. Thus you will see in the present day many enemies of the Gospel, like fanatics, fighting with the open and visible hand of God. And yet they demand miracles from us, but it is for no other purpose than to show that, in stubborn resistance, they are monsters of men. As to the report being carried to the Pharisees rather than to any others,<sup>327</sup> it is because, in proportion to their hypocrisy, they were more fierce in opposing the Gospel. For the same reason he soon afterwards makes express mention of them, when he relates that *the council* was assembled.

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327 “Plustost qu’a quelques autres.”

They were indeed a part of *the priests*, but are specially named by the Evangelist, because they served the purpose of bellows to kindle the rage of the whole *council*

47. *Then the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled the council.* Not less monstrous is the blindness of *the priests*, which is here described. If they had not been exceedingly stupid and brutish, they would at least have been impressed with some reverence for Christ, after so striking a demonstration of his Divine power. They now assemble deliberately and intentionally to bury the glory of God, at the sight of which they are constrained to be astonished. True, they do not openly proclaim that they wish to make war with God, but as they cannot extinguish Christ but by overturning the power of God, they unquestionably fight against that power openly by presumption and sacrilege. Infidelity indeed is always haughty, and despises God, but does not all at once break out to such an extent as to raise its horns against God. But when men have long struggled against God, the result at which they ultimately arrive is, that they endeavor to ascend above heaven, after the manner of the giants,<sup>328</sup> without any dread of the Divine majesty;<sup>329</sup> for they acknowledge that Christ *doth many miracles* And whence proceeds his great power? They therefore openly prepare to crush the power of God, which shines in the miracles of Christ. Yet God is not unemployed; but though he wink at them for a time, he laughs at their foolish arrogance, till the time come for executing his wrath, as it is said, ([Psalm 2:4, 12.](#))

*What do we?* By these words they accuse themselves of sloth, as if they said that it is on account of their doing nothing, that Christ continues to make advances, because by active exertion they may stop his progress. Such is the confidence of wicked men, by which they lay claim to everything, as if it were in their power to do as they please, and as if even the result of the work depended on their wishes. And if the whole be duly weighed, they here employ their own industry as a shield against the Divine power, as if by perseverance they could vanquish God.

48. *If we let him alone thus.* What if they do not *let him alone*? In that case, as we have already said, they are fully convinced that it lies in their power to block up Christ's path, so that he shall go no farther, provided that they earnestly strive against him. If Christ had been some impostor, their duty would have been to employ their exertions, that he might not lead away the sheep from the Lord's flock; but by confessing his *miracles*, they make it sufficiently evident that they do not care much about God, whose power they so boldly and disdainfully despise.

*The Romans will come.* They cloak their wickedness by a plausible disguise, their zeal for the public good. The fear that chiefly distressed them was, that their tyranny would be destroyed; but they pretend to be anxious about the temple and worship of God, about the

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328 See [page 223, n. 1.](#)

329 "De la Divine majeste."

name of the nation, and about the condition of the people. And what is the object of all this? For they do not appear to seek pretences of this nature in order to deceive. They are not haranguing the people, but are holding in secrecy a private consultation among themselves. Being all aware that they are guilty of the same treachery, why do they not openly bring forward their plans and opinions? It is because impiety, though gross and manifest, is almost always accompanied by hypocrisy, and thus wraps itself in indirect evasions or subterfuges, so as to deceive under the semblance of virtue. Their chief design undoubtedly was, to hold out some appearance of gravity, moderation, and prudence, so as to practice imposition upon others; but it may readily be believed that, when they pretended to have just ground for persecuting Christ, they were themselves deceived by that poor disguise. Thus hypocrites, though their conscience reproves them within, are afterwards intoxicated by vain imaginations, so that in sinning they appear to be innocent. Yet they evidently contradict themselves; for at first they confessed that Christ *did many miracles*, and now they dread the Romans, as if there had not been abundantly sufficient protection in the power of God, which showed itself to be present by those *miracles*

*The Romans will come.* The Evangelist means, that the chief object of their consultation was, to guard against imminent danger. “If *the Romans*,” they say, “knew that any innovation was made in public matters, there is reason to fear that they would send an army to ruin our nation, together with the temple and worship of God.” Now it is wicked to consult about guarding against dangers, which we cannot avoid, unless we choose to depart from the right path. Our first inquiry ought to be, What does God command and choose to be done? By this we ought to abide, whatever may be the consequence to ourselves. Those men, on the other hand, resolve that Christ shall be removed from the midst of them, that no inconvenience may arise by allowing him to proceed, as he has begun. But what if he has been sent by God? Shall they banish a prophet of God from among them, to purchase peace with *the Romans*? Such are the schemes of those who do not truly and sincerely fear God. What is right and lawful gives them no concern, for their whole attention is directed to the consequences.

But the only way to deliberate in a proper and holy manner is this. First, we ought to inquire what is the will of God. Next, we ought to follow boldly whatever he enjoins, and not to be discouraged by any fear, though we were besieged by a thousand deaths; for our actions must not be moved by any gust of wind, but must be constantly regulated by the will of God alone. He who boldly despises dangers, or, at least, rising above the fear of them, sincerely obeys God, will at length have a prosperous result; for, contrary to the expectation of all, God blesses that firmness which is founded on obedience to his word. Unbelievers, on the other hand, are so far from deriving any advantage from their precautions, that, the more timorous they are, the more numerous are the snares in which they entangle themselves.

In this narrative the form and character of our own age are strikingly delineated. They who are desirous to be regarded as prudent and cautious have continually this song in their mouth: "We must consult the public tranquillity; the reformation which we attempt is not unaccompanied by many dangers." After having raised this unfounded dislike against us, they find no better expedient than to bury Christ, for the purpose of obviating every annoyance. As if such wicked contempt of the grace of God could actually have a prosperous issue, when, in order to allay disturbances, they contrive this remedy, that the doctrine of salvation shall be abolished. On the contrary, what wicked men dread will happen; and though they may obtain what they expect, still it is a most unworthy recompense, to appease the world by offending God.

*Will take away our place.* It is uncertain whether they mean the temple or their country. They thought that their salvation depended on both; for, if the temple was destroyed, there would be no more sacrifices, or public worship of God, or calling on his name. If, therefore, they cared any thing about religion, they must have been anxious about the temple. It was of great importance, on the other hand, for upholding the condition of the Church, that they should not again be led away out of their own land. They still remembered the captivity into Babylon, which was an awfully severe vengeance of God. It was also a common proverb among them — which is frequently to be found in the Law — that it was in some respects a casting them off, if the Lord thrust them out of that land. Hence they conclude that, unless Christ be destroyed, the Church will not be safe.

**49.** *Then one of them, named Caiaphas.* It was a short consultation, for *Caiaphas* did not allow them to hesitate long. He holds out that there is but one way of purchasing safety, and that is, to slay an innocent man. To what a pitch of wickedness do men proceed, who, destitute of the fear of God, form their plans rather from the judgment of their flesh than from the word of God, and who confidently believe that they will derive advantage from that which is not permitted by the Author of every blessing. For what *Caiaphas* meant may be thus expressed. "They must provoke the wrath of God, in order that they may be happy and prosperous." Wherefore, let us learn never to separate what is useful from what is lawful, since we ought not to expect any prosperity or success but from the blessing of God, which is promised not to wicked and rebellious persons, who ask assistance from the devil, but to believers who sincerely walk *in their ways*, ([Psalm 91:11](#).) And yet there was some plausibility in this argument, for the public advantage ought always to have the preference. But — as I have already said — a people is no better protected by the unjust death of an innocent man, than the whole body of a man is protected, when you only cut his throat, or pierce his breast with a sword.

*Who was the high priest of that year.* He does not call him *the high priest of that year*, as if he meant that the office was annual, and lasted only for a year; but because it had become a gift that could be purchased with money, and was conveyed to various persons contrary



to the injunction of the Law. God did not intend that this dignity should be terminated but by the death of him who held it;<sup>330</sup> but, in consequence of trouble and confusion in public affairs, the Romans frequently changed the priests according to their fancy.

51. *Now he spoke this, not of himself.* When the Evangelist says that Caiaphas *did not speak this of himself*, he does not mean that Caiaphas — like one who was mad, or out of his senses — uttered what he did not understand; for he spoke what was his own opinion. But the Evangelist means that a higher impulse guided his tongue, because God intended that he should make known, by his mouth, something higher than what occurred to his mind. *Caiaphas*, therefore, might be said, at that time, to have two tongues; for he vomited out the wicked and cruel design of putting Christ to death, which he had conceived in his mind; but God turned his tongue to a different purpose, so that, under ambiguous words, he likewise uttered a prediction. God intended that the heavenly oracle should proceed from the high priest's seat, that the Jews might have less excuse. For, though not one person in the whole assembly had his conscience moved, yet they afterwards perceived that their insensibility was not entitled to forgiveness. Nor did the wickedness of Caiaphas prevent his tongue from being the organ of the Holy Spirit, for God looked at the *priesthood* which he had instituted rather than at the person of the man. And this was the reason which I glanced at, that a voice uttered from a lofty place might be more distinctly heard, and might have greater reverence and authority. In the same manner, God intended to bless his people by the mouth of Balaam, on whom he had bestowed the spirit of prophecy.

But it is highly ridiculous in the Papists to infer from this that we ought to reckon as an oracle whatever the Roman *high priest* may think fit to pronounce. First, granting what is false, that every man who is a *high priest* is also a prophet, still they will be under the necessity of proving that the Roman *high priest* is appointed by the command of God; for the *priesthood* was abolished by the coming of one man, who is Christ, and we no where read that it was afterwards enjoined by God that any one man should be the ruler of the whole Church. Granting to them, in the second place, that the power and title of *high priest* was conveyed to the Bishop of Rome, we must see of what advantage it was to the priests that they accepted the prediction of *Caiaphas*. In order to concur in his opinion, they conspire to put Christ to death. But far from us be that kind of obedience which drives us to horrid apostacy by denying the Son of God. With the same voice Caiaphas blasphemes and also prophesies. They who follow his suggestion despise the *prophecy*, and adopt the blasphemy. We ought to guard against the same thing happening to us, if we listen to the *Caiaphas* of Rome; for otherwise the comparison would be defective. Besides, I ask, Must we conclude that, because *Caiaphas* once *prophesied*, every word uttered by the *high priest* is always a *prophecy*? But soon afterwards Caiaphas condemned as *blasphemy* ([Matthew 26:65](#)) the most important

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330 “Par la mort de celui qui l'avolt.”

article of our faith. Hence we conclude, that what the Evangelist now relates was an extraordinary occurrence, and that it would be foolish to adduce it as an example.

*That Jesus would die.* First, the Evangelist shows that the whole of our salvation consists in this, that Christ should *assemble us into one*; for in this way he reconciles us to the Father, *in whom is the fountain of life*, ([Psalm 36:9](#).) Hence, also, we infer, that the human race is scattered and estranged from God, until the children of God are assembled under Christ their Head. Thus, the communion of saints is a preparation for eternal life, because all whom Christ does not gather to the Father remain in death, as we shall see again under the seventeenth chapter. For the same reason Paul also teaches that Christ was sent, in order

that he might gather together all things which are in heaven and in earth,  
([Ephesians 1:10](#).)

Wherefore, that we may enjoy the salvation brought by Christ, discord must be removed, and we must be made one with God and with angels, and among ourselves. The cause and pledge of this unity was the death of Christ, by which he drew all things to himself; but we are daily *gathered* by the Gospel into the fold of Christ.

**52.** *And not for that nation only.* The Evangelist means that the reconciliation effected by Christ is also extended to the Gentiles. But how comes it that they who, in consequence of being wretchedly scattered and wandering, became the enemies of God, are here called *the children of God*? I answer, as has been already said, God had in his breast *children*, who in themselves were wandering and lost sheep, or rather who were the farthest possible from being sheep, but, on the contrary, were wolves and wild beasts. It is therefore by election that he reckons as *the children of God*, even before they are called, those who at length begin to be manifested by faith both to themselves and to others.

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### John 11:53-57

53. From that day, therefore, they consulted to put him to death. 54. Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but retired to a country near the wilderness, into a city which is called Ephraim, and there dwelt with his disciples. 55. Now the passover of the Jews was at hand, and many of that country went up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. 56. They therefore sought Jesus, and said among themselves, while they stood in the temple, What think you? will he not come to the feast? 57. Now the chief priests<sup>331</sup> and Pharisees had issued an order, that if any one knew where he was, he would show it, that they might seize him.

53. *They consulted to put him to death.* The Evangelist relates that Christ again fled, knowing that his enemies sought him with so great rage. Yet let us remember that he did not fly in order to withdraw from his Father's calling; for he had no other intention than to present himself to undergo voluntary death at the time which God had appointed. This *consultation*, which the Evangelist mentions, related not so much to slaying Christ as to find out some method of crushing him. They had already determined to put him to death; it only remained to advise in what way they could carry their resolution into effect.

54. *Which is called Ephraim.* As to the name of the town which is mentioned here, I think that either it was pronounced at that time in a corrupted manner, or it was entirely new. For we know how greatly the language was changed after the captivity into Babylon, and likewise how different was the appearance of the country; so that we need not be surprised that some places are mentioned, which in ancient times were altogether unknown.

*And there he dwelt with his disciples.* By calling them *disciples of Christ*, he means not those who had received his doctrine, but those who were his constant companions, and who were wont to live under the same roof.

55. *Many from that country went up to Jerusalem.* It was not absolutely enjoined that they should *purify themselves before sacrificing the passover*; and, therefore, the Evangelist does not say that *all* came, but *many*. No unclean person, indeed, was permitted to eat; but I say that this sanctification was undertaken voluntarily and from their own inclination, so that others were not forbidden to eat, though they had not been prepared by such a ceremony before the day of the feast.

56. *They therefore sought Jesus.* The design of the Evangelist is, to show how extensively the fame of Christ was diffused through the whole of Judea; for they who assemble in the temple, from whatever quarter they come, are eager to seek Christ, and are employed in holding conversations among themselves concerning him. It is true that they *seek* him after

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331 "Les principaux sacrificateurs."

a human fashion, but yet, in *seeking* him, they discover that it is the tyranny of the priests which prevents him from appearing openly.

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