

A WARNING AGAINST THE IDOLATRY OF THE LAST TIMES

*and An Instruction Touching
Religious or Divine Worship*

LITTLE
CHILDREN
KEEP
YOURSELVES
FROM
IDOLS



WILLIAM PERKINS

MODERNIZED

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A Warning Against the Idolatry of the Last Times

Dedication to the Right Honorable Lord Henry, Earl of Kent, Lord of Hastings, Weisford, and Ruthyn

Right Honorable,

Great indeed has been the mercy of God toward this our English nation. Along with peace and protection, He has blessed us with the treasure of His gospel—bestowed upon us now for more than forty years under the gracious rule of our Queen. It is an inexpressible benefit; and I believe England has never before enjoyed its equal.

For this great mercy, we owe to God all the thankfulness that heart can conceive or tongue can speak. Our gratitude must show itself in the fruit of obedience to the gospel; and obedience consists in turning wholly to God from every evil way, in believing on Christ, and in walking in the newness of a godly life.

But, alas, in regard to the greater part, we are a nation most unthankful, yielding little obedience to the gospel of life. Were the same blessings that have been poured out upon England given to Barbary, or Turkey, or the Americas, they might have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes, and turned to God more earnestly than we have done. For this reason, we have deserved that God should remove His gospel from us and give it to a people who will bear its fruit. To prevent this righteous judgment, it is our urgent duty to repent of our unthankfulness, to embrace the gospel more heartily than before, and to walk worthy of it in holiness of life.

To advance this good work, I have written this small Treatise concerning Idols and the true worship of God. For this is the right practice of the gospel—to cast away every kind of idol and to sanctify the Lord in our hearts, serving Him in mind and spirit, with a pure heart, a good conscience, and an unspotted life.

Having completed this Treatise, I now present it to Your Lordship and venture to publish it under your name. I do so, first, because God has made you honorable not only by civil dignity but also by a steadfast love and obedience to the gospel of Christ. Second, it is my desire to show some small token of gratitude for undeserved favor. Thus I take my leave, praying that God would establish the heart of Your Lordship, and of all His people, blameless in holiness before Him—our Father—at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Your Lordship's in all duty to command,
W. Perkins

To the Reader

If anyone asks why I have written and published this Treatise on Idolatry—now in the clear light of the gospel and within a church where idolatry is condemned to the pit of hell—let them understand that I do so for several reasons.

First, to expose and convict the Church of Rome of manifest idolatry, and thereby to show that those are mistaken who imagine Protestants and Papists differ only in outward matters and not in the very substance of religion.

Second, to admonish our countrymen who still adhere to Rome (if they will be pleased to read and consider what I have written) that they ought rather to separate from the Church of Rome, for she is both a maintainer and a worshiper of idols.

Third, to awaken in the hearts of our fellow Englishmen a deeper detestation and abhorrence of the Romish religion. For even if it had no other error, the very crime of inexcusable idolatry with which it stands justly charged is enough to move all who care for their salvation to abhor it utterly.

Lastly, I write to instruct the ignorant multitude concerning the true worship of God. For remnants of popery still cling to the minds of many, who think that to serve God is merely to deal honestly with men and to mutter a few words morning and evening—whether at home or in the church—without any true understanding.

Part I

The Nature and Corruption of Worship

Keep Yourselves from Idols

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” - 1 John 5:21

The purpose and scope of the apostle in this epistle is to provide clear marks and evidences by which men may know whether they are the children of God. Having done this from the beginning of the letter to its close, he answers, near the end of this chapter (verse 18), a hidden objection that might arise: *“He that is a child of God may fall away from God, commit a sin unto death, and thus lose his assurance. Therefore, there is no lasting comfort in knowing one’s adoption—only for the present time.”*

To this the apostle responds negatively in verses 18 through 20. His answer in substance is this: the one who is born of God is so preserved by grace that Satan cannot draw him into the sin that leads to death. And in the final verse of the chapter, John sets forth a rule by which believers may keep themselves from such danger: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”* That is, hold fast to the true and spiritual worship of God, and therefore avoid everything that might turn your hearts away from Him—especially beware of idols.

What an Idol Is

In this exhortation I observe two things: first, the command itself, “*Keep yourselves from idols,*” and second, the reason implied in the word “*children.*” That the true sense of the commandment may appear more plainly, I will pause for a moment to explain, first, what is meant by *idols*; and second, how we are to keep ourselves from them.

The word *idol* generally and properly means the same as *image*—that is, a likeness or resemblance of some thing, whether good or evil. For what *imago* is in Latin, *eidolon* is in Greek. Tertullian tells us that *idol* signifies a “form” or “little form,” and the Latin translators did not always distinguish between *image* and *idol*.

Yet, in a narrower and more useful sense, the word *idols* is used for any image erected to represent either a false god or the true God. That idols are images of false gods all men grant; but that they may also be images of the true God is the question. This, however, can be clearly shown.

The golden calf made by the Israelites was an idol, as Stephen calls it in Acts 7:41, and it was expressly an image of Jehovah. For after the calf was made, Aaron proclaimed a solemn feast and said, “*Tomorrow shall be a holy day unto Jehovah*” (Exodus 32:5). What the Israelites did in this case was no doubt learned from what they had often seen in Egypt; for the Egyptians represented and worshiped God in the shapes of wild and tame beasts, as Strabo the geographer plainly records. “The images used in religion,” he says, “were nothing else but idols; and many of them indeed were images of the true God.” Paul likewise bears witness to this when he says, “*They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to beasts*” (Romans 1:23).

Furthermore, idols sometimes signify false gods themselves: “*The gods of the people are idols*” (1 Chronicles 16:26). Thus Rachel is said to have stolen *the idols* of her father (Genesis 31:19, 30). And Paul makes a clear opposition between *an idol* and *the true God* (1 Corinthians 8:4). Yet false gods are not idols in the strict sense, but only by a figure of speech. For just as images made for religious use draw the heart away from the true God, so do false gods; and therefore they too are rightly called idols.

Thus, an idol is anything set up to be worshiped—either **in the place of God**, as with profane images, or **as God Himself**, as with false gods.

The Nature of an Idol

The general property of all idols is that they are *nothing in the world*, as Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 8:4. They are called nothing because they contain nothing of the divine nature or power—neither in their being nor in their efficacy. Paul proves this by reasoning: “*An idol is nothing in the world, for to us there is but one God*” (verses 4 and 6).

Moreover, idols are nothing even in regard to representation. Sometimes an idol is nothing at all—mere material without meaning. At other times, it pretends to represent God but instead depicts what is not God; or it represents the true God in a false and distorted manner—and in that sense also, it represents nothing.

Three Kinds of Idols

The kinds and forms of idolatry must likewise be considered—especially those that have arisen since the days of the apostles. For there is no question that the apostle foresaw how the pure religion of the gospel would be corrupted by idolatry, which is what moved him to say, “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*”

To understand the various kinds of idols, we must first ask: in how many ways may a person create an idol for himself? Scripture and experience teach us there are three.

1. God Misconceived

The first kind of idol is a **misconceived God or Christ**.

A man makes such an idol when he conceives of God differently than God has revealed Himself in His Word. We are to think of God only as He has made Himself known; if we imagine Him otherwise, we do not conceive of God at all but only a fiction—an idol of our own mind. Augustine, commenting on Joshua’s words, “*Put away the strange gods from among you,*” writes: “The holy prophet Joshua saw in their hearts thoughts of God unworthy of Him, and he commanded them to cast those thoughts away. For whoever imagines God to be what He is not, carries within his heart a strange and false god.”

Two clear examples illustrate this kind.

First, when men conceive of the true God apart from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—or apart from Christ our Redeemer, who is both God and man. To abstract the divine nature from the persons of the Trinity is to turn God into an idol. The Ephesians before their conversion worshiped the Maker of heaven and earth, and so did the Galatians; yet Paul says of the former that they were “*without God*” (Ephesians 2:12), and of the latter that they “*served them which by nature are not gods*” (Galatians 4:8). Why? Because they worshiped God apart from Christ, for, as John writes, “*He that denies the Son*

has not the Father” (1 John 2:23). The unity of the divine essence is to be adored only within the Trinity of Persons.

Here, then, is the idol-god of many nations: of the Turks, of the Jews, and even of many who bear the name of Christians, who—through ignorance—worship nothing more than an *absolute God*, that is, God conceived without reference to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit. Indeed, multitudes everywhere set up in their hearts a god of all mercy and no justice, content with the dim light of nature and fashioning a deity according to their own desires and affections. In doing so, they erect idols within their own souls and commit a most secret and spiritual idolatry that the world cannot perceive.

Second, Christ Jesus Himself is often falsely conceived—imagined far otherwise than He has revealed Himself in His Word. Yet He, in one person, is perfect God and perfect man, our only Redeemer, all-sufficient in Himself, and therefore our complete King, Priest, and Prophet, without partner or fellow in the work of salvation. Whoever conceives of Him otherwise turns Him into an idol—a forged Christ of his own making.

This the so-called Catholic religion of the Council of Trent has done. It presents Christ indeed, yet a poor, disguised, and deformed Christ. It strips Him of His manhood and diminishes His offices.

He is robbed of His true humanity by the doctrine of His bodily presence in the sacrament. For if the bread is truly changed into Christ’s body, then that body must be composed not only of the Virgin’s substance but also of the substance of bread—indeed, it must be a monstrous body. Being complete in size and form, and yet supposed to be contained within the small compass of a wafer, it would be as if a solid body of many feet were enclosed within one only a few inches wide.

Moreover, if Christ’s body is physically present in the bread and in the hand of the receiver, then forgiveness of sins must be sought

from that which we hold in our hands and put into our mouths. But remission of sin must be sought from God for Christ's sake, especially in the use of the Lord's Supper. Thus communicants would have to say in prayer: *"O heavenly Father, be merciful to me for this, Your own Son, whom I now hold bodily in my hand and receive with my mouth."*

This, indeed, is the oblation of the popish mass, wherein the priest imagines that he holds and carries Christ bodily in his hands and there offers Him to the Father to obtain pardon for his own sins and for others—for the sake of Him whom he holds. This is horrible and detestable idolatry. It were better to suffer many deaths than to partake in it even once. For the Word of God teaches us to look for our salvation from Christ, who became man and now appears at the right hand of His Father in heaven—not from one whom we pretend to hold and carry in our hands.

The Degradation of Christ's Offices

The same Romish doctrine also degrades Christ in His **threefold office** of Priest, King, and Prophet.

(1) His Priesthood.

It diminishes His priestly work in five ways:

1. By teaching that Christ is daily offered in the mass, truly and really, for the sins of the living and the dead. This either continues His sacrifice, as if it were unfinished on the cross, or repeats it. If continued, it was not accomplished at Calvary; if repeated, it was imperfect. And if imperfect, it could not be the sacrifice of a Redeemer.
2. By the doctrine of **human satisfaction**—that our own sufferings can, in part, satisfy for sin's temporal punishment

along with Christ's satisfaction for its eternal guilt. But this makes His work defective, as though needing our supplement. If I pay my creditor myself, my friend does not pay for me; and insofar as I satisfy for myself, I redeem myself.

3. By the doctrine of the **merit of works**, which nullifies the redemption wrought by Christ. For if Christ merited by His passion that we might also merit eternal life by our deeds, then He is not a full and perfect Savior, but merely the chief cause or instrument of God to make us our own saviors.
4. By the teaching of **venial sin**—that some sins are so slight that we may satisfy for them ourselves. If this were true, Christ need not have died to redeem us from *all* sin.
5. By the doctrine of the **intercession of saints**, who, according to Rome, intercede not only by entreaty but by merit—indeed, by command. Thus the Virgin Mary is said to do more than Christ Himself can do.

(2) His Kingship.

The same religion strips Christ of His royal dignity by granting to the pope two regal powers belonging to Christ alone:

1. The authority to forgive sins fully and properly—a power that belongs to God only.
2. The authority to make laws that bind the consciences of all within the church as truly as the laws of God—though Scripture declares there is but one Lawgiver who can save and destroy the soul.

(3) His Prophetic Office.

It deprives Him of His prophetic office in two ways:

1. By giving the pope supreme and infallible authority to determine, in his consistory or in general councils, all

controversies of faith and conduct—a power inseparably tied to the person of Christ, who, in and through His written Word, determines all matters of salvation infallibly and sufficiently for the satisfaction of every humble heart and the settling of every conscience.

2. By **adding to and taking from** the doctrine Christ has left to His church, especially that contained in the New Testament, through a heap of human traditions—such as the law of enforced celibacy and the denial of the cup to the laity in the Lord’s Supper.

It May Be Alleged...

It may perhaps be alleged that the religion which calls itself *Catholic* maintains, as we do, the unity of the Godhead, the Trinity of persons, the distinction of natures in Christ, the personal union, and the offices of the Mediator. I answer: in words it does so, but in practice—and by the unavoidable consequence of its doctrines—it abolishes Christ, as I have already shown.

Papists profess Him to be *our Lord*, but with this reservation: that *the Servant of Servants*—that is, the pope—may alter and change His precepts, possessing such power that he may be judged by none, and can open or shut heaven to whom he pleases. They confess Him to be *Jesus our Savior*, yet a Savior only in part, as one who gives us grace so that by our own merits we may save ourselves, borrowing further help, if need be, from martyrs and saints. They confess that He was *crucified, dead, and buried for us*, yet add that, though the guilt of sin be pardoned, we must still satisfy for a portion of the punishment, either in this world or in purgatory.

They confess that *He sits at the right hand of God the Father* to make intercession for us; and yet they teach that His mother is *the Queen of Heaven*, possessing authority to command her Son. What

kind of Christ is this—who must share the very acts of our redemption with others as His partners and fellows?

For this cause we reject that religion: it turns our only and perfect Redeemer into a feigned Christ of man's own devising. Some may object that false opinions about Christ do not immediately make Him an idol. But I answer with Jerome: *“Even to this day an idol is set up in the house of God—or in the hearts of believers—when a new doctrine is invented.”* Again, he says, *“A false opinion is an idol of falsehood.”*

2. God Worshiped Amiss

The second way of erecting an idol is when God is worshiped otherwise, or by other means, than He has revealed in His Word. For when men devise their own forms of worship, they also devise a new god to suit them.

Augustine says of the Gentiles that they refused to worship the God of the Hebrews because, *“if they had worshiped Him otherwise than He commanded, they would not have worshiped Him at all, but only what they had imagined.”* The Samaritans worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they expected the coming of the Messiah. Yet Christ said to them, *“You worship what you do not know”* (John 4:22), because they worshiped the true God by a worship of human invention.

The Lord said to the Israelites, *“You shall call Me no more Baal”* (Hosea 2:16), signifying that since they had sometimes worshiped Him with the same rites, images, and names by which the heathen served Baal, they had in truth made Him as one of their idols. The next verse confirms this meaning: *“For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth”* (v. 17). And when the Jews in Jeremiah 2:23 denied that they worshiped Baal, their denial must have meant

only this—that they intended to worship God *through* the idols of Baal.

Again, Saint John writes, “*If that which you have heard from the beginning abides in you, you also shall continue in the Father and the Son*” (1 John 2:24). From this it follows that those who do not abide in the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, but set up another form of worship, do not continue in the Father and the Son.

God must be worshiped according to His own nature—heavenly, divine, and spiritual. All devised worship, being framed according to man’s own disposition, is foolish, carnal, and vain. As Christ said, “*In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9). And as the worship is, so is the god that is worshiped. Therefore, when God is worshiped not according to His own will but according to the pleasure of man, the true God is not worshiped at all; rather, a god of man’s imagination is set up in His place.

One clear example will suffice: whenever God is represented or worshiped by an image of human invention, a double idol is made—the image that represents, and the supposed deity represented, who by this means is turned into an idol.

A Devised Image of God Is an Idol

That any image made to resemble and represent God is an idol may be proved thus:

The image that Micah made was a plain idol, for it is called *teraphim*, which all translators render *idols* (Judges 17:5). Yet it was meant to be an image of Jehovah (v. 3). For before it was made, the silver from which it was formed had been dedicated to God; and afterward, when Micah obtained a priest to offer sacrifice before it, his mother said, “*Now I know that Jehovah will be good to me*” (v. 13).

Likewise, the two golden calves set up in Dan and Bethel by Jeroboam were idols in the judgment of all, yet they were nothing else than images intended to represent the true God of Israel. Their worship is even called *“the fear of Jehovah”* (2 Kings 17:28). Jehu never departed from the sin of Jeroboam (2 Kings 10:31) and was therefore a defender of the golden calves. Yet he did not imagine them to be other gods, but meant to worship the Lord of hosts *in and through* them. When he went to destroy the images and priests of Baal, he said, *“Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts.”*

God Represented or Worshiped by an Image Is an Idol

The graven images and likenesses forbidden in the Second Commandment are nothing other than idols—and they include not only images of false gods but also images made to represent the true God. Moses, expounding this commandment, said: *“Take good heed to yourselves...that you do not corrupt yourselves, nor make a carved image, the likeness of any figure”* (Deuteronomy 4:15–16). His reason is given in verse 15: *“You saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire,”* meaning, you saw no image of the true God, but only heard His voice. Therefore, you are to make no image of God to represent Him or His presence.

A notable testimony to this truth comes from the heathen writer Strabo. He records that *“Moses taught that the Egyptians were wrong in representing God in the forms of beasts, and that the Libyans and Greeks erred likewise in portraying Him in human shape. For God is that being alone which contains us, the earth, and the sea—what we call heaven and the world and the nature of all things. Who, being in his right mind, would dare to fashion an image of Him like anything about us? We must banish all image-making, build a temple worthy of Him, and worship Him without*

any form.” A little later Strabo adds that “the Jews are the true worshipers of God.”

Origen likewise writes against Celsus that angels are not to be adored, and that both Jews and Christians are restrained by their religion from worshiping God in temples, altars, or images, because the law says, “*You shall have no other gods before Me,*” and again, “*You shall not make for yourself any carved image.*”

From all this it follows that to fashion or set up an image with intent to represent or worship God by it is to erect an idol, even if it be not further abused in open idolatry.

Christ Worshiped in a Crucifix Is an Idol

It may be objected that we may lawfully make an image of Christ and that such an image is no idol. I answer: it is not unlawful to make or to possess an image of Christ, provided two cautions are kept. First, the image must represent only His manhood. Second, it must be kept entirely outside the use of religion. For if it is made to represent the whole Christ—God and man—or if it is used as an instrument or sign by which, and before which, men worship Christ Himself, then, by the doctrine already laid down, it is plainly an idol.

Friends of images further argue in this way: “Though we may not set up whatever images we please to God, yet we may represent Him in those forms and shapes in which He has been pleased to manifest Himself to men—as in the form of a man, or as a dove,” and so on. I answer, first, that the forms in which the Son and the Holy Ghost appeared were not their images but only sensible signs and pledges of their presence—signs for the time being, not perpetually; therefore they are neither signs nor images of God’s presence now. Hence when the history of Scripture is painted or pictured (as in some of

our Bibles), it does not depict images of God; it only portrays those visible appearances which at some time served as signs of His presence.

Second, God's commandment generally forbids images, without excepting even those shapes in which He formerly testified His presence. Where the prohibition of God stands against us, it is vain to devise shifts or excuses; there is no exception to God's command.

Third, it is false reasoning to suppose that whatever God does, we may lawfully imitate. We must reason cautiously from God's example when we would justify our own actions.

Fourth, God will not be adored as idols are adored: *"You shall not do so to the Lord your God."*

Fifth, God has power to represent Himself by what signs He wills; no creature has such power, nor has He given us authority to represent Him in this or that form.

Sixth, when God represents Himself in visible forms, He can, at His pleasure, cut off all occasions of idolatry; men cannot do this, as common experience shows. Therefore, in so doing they tempt God and expose themselves to the danger of idolatry.

Lastly, images set up to God diminish and deface His majesty, breed absurd thoughts of Him in the minds of men, and suit His endless glory no more than the picture of an ape or a fool suits the dignity of an emperor.

“Religious Images Are Only Condemned if Taken as Gods”?

A third objection is raised: Scripture does not simply condemn religious images, but only because Jews and Gentiles held them to be

their gods; and this opinion is refuted by Paul when he says, “*They are not gods which are made with hands*” (Acts 19:26). I answer: it was not the opinion of the Jews, nor of the wisest Gentiles, that carved images were, in themselves, their gods; the light of nature taught them otherwise. That they distinguished between their gods and the images of those gods is evident from the very distinction of the First and Second Commandments. In the First, false or strange gods are forbidden; in the Second, images are condemned—whether images of Jehovah or of false gods. If images were forbidden only because they were reputed and worshiped as gods, then the First and Second Commandments—anciently distinguished—would become one and the same.

Images are indeed often called “gods” in Scripture, but for two reasons. First, because in man’s intention they bear a relation to God and are set to represent Him; thus, by a figure of speech, they borrow His name—just as a painted man is called a “man,” or he who plays a king is called a “king.” Second, they are called “gods” because men, though not in formal judgment, yet in practice make them their gods by giving them religious worship. For this reason Paul says, “*They are not gods which are made with hands,*” to draw the Ephesians, by force of consequence, away from offering any worship to the image of Diana.

God Represented or Worshiped by an Image Becomes an Idol

The second point to be established is that when God is represented or worshiped in, at, or before an image, He is thereby transformed—by men’s abuse—into an idol. Habakkuk calls images “*teachers of lies*” (Habakkuk 2:18) because, as soon as God is represented by an image, His glory is obscured and He is conceived as a bodily, visible, circumscribed, finite majesty. When the Israelites intended to

worship God in the golden calf, the psalmist says they “*changed their glory into the likeness of an ox that eats grass*” (Psalm 106:20).

Second, we may not bind the presence of God, the working of His Spirit, or His hearing of our prayers to anything to which He has not bound Himself by commandment or promise, or both. God has nowhere bound Himself to be present at images, or to hear us when we call upon Him at them or before them. Hence, when men present themselves before images to worship God, they do not worship God but either a feigned god—who can and will be present at images—or else the images themselves. For God is worshiped by us only when He is pleased to accept our worship; and He accepts it only when it is according to His will.

Patrons of images protest here that they do not intend to worship the images themselves, nor any false god, but only the true God, Maker of heaven and earth. I answer, first, that this was precisely the excuse of the wiser heathen (as will appear), and it did not excuse them from idolatry. Second, man’s intention does not make God’s worship—God’s will does. And it is not His will to accept worship offered to Him by images; therefore He is not worshiped, but something else is set in His place.

The Israelites truly intended (as has been shown) to worship the God of their fathers by the golden calf; and Jeroboam intended the same by the calves in Dan and Bethel. They did not mean to give their service to the molten images. Yet the Holy Spirit has judged that “*they worshiped the molten image*” (Psalm 106:19), and that “*Jeroboam offered sacrifices to the calves*” (1 Kings 12:32). Likewise the Gentiles are said to “*sacrifice to devils*” (1 Corinthians 10:20), though some of them intended to offer sacrifice to God through images. The reason is that God did not accept such service. In truth, devils were served—though the Gentiles thought otherwise; for they supposed their images to be the receptacles of celestial powers and good angels, whereas Paul declares they were demons, wicked spirits. Again, when God is adored by devised images, the worshipers

are said to “*forget God*” (Psalm 106:13), even while they think they remember Him; for they forget not only His commandment, but the true knowledge of God, as soon as they represent Him by an image—then they conceive Him other than He is.

A Clear View of Rome’s Idolatry

From what has been shown on evident grounds from God’s Word, we may take a clear view of the idolatry of the so-called Catholic Church of Rome. It teaches men to worship God and Christ in and before images—especially crucifixes—which, in truth, is nothing but the idolatry already described.

Further, the Roman Church adores Christ in, at, and before a piece of bread in the Eucharist, and instructs men to do the same. But to direct our adoration to the bread, or to the place where the bread is, is nothing less than idolatry. First, it is manifest that adoration is not bound—by any commandment or promise of God—either to the bread itself, or to the form of bread, or to the place of the bread. And it is a most idolatrous practice to bind adoration to any particular thing or place: that is, to determine that God must be adored and will hear us in some set place where He has not expressly commanded us to worship Him or promised to hear us.

Again, under the New Testament, after Christ’s ascension, spiritual worship alone is required, and all worship tied to any certain thing or place on earth is abolished and forbidden. Christ Himself teaches: “*The hour is coming, and now is, when you shall neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father*” (John 4:21–22). By a figure of speech (synecdoche) He removes every earthly circumstance of place to which God’s worship might be tied—including bread and wine in the Supper, the altar, or the minister’s hand. This is made plain by the contrast that follows: “*But in spirit and truth.*”

If it be said, “The Jews worshiped God at and before the ark,” I answer: they did so, and for that they had both commandment and promise. Therefore those who worshiped God at the ark and temple in Jerusalem were counted true worshipers. But those who worshiped the same God at Dan and Bethel before the golden calves—or in the temple at Samaria—without any warrant from God, were regarded as idolaters (though not all in the same degree), as if they had worshiped the very gold of which the calves were made. For it is idolatry to direct the worship of God, or any part of it, to any particular place or creature without God’s appointment.

Now the Church of Rome directs its worship to God in, at, and before crucifixes, and before the bread in the sacrament, having no warrant—neither commandment nor promise—for such practice. If they have one, let them show it. If not, they must know that theirs is a devised worship, and the god they adore is a devised god: a god who will be present and will hear them especially in or at images. Their intention to worship the true Christ avails nothing unless they worship Him according to His own will.

Baal in Israel was sometimes served as the true God, if we regard the intention of the worshipers; yet for all that, Baal remained an idol—an empty name. So also here: seeing that there is no Christ who will be corporally present and lie hidden under the form of bread, it is not the true Christ—who is now corporally in heaven—that is worshiped, but a mere figment of the human mind.

Furthermore, on the former ground it follows that not only false gods but also angels and departed saints, when they are worshiped in, at, or before their images, are likewise turned into idols. For if God, when worshiped thus, is turned into an idol by men’s abuse, then much more they—since we have no more warrant to worship them in this manner than to worship God Himself so.

The Third Kind: What Belongs to God Given to Creatures

The third and last way by which idols are erected is when what belongs to God by right is given to His creatures. Whatever receives the glory due to God is thereby made another god. The reason is plain. When Rachel said, “Give me children, or I die,” Jacob answered, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (Genesis 30:1–2). When the king of Syria wrote to the king of Israel asking that Naaman be cured of leprosy, the king tore his clothes and cried, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive?” (2 Kings 5:7). And the Lord says, “I am Jehovah; that is my name; my glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to carved images” (Isaiah 42:8). Now, what is proper to God is given to creatures in three ways.

1) Divinity Ascribed to Creatures

First, when the Godhead, divinity, or divine nature is ascribed to anything that is not by nature God, it is made a false or strange god. Such false gods are chiefly of two sorts: the gods of the Gentiles, and the Roman “gods” of our time. To grasp something of the heathen gods, consider three points: their kinds, what was meant by them, and what images they bore.

Kinds. Heathen gods were of two ranks—superior and inferior. Among the superior were Baal, the god of the Chaldeans and Assyrians (Numbers 22:41; Psalm 106:28; Judges 8–9); Ashtoreth, the god of the Sidonians (Judges 2:13; 1 Kings 11:7); Moloch or Milcom, the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:5); Chemosh, the god of Moab (Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7); Rimmon, the god of Syria (2 Kings 5); Dagon, the god of the Philistines (Judges 16; 1 Samuel 5); and Remphan, mentioned by Stephen and called Chiun by Amos (Acts 7:43; Amos 5:26). Scripture names others as well. The inferior

gods were men—living or dead—whom nations deified. The Assyrians and Romans sometimes made their kings “gods” even while they lived. King Ahasuerus exalted Haman (Esther 3:2). This exaltation was no mere civil preferment but a kind of divine state, a petty godship; for Mordecai refused to do him reverence precisely because he was a Jew and could not in conscience give such honor (cf. the Greek additions to Esther 13:14: “I would not prefer the honor of a man above the glory of God, nor worship any but you, O Lord”). Likewise, the heathen Conon refused to adore King Artaxerxes after the Persian fashion. And the people of Lystra, seeing Paul and Barnabas, cried, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men,” and would have offered sacrifice to them (Acts 14:11–13).

Meaning. As to what these gods signified: the principal name *Baal* often denotes Jupiter—the host of heaven—yet not always, for the Holy Spirit distinguishes Baal from sun, moon, stars, and the heavenly host (2 Kings 23:5; 2 Chronicles 33:3). By conjecture, Baal sometimes signifies Saturn—that is, Time—whom the heathen worshiped as a special god. Elijah’s taunt, “He is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he sleeps” (1 Kings 18:27), aptly fits Saturn as he was commonly portrayed: devouring his children (all things he brings forth), with four wings—two spread and two folded—to show that though he seems to stand, he is ever in swift motion; with four eyes—two open and two shut—to indicate that he is always waking and always sleeping, even at noon. Ancient writers sometimes call Baal (or Bel) Saturn. Moloch is often taken as Jupiter or Saturn; Remphan as Saturn or Lucifer (the morning star). The rest signify the world, nature, time, fortune, fate, the sun, moon, stars, or souls—often the souls of men departed—or some unknown deity.

Images. As for their images: Baal had many, one notably in the form of a fly—hence *Beelzebub*, “lord of flies,” as if he were chief among them (Nazianzen says a fly was the god of Ekron). Ashtoreth, the Sidonian deity, was worshiped in the forms of sheep, as the name hints. Dagon took the form of a fish. Diana was honored by silver

shrines, stamped with the image of a temple and her figure. When the Assyrians settled in Samaria, they brought their gods with them—Succoth-Benoth, Nergal, Ashima, Nibhaz, Tartak, Adrammelech, and Anammelech (2 Kings 17:30)—names that, in the Syrian tongue, were said to be drawn from animals: cocks, hens, kids, dogs, asses, horses, mules, peacocks, and the like.

Thus Scripture gives us a partial catalog of heathen gods. Here we should acknowledge God's mercy to us: He has not left us to our own ways as He did the Gentiles in former ages—"without God and without Christ"—but has revealed Himself and His will to us, choosing us to be His own people. For such mercy let us be thankful and show it by cleaving to Him alone with our hearts.

The Virgin Mary Made a Goddess

The Roman false gods are two. The first is the Virgin Mary, whom those who call themselves Catholic in our time, of a saint make a goddess. They call her "Queen of Heaven," "Queen of the World," "Our Lady, the Mother of Grace and Mercy." She is esteemed a universal advocate for the whole world, with other mediators to her as to a queen. She has eight solemn feasts for her honor and invocation; besides these, scarcely a day passes without her being invoked in hymns or in the mass. They ascribe to her authority to command and control her Son in heaven, saying, "Ask the Father; command the Son—and command Him by a mother's right," and again, "Cause Him to receive our prayers." This does not merely make her a goddess; it places her above God Himself. Some say such language is metaphor or prosopopoeia. But it cannot be so, for the ground of these speeches—a *mother's right*—is literally ascribed to Mary; therefore the act of "commanding" is, without figure, properly ascribed to her.

We are indebted to Tursellinus the Jesuit for his five books on *Our Lady of Loreto*; from these two things are evident. First, she is made a goddess, being worshiped with the same worship given to God. In

dangers and extremities, men straightway offer prayers and vows to her. Second, on pilgrimages, when they come near Loreto and behold the place of her image from afar, they fall down and worship; some go bareheaded even in the depth of winter until they reach her temple, at whose doors they fall down again. When they stand before her image, all—yes, the greatest persons—humble themselves in the lowliest manner, kneeling upon the bare ground among the common crowd. She has a choir of boys to sing her praises. She is honored with two feasts—her conception and her nativity—one in spring and one in autumn; the solemnity of each lasts three months, and at every feast some two hundred thousand people resort to her. She is worshiped with temple, altar, and lavish offerings; few come empty-handed. The furnishings for her image are gold, silver, pearls, precious stones, silk—everything rare and costly.

The second point is this: what is worshiped under the name of *Our Lady of Loreto* is neither God nor saint, but the devil himself. First, her covetousness appears insatiable; she sets no measure to the taking of gifts, whereas God and His true servants do the contrary (Exodus 36:5). Second, her miracles are as many as those recorded of Christ and His apostles, yet of a kind that may be achieved by satanic operation. The devil knows the secrets of nature beyond all men and thus can perform things that seem miraculous—though they are not. He is the most subtle “physician,” able to cure diseases that appear incurable to men; yet he cannot give sight to those born blind nor raise the dead. Accordingly, among all her miracles, none such are found. Third, her apparitions and wonders serve to erect, establish, and maintain worship of herself, whereas the true saints of God seek not their own honor but God’s (Revelation 19:10). Fourth, when absolute forms of prayer are made to the Virgin for temporal help or deliverance, there is neither commandment nor promise for such petitions—yet these prayers are often “answered.” Fifth, our Savior, the King of heaven and earth, never intermeddled with the execution of civil justice in private cases; yet this Lady of Loreto is reported to break the halter at executions and preserve the lives of the hanged

until they are taken down. She is said to hear the prayers of infidels: the Turkish pasha, for instance, was cured of an abscess in his breast.

The Pope Made a God

The second false god is the bishop of Rome who, though he is not commonly called a god, is nevertheless made one. First, he assumes to himself the titles of God and allows himself to be called *god* in his own law, where the tenor of a certain canon is to this effect: “He who is God may be judged by none.” The syllogism then runs: *The pope is God*—for so, they say, Emperor Constantine called him—*therefore he may be judged by none*. And note: these words are found not only in the old copies of canon law, but also in the corrected edition of Gregory XIII. Again, he suffers himself to be styled the *doctor and pastor of the catholic church* and *the spouse of the church*; indeed, he expressly calls the catholic church *his own spouse*—an honor proper to Christ, for it would have sufficed him to be a *friend of the Bridegroom*. Bernard even says of him that he is “by anointing, Christ.”

Second, the pope claims for himself infinite power, applying to his office the words of Matthew, “*All power is given to me in heaven and in earth*.” Thus the book of pontifical ceremonies says: “This pontifical sword figures that supreme pontifical power, given by Christ to His vicar on earth, the bishop of Rome, according to, ‘All power is given to me in heaven and in earth.’” And again: “He shall rule from sea to sea and from the rivers to the ends of the earth,” which, they say, is signified by the velvet cap the popes wear on the night of our Lord’s nativity. This appears further in that he usurps power over all creatures—even over kings and princes—and will be the deputy of Christ for governing the universal church.

Third, he assumes sovereign judgment over all persons and causes, so that—even if he should carry innumerable souls to hell with him—no man may judge him.

Lastly, he takes to himself *the fullness of power* to dispense with the laws of God. His law says that men should reverence the apostolic see so highly that they prefer to learn the ancient institution of the Christian religion from the pope's mouth rather than from Holy Scripture; that they should inquire only what his pleasure is and order their life accordingly. Hence, in the Council of Trent, he presumed—on pain of anathema—to forbid more degrees of consanguinity than God has forbidden. What is this but to verify the apostle's saying, that he “exalts himself above all that is called God or is worshiped” (2 Thessalonians 2:4)?

When the Properties of God Are Given to Creatures

The second way in which what is God's is given to creatures is when properties or proper actions of the Godhead are ascribed to them. Thus creatures are made gods in part—and consequently idols. Formerly it was held a kind of idolatry to appoint constellations and make them signs to reveal secret truths, because what is proper to God is thereby transferred to them. The Church of Rome at this day provides four notable examples.

1) Saints Made Idols

First, it turns the saints in heaven into idols. It teaches men to kneel to them and to pray to them—though they are as far from us as heaven is from earth. By praying to them, men implicitly acknowledge that the saints have power to hear and help in all places and at all times, and that they know the secret minds and hearts of men. But to hear prayer in that manner, and to discern the heart, is a

property of the Godhead. Solomon prays, “Hear in heaven Your dwelling place...for You alone know the hearts of all the children of men” (1 Kings 8:39). Paul likewise assumes it as granted that there is One who searches the hearts and knows the mind of the Spirit, and that no man knows what is in a man but the spirit—or conscience—of that man (Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:11).

They reply: God hears and knows hearts of Himself, by His nature; the saints do so only by communication or revelation. I answer: God sometimes reveals to His servants particular words or deeds, as to Elisha and to Peter (2 Kings 5:26; 2 Kings 4:27; Acts 5:4)—this we do not deny. But that God reveals *all* the thoughts and desires of *all* who pray, at *all* times and in *all* places, so that the saints know everything by continual revelation—this we deny. That would communicate the glory of God to the creature and, in effect, make the creature God—not by nature, but by participation. Such were most of the heathen “gods”: men, made gods by participation and in no other way.

2) Sacraments Made Idols

Second, Rome turns the sacraments into idols by teaching that they confer grace *ex opere operato*—by the very work done; that is, that the outward elements or the duly pronounced words, or both together in the administration, are like physical causes that “effectively, actively, and immediately” produce in the heart the grace of regeneration and justification. Hence the priest prays that “the nature of the waters may receive the virtue of sanctification; that God would make the water fruitful by the secret admixture of His Godhead; that, having conceived sanctification, a new creature may spring from the immaculate womb of the divine fountain; that it may be living water, effectual to purify our minds; that the Holy Ghost would descend into the fullness of the font; that He would make the whole substance of the water fruitful for the effecting of regeneration.”

But the work of regeneration is a proper and immediate work of the Godhead. To *create* is God's proper and immediate work; to *regenerate* is to create anew. Therefore, to regenerate is the proper and immediate work of God; nothing can actively regenerate but God. Sacraments "regenerate" only as *moral instruments*: when rightly used, God Himself confers grace. If, however, they *effectively and actively* regenerate and justify, then they are not only moral instruments; they are more than physical instruments—they are, in this respect, as God Himself. Paul says that in planting and watering he is *nothing*. We receive new spiritual life from the Son by means of His flesh apprehended by faith; yet the power that quickens does not reside in His flesh as its proper subject, but in the Godhead. God will not give His glory to men or angels—nor even to the flesh and manhood of the Son of God, much less to lifeless creatures. Therefore, not to the sacraments.

3) Works Made Idols

Third, Rome makes idols of works by ascribing to them the *merit* of justification and salvation. None can merit with God but He who is God. The creature can do nothing to benefit God; therefore God is not bound by the bond of human desert to reward man for anything he does. If He is "bound," it is because He binds Himself by His own promise—and He is moved to promise not by the worth of any human work, but solely by His own goodness.

If it be said, "Christ merits, and yet He Himself can do nothing to benefit God," I answer: Christ merits properly on account of the dignity of His person. Since *God incarnate*—the God-man—suffered and fulfilled the law for us, divine justice requires that what He deserved by suffering and obeying be given to Him. This ground is found in no mere man or angel. God, as the chief Good, magnifies Himself and maintains His own honor according to the order of divine justice. He is not bound to His creatures, but of His free and mere goodness He bestows every blessing He gives.

4) The Bread in the Eucharist Made an Idol

Fourth, the Roman Church makes the bread in the Eucharist to be what it is not—and so makes an idol. Their chief teachers say that after consecration the bread, without being annihilated, is changed by conversion into the very body of Christ; thus bread is exalted above men and angels and is received into the unity of the second Person. If they reply that the bread is no idol because they believe this conversion, I answer: sacraments, outside their use, once the administration is ended, cease to be sacraments, and bread ceases to be the body of Christ. Therefore the *host*—the bread kept in the box, carried in procession, and worshiped—is nothing but a wheaten god, a bread-god, an idol no better than Aaron’s calf, or Jeroboam’s calves, or the *Nehushtan* which Hezekiah broke in pieces—indeed, as vile and detestable as any idol among the heathen.

When God’s Worship Is Given to Creatures

The third way in which what belongs to God is given to His creatures is when His worship is offered to them. In this way they are transformed into idols. For divine worship is proper to God alone, as our Savior says, “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve*” (Matthew 4:10). When divine worship is directed to any creature, that creature is made a god—or, at the least, is made equal to God—and therefore becomes an idol.

Now, creatures are made idols by the misdirecting of God’s worship in three ways.

1) When the Heart’s Chief Affection Is Given to the Creature

First, creatures become idols when men give their hearts to them and fix their chief affections upon them. Scripture commands that our hearts and all their affections, together with the obedience of both inward and outward man, be devoted to God alone. *“We must obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29). *“Fear not them which kill the body”* (Matthew 10:28). *“Sanctify the Lord in your hearts”* (1 Peter 3:14). *“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man”* (Psalm 118:8). *“Cursed is the man that trusts in man”* (Jeremiah 17:5). *“He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10:37). And again, *“Fear not idols, for they can do neither good nor evil. There is none like You, O King”* (Jeremiah 10:5–6).

These commands are given so that, by them, we might acknowledge God as our God. But when any creature is placed above God—or even matched with Him—in matters of obedience, fear, love, or confidence, it is made another god to us. Then the first commandment is broken, for we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Satan is called *“the god of this world”* (2 Corinthians 4:4) because men obey his suggestions rather than God’s commandments. Likewise, Antichrist is called God because he binds men to obey his traditions more strictly than the Word of God. Paul calls covetousness *“idolatry”* (Colossians 3:5), because the covetous man puts his confidence in riches for the preservation of life. Again, he says that some *“make their belly their god”* (Philippians 3:19; cf. 2 Timothy 3:4), because they mind nothing but earthly things and love their pleasures more than God.

A learned divine calls this “idolatry of manners,” writing,

“An idolater is one who gives to the creature the worship due to the Creator. There are two kinds of idolaters: some are idolaters in opinion, who ascribe divinity to the sun, moon, or any creature; others are idolaters in practice, who prefer the creature

before the Creator. For that which a man loves most, he makes his god. He who prefers the pampering of his belly before God makes it his god; he who prefers wine before God makes Bacchus his god; he who prefers lust before God makes lust his god. Of this kind (I speak it with grief) are many today, serving their vices and sins rather than God; for though they say with their mouths that they believe in God, yet by their deeds they deny Him.”

So the Church of Rome makes idols even of *good works*, for it teaches men to place their confidence in them for salvation—though they be done with sobriety and outward religion. This is to deify them and put them in God’s place. Jerome rightly says, “*If we must put our confidence in any, let it be in God alone.*” And Basil adds, “*As it is fitting to worship none but God, so must our hope be fixed in Him alone.*”

2) When Angels and Saints Are Given Divine Honor

Again, angels and departed saints are made idols—by the Church of Rome—in four ways.

First, in that she gives them *religious worship or adoration*—that is, the bowing of the knee or the prostration of the body. The devil desired no more of Christ than this token of reverence, saying that by God’s permission he was the disposer of the kingdoms of the world. But Christ answered, “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve*” (Matthew 4:10).

When the apostle John fell down to worship the angel (Revelation 19:10), he did not intend to worship him as God—for he well knew the difference between the Creator and the creature—but to honor him as a glorious and divine creature, with a measure of reverence approaching divine honor. Yet even this the angel forbade, saying, “*See that you do it not, for I am your fellow servant; worship God.*” From this we may reason: those who are our fellow servants are not

to be worshiped with divine honor. Angels and saints are our fellow servants; therefore, they are not to be worshiped with divine adoration.

It may be objected that we *adore* kings, princes, and even persons of lower estate. I answer: there are two kinds of adoration—divine and civil. The outward gesture may be the same in both, but the *cause* makes the difference. Divine adoration is when the body is bowed on a divine ground—that is, for reasons proper only to God—as when we kneel to Him in token of our subjection because He is Lord of all, because He knows the heart, because He is everywhere present, and because He alone is able to hear and help all who call upon Him throughout the world. For these reasons, and for these alone, is God to be adored.

Civil adoration, by contrast, arises from civil causes—as when we bow to men who are set in authority, or who are endowed with eminent gifts of God. This civil honor varies according to the degree of men's dignity or excellence.

On this ground I answer: kings and princes are worshiped only with *civil* adoration, not divine. But angels and saints are worshiped in the Roman Church with *divine* adoration. For we have no earthly or political fellowship with them; therefore, any worship rendered to them cannot be civil—it must be on some higher, spiritual ground. Indeed, the very reason they are worshiped is properly divine: because it is believed that they possess the power to hear and help all who pray to them, in any place and at any time, even though they are absent from the places where they are adored. Such worship ascribes to them the knowledge and vision of our hearts, presence in all places, and infinite power to assist all who call upon them.

Those who worship saints and angels therefore suppose that, being in heaven, they can at all times and in all places hear and help their petitioners. Hence, it is vain for papists to say that they give worship

to God only, and offer the saints but a “lesser” kind of service, when in truth they give to them that which is proper to God alone.

When certain devout women, in ancient times, offered not candles or prayers to the Virgin Mary, nor even called her “Queen of Heaven,” “Advocate of Sinners,” “Our Hope,” “Gate of Heaven,” or “Mediatrice,” but merely offered a cake in her honor, Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, condemned the act and said, “It is honor beyond measure”—that is, adoration—“which belongs to God alone, and not to angels, much less to the Virgin Mary.”

The Invocation of Angels and Saints

Again, angels and saints are made idols when prayer or invocation is directed to them, for prayer is a proper part of God’s worship. The commandment of God is plain: “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble*” (Psalm 50:15). The word *Me* must be understood exclusively—*call upon Me alone*. This is gathered by proportion. Moses says, “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him you shall serve*” (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20). Christ, quoting and expounding this text, adds the word *alone*: “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve*” (Matthew 4:10). Thus, all commandments concerning the worship of God carry the force of that word *alone*, though it be not always expressed.

The reason for the commandment confirms this: “*I will deliver you.*” It may be framed thus: “You must pray to Him who can deliver you. I alone deliver you; therefore, call upon Me alone.”

Secondly, the one to whom we pray must be such that we may believe in Him; for the apostle says, “*How shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed?*” (Romans 10:14). We must not believe in angels or saints, but only in God. The ancient and apostolic faith is

this: to *believe in God*, and to *believe the Church*. As Augustine rightly says, “*We believe the apostle; we do not believe in the apostle.*” And again, “*We must believe the Church, but not in the Church.*”

Thirdly, sacrifice is proper to God alone. In the New Testament, prayer takes the place of sacrifice. For whereas Malachi prophesied that “*in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering*” (Malachi 1:11), Paul explains its meaning when he says, “*I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands*” (1 Timothy 2:8). Thus, prayer is a spiritual sacrifice, called in Scripture “*the calves of our lips*” (Hebrews 13:15).

The ancient Church held that the Holy Spirit is God because He is *invoked*. For the heretics objected: “Only God may be invoked. The Holy Spirit is not invoked. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is not God.” The Church answered by denying the second statement, declaring that the Holy Spirit is invoked. Origen says, “All vows, petitions, supplications, and thanksgivings must be addressed to God, the Lord of all things. It is not fitting to invoke angels, unless we could truly know them.” Athanasius writes that “*the saints—that is, believers—seek no aid from anything created; therefore, Jesus Christ, to whom men pray for help, is God.*”

Defenders of the invocation of saints allege that they pray not to them as to God, since they do not make them the authors or givers of blessings, but only helpers by their prayers. I answer that this is false, for they make them helpers not only by their prayers but also by their *merits*—and this is to make them *redeemers*. The very form of their prayers, as found in their breviaries and missals, proves this: “*Have mercy on us; grant us this or that; deliver us from this or that evil.*” Such language belongs to God alone. Their excuse is like that of an adulteress who says, “I lie with this man as with my lover and friend. I know he is not my husband, nor do I treat him as such.” The act remains adultery, though she denies it.

They further argue that if the living may ask one another's prayers, the living may likewise ask help from the dead. But the reasoning fails, for four great differences make the cases unlike.

First, we have a commandment and examples in Scripture to request the prayers of the living for one another, but no commandment at all to pray to the dead.

Second, we are present with those from whom we request prayer; we are not present with the saints in heaven. Indeed, if a man among us were to kneel down here and direct his petition to a man in London, Rome, or Jerusalem, he would commit idolatry. How much more, then, when men on earth kneel and pray to saints in heaven?

It is alleged that the saints are present by hearing our prayers, since they are with God and see Him who sees all things, and therefore in Him they see all things. I answer, this is false. The angels see the wisdom of God and the mystery of redemption not *in God*—with whom they are present—but in the Church, as it is made known through the ministry of the apostles (Ephesians 3:10). The souls of the martyrs cry, "*How long, O Lord, holy and true?*" (Revelation 6:10), showing they do not know the time of their deliverance. Christ Himself said, "*The Father has kept the times and seasons in His own power*" (Acts 1:7), and that not even the angels know the hour of His coming (Matthew 24:36). The prophet says, "*Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledges us not*" (Isaiah 63:16), which Augustine also cites to this end.

The third difference: one living man may seek the prayers of another by word or letter, thus openly declaring his needs. But in prayer we reveal our wants not by speech or writing, but by the secret groanings and desires of our hearts. We lift up our souls to Him to whom we pray, making Him our refuge by faith. For true prayer is not in the tongue, but in the heart's desire and faith.

Lastly, when one believer requests another's prayer, both stand as fellow members of one body, directing one common supplication to God in the name of one Mediator, Christ. But when we pray to the dead, the case is wholly different, for then they are made mediators of intercession between us and God—thus usurping the place of Christ.

Temples, Altars, and Holy Days Dedicated to Saints

Thirdly, saints and angels are made idols when temples, altars, and holy days are consecrated in their honor. All these belong properly to the worship of God. *Temples*—for only God can bind His presence and hearing to any place. *Altars*—for they are for sacrifices and oblations, which are due to God alone. *Holy days*—for God is the only Lord of time, and days may be dedicated only to His glory. Though the Church of England retains the names of saints' days, yet we are altogether free from this idolatry, for we dedicate the days themselves to the honor of God.

Swearing and Vowing to Saints

They are also made idols when men swear by them or make vows to them. “*Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by them that are no gods*” (Jeremiah 5:7). And God threatens to destroy those who “*swear by the Lord and by Malcham*”—that is, Moloch, their king (Zephaniah 1:5). The same judgment applies to those who swear “by God and by Mary,” “by the mass,” and the like. One has rightly said, “*Whoever swears by anything other than God deifies that thing and thereby makes himself an idolater.*” Concerning vows, Isaiah says, “*In that day men shall vow vows unto the Lord, and perform them*” (Isaiah 19:21), showing that vows are a proper part of divine worship. Origen likewise affirms that all vows must be made to God alone.

Images and Relics Made Idols

Finally, images themselves—together with relics of Christ and the saints, and other so-called “holy things” such as temples, altars, and the like—are made idols in two ways.

First, when they are adored and worshiped with religious veneration, or when the living image of God—that is, man—bows down before a dead image. Then indeed they become false gods. The second commandment forbids this plainly: “*You shall not bow down to them nor serve them*” (Exodus 20:4–5)—that is, to images of the true God or of anything else. The reason follows: “*For I the Lord your God am a jealous God.*” Hence, when images are worshiped, they are turned into false gods and idols, for God’s jealousy arises because those who are espoused to Him set up another “husband” in His place or alongside Him. When we bow to them, it is more than civil reverence; it is divine honor, which God will share with none.

Man himself is the living image of God, made by His own hand, and therefore infinitely more excellent than all images made by human hands. If any mere man is worshiped with more than civil honor, he is thereby made more than a man—an idol. If no more than civil honor is due even to man, who is the image of God, then certainly no religious honor may be given to images fashioned by man.

When Cornelius fell down before Peter, meaning not to honor him as God but only to show reverence, Peter reproved him, saying, “*Stand up; I myself also am a man*” (Acts 10:25–26). If such a gesture toward an apostle was rebuked, what reproof is due to those who bow religiously before images?

Those who worshiped the sun, moon, and stars were condemned as idolaters (Deuteronomy 4:19; 2 Kings 23:5). How much more those who worship images and relics—for the heavenly bodies are God’s handiwork, whereas images are but man’s. It was idolatry to kiss the golden calves of Jeroboam (Hosea 13:2). Augustine says that those

who “are worshipers of pictures lack the power of Christianity.” Again, he numbers the worship of images among heresies, noting that Marcellina, companion of Carpocrates, “*worshiped the images of Jesus, Paul, Homer, and Pythagoras with incense and adoration.*” He adds, “*In the second commandment we are forbidden to worship any likeness of God made by man’s device, for no image of God may be worshiped but that which is the same with Himself.*” Ambrose likewise says, “*It is a heathenish error to worship the cross on which Christ died.*” Holcot remarks that the Spirit of God condemns those “who honor and serve images and artificial figures.”

Catherinus, a leading voice at the Council of Trent, confessed: “There is debate among Catholics whether images may be made for the very purpose of being adored, and whether worship may rightly be given to them. Many utterly deny it and cry out against it as idolatry. Nor are they moved by light reasons, nor without the authority of Scripture and the Fathers. For indeed, Scripture condemns the idols and images of the pagans not only because they represented false gods, but also because they were works of men’s hands and without sense, and therefore undeserving of worship. This opinion some of the ancient doctors appear to approve, if we weigh what they have written.”

Durandus says, “*We do not adore images, nor call them gods, nor put our trust in them, for this would be idolatry.*” He distinguishes two uses of images: one *moderate*, when they serve for remembrance and representation; the other *excessive*, when they are worshiped. And he adds, “*By this excess the simple and weak are easily drawn into idolatry.*”

It is objected that men may bow to the chair of state or to a prince’s letter without idolatry—and therefore, much more, to images of God, Christ, and the saints. I answer: the conclusion does not follow. When we bow to the chair of state or to the royal seal, it is only civil honor, done for a public end—to pay homage and signify our loyalty

and subjection to our lawful prince. Bowing to images, however, is done on a religious ground.

Second, the chair of state is a sign of the prince's presence, and his letters are signs of his will—by the prince's own appointment. Images are not, by God's appointment, signs or pledges of His presence or pleasure; He will not be worshiped *in* them, *by* them, or *at* them, nor has He bound His presence or His hearing to them.

Third, men do not bow to the chair of state when the prince himself is present; yet those who worship images bow to them though God is always present. I turn the argument upon them thus: he who sets up a chair and calls it "the presence," or sends a letter in the prince's name and seals it with a counterfeit seal, is guilty of treason. So they who of their own heads set up images as signs and pledges of God's presence do, in effect, commit treason against God.

When Nadab and Abihu offered sacrifices which God had appointed *with fire of their own devising*, they were struck dead (Leviticus 10:1). When the Jews worshiped the true God with His own worship, yet in places of their own choice, the Spirit says they corrupted themselves and did not prepare their hearts to the Lord (2 Chronicles 27:2; cf. 2 Kings 15:34–35; 2 Chronicles 20:33). What impiety, then, is it to worship God *in images* without His command?

When the Jews set their thresholds by God's thresholds and their posts by His posts—that is, when they joined their traditions to God's commandments—*they set a wall between themselves and God and defiled His holy name with their abominations* (Ezekiel 43:8). Even an oath must not be taken by creatures, though they be considered as signs of God's presence and power, and though the worship in the oath be ultimately directed to God. Scripture allows only a simple, straightforward oath—without fraud or obliquity—lest God's authority be diminished, our neighbor deceived (against the order of human society), or the religion of an oath fall into contempt, as commonly happens when men swear by creatures. Therefore Christ

said, “*Swear not at all—neither by heaven,*” etc. (Matthew 5:34). As one part of God’s worship must be direct and not oblique, so must all the rest. Therefore we may not worship God *in, at, or before* images—even if we ourselves treat them as signs or pledges of His presence and intend to worship God *in* them.

Again, it is alleged: “The wooden cross of Christ was an instrument of our redemption; therefore it is to be worshiped.” I answer: first, it was an instrument of Christ’s *death*, but not the cause or instrument of man’s redemption, which came by His death. Second, by the same reasoning Judas, the Jews, the spears, and the thorns should be worshiped, for they too were instruments of His death—indeed, even the spittle and clay Christ once used in working a miracle (John 9:6).

Third, they urge the words spoken to Moses and Joshua: “*Put off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy*” (Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:15). I answer: Moses and Joshua put off their shoes not to the *place*, but to *God*, whose presence made the place holy. Further, the place was holy only for the time in which God manifested His presence; whereas images and relics are claimed to be holy at all times and in all places.

Moreover, images and relics are made idols when incense is burned before them, when candles are lighted to them, when altars are built and gifts offered to them, when pilgrimages are made to them. All these are parts of religious worship; and when such acts are directed to images and relics, it betrays a hidden persuasion that some divine power, presence, or operation dwells in or about them. The bronze serpent was God’s ordinance, a figure of Christ (John 3:14), and a memorial of deliverance from the fiery serpents in the wilderness; yet when incense—a part of God’s worship (Exodus 30:8; Leviticus 2:1)—was offered to it, it became an idol and was destroyed by Hezekiah, whose deed Scripture commends (2 Kings 18:4).

The Idolatry of Rome in Crucifixes. From all this, we must take notice of the open idolatry of the Roman Church, whose chief

teachers hold and defend that crucifixes and other images of God are to be worshiped with the very same worship given to Christ Himself—*the same kind of worship, the same affection, the same devotion*. What is this but to make gods of crucifixes? The excuse that crucifixes are worshiped only *with respect to Christ*, and that the worship “passes by the image to Him,” will not avail; for the image is still honored with religious honor, which may not be given to any creature.

Nestorius imagined Christ’s manhood to be a person distinct from the eternal Word, and devised a *co-adoration* whereby the manhood was to be worshiped together with the Word. The Council of Ephesus condemned this *co-adoration*. How much more would it have condemned a *co-adoration* of the crucifix with Christ!

It is said: “Adoration is given to God properly and directly, and to the image only improperly and indirectly.” I reply: even so, *more* is given to the image than may be given; indeed, far more than mere co-adoration. For five things are ascribed to images:

1. **A union of relation** with God, whereby seeing the image brings the thing signified to mind.
2. **A relative presence**, so that God and Christ are, in their images—and their images with them—one and the same object.
3. **Signification**, by which the image, as image, signifies God and Christ.
4. **Representation**, whereby the image stands in the stead and room of God—not only as an ambassador, but as a viceroy or deputy stands in the place of a prince—so that whatever would be done about God or Christ, if He manifested His presence, is now to be done about the image. This is, undeniably, a portion of divine honor; for the image is set to receive honor *for* God, and God is said to receive honor *by* it.

5. **Communication of religious worship** between God and the image. This is twofold: first, when worship is offered before the image to God directly and then, by consequence, returns to the image indirectly—as when one kneels before an image and prays; the worship is God’s properly, but pertains to the image by consequent. Second, when worship is given directly to the image and only then referred to God by consequence—as when one salutes the image in passing or adorns it with garments and jewels.

Upon this communication follows a **communion of worship**, whereby God is made to share in the worship of the image, and the image to share in the worship of God. Such communion in religious worship lowers the honor of God and exalts the image into a divine estate above men and angels. If a king should appoint one of his subjects to be his *image* and deputy for worship—so that ordinarily the king’s homage is rendered before the deputy—then, whatever intentions lie in the subjects’ minds to honor the king and not the deputy, in reality the deputy becomes king and the other bears only the name. So too with images: being not merely images of God but His *deputies* for worship, they receive in truth the honor of God.

Again, when *latria*—divine honor—is given to God *in* His image, it terminates upon the image; the worship is first directed to God and then, in the same motion, extended by consequence to the image. But that religious worship whose termination rests in the creature is, by common consent, **idolatry**.

The Preservation of Ourselves from Idols in Four Respects

Thus far I have shown what an idol is, the kinds of idols, and the ways by which they are erected. I now proceed to a second point—

how we are to keep ourselves from idols. And that we may preserve ourselves thoroughly from their contagion, four duties are required: we must avoid the *making* of them, the *having* of them, the *using* of them, and the *company of those who use* them.

From the Making of Them

The making of idols must be avoided by the express commandment of God: “*You shall not make for yourself any graven image, or the likeness of anything*” (Exodus 20:4). In these words, all kinds of images are forbidden—whether carved or painted—and images of all things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth; therefore, even of God, whose dwelling is in heaven. Tertullian remarks, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols”—not merely from idolatry (that is, the service of idols), but from the idols themselves, that is, from the images.

Yet the making of images is not absolutely forbidden in every respect, for there is a lawful use of them, both holy and common.

The *holy use* of images is when they serve to signify the holy things of God. Such images are properly *signs* or *types*, and exist only by God’s appointment. Thus, the cherubim upon the mercy seat were figures of God’s presence; the bronze serpent was a figure of Christ crucified; and the outward elements in the sacraments of the New Testament are signs and seals of the body and blood of Christ, together with the benefits of His death.

The *common use* of images is threefold.

First, a *symbolic or political use*, when they serve for civil distinction, as in coins. Thus the Jews, though forbidden to make images for religious use, were permitted to use them on their coins. Christ Himself, when shown the coin bearing Caesar’s image and inscription, said, “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*” (Matthew 22:21).

Second, a *historical use*, when images serve to record human or divine history. Yet even here, the painting of biblical history—though lawful in itself—is not expedient in churches, because of the danger of idolatry that may arise from it. Therefore, the practice of the Church of England is commendable, which forbids, in places set apart for worship, images either painted or carved, even when representing biblical scenes. The case differs with illustrated Bibles, since such images do not provoke the same danger of idolatry.

Third, images may be used for *ornament*, when they serve only to beautify public or private houses for civil gatherings. For the scope of the divine commandment is not to forbid all making of images, but only their making for *divine or religious* use—that is, to represent God in His nature, attributes, or presence.

Someone may object: “When we think of God, we conceive an internal image or form of Him in our minds; and what we conceive internally, we may also express outwardly by painting or carving. If the internal form of God may be lawfully conceived, why may not the external be made?”

I answer: the right way to conceive of God is not to imagine a form, but to contemplate His attributes and works. As soon as the mind forms a visible shape of God—as when He is superstitiously imagined as an old man seated in heaven upon a throne with a scepter in His hand—an idol is set up in the heart. Moreover, these internal conceptions are not worshiped, as carved or painted images are. Finally, God, who allows inward apprehensions of His glory, strictly forbids external representations of Him in the use of religion.

From the Having or Keeping of Them

The second thing to be avoided is the *keeping* or *having* of idols—that is, of images that have been abused to idolatry and are likely to be abused again, especially if they stand in public places. God’s

commandment is plain: destroy the idols of the heathen, their altars, and their high places. Accordingly, Moses destroyed the golden calf, and Hezekiah broke in pieces the bronze serpent (Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:25; Exodus 32:20; 2 Kings 18:4).

There are several weighty reasons for this commandment.

First, preserved idols are enduring monuments of devil worship and of contempt for the true God. Their preservation keeps alive the memory of that which dishonors God and of things abominable to Him (Deuteronomy 7:25). A loyal subject would not treasure the spoils of an enemy's conquest, for by doing so he shows disloyalty to his prince.

Second, we are called not only to confess our faith in words but also to bear witness in our deeds that we are the people of God who worship no idols. This confession is contradicted if we keep such images. Hence the Lord commands, "*You shall destroy them, because you are a holy people to the Lord*" (Deuteronomy 7:5–6).

Third, the keeping of idols is a stumbling block to those who are inclined toward idolatry, for it fosters in them the belief that these images deserve some reverence.

Fourth, we are bound to remove all occasions of idolatry. This duty is neglected when idols are preserved, for such preservation gives opportunity and temptation to the superstitious to worship them.

Fifth, the keeping of idols gives occasion to the simple and unlearned to misuse them. When the idols of the nations remained among the Israelites, they became *a snare to them* (Judges 2:3).

Lastly, idols are called by the Holy Spirit *vanities*—not as other things, which may have some proper and good use, but as things utterly unprofitable (Isaiah 44:10). Therefore, their preservation can serve no good purpose. Among the people of God, all things must tend, in their kind, to His glory—either directly or indirectly.

If it is said, “They are the layman’s books, and therefore may be kept,” I answer, they are *not* books for laymen, for the Lord has pronounced them *mere vanities*. Augustine says rightly, “They are worthy to be deceived who seek Christ and His apostles not in the Scriptures, but upon painted walls.”

From the Religious Use of Them

The third thing to be avoided is the *religious* use of idols. This use—namely, worship—is utterly condemned in the second part of the Second Commandment: “*You shall not bow down to them or serve them*” (Exodus 20:5). In these words, the Lord identifies two parts of idol-worship: **honor** and **service**.

Honor is either inward or outward. *Inward honor* lies in the affection of reverence. *Outward honor* consists of bodily gestures that signify reverence: removing the hat, lifting up hands and eyes, bending the knees, prostrating the body, and the like.

Service is likewise either inward or outward. *Inward service* lies in the devotion of the mind—confidence, hope, invocation, vows, and the like. *Outward service* consists of all other acts beyond gesture: sacrifices, offerings, lighting tapers, burning incense, erecting altars and temples, making pilgrimages, and so forth. All these, and everything of like kind, are utterly forbidden.

Furthermore, to leave no place for idols among the people of God, He has strictly barred us by law from using even those things that are proper *memorials and monuments* of idols: “*You shall make no mention of the name of other gods; it shall not be heard upon your lips*” (Exodus 23:13). Indeed, everything that pertains in any way to idol-worship must be avoided. On this ground Paul argues at length that the Corinthians must not be present at feasts held in honor of

heathen gods, even if they abstain from the worship itself (1 Corinthians 10). As Tertullian notes, it was a common fault to say *mehercule* or *medius fidius*—oaths that arose from ignorance, not realizing they invoked Hercules—yet even he grants that ordinary conversation may compel us to *mention* the names of false gods, while the former law forbids honoring them.

From the Users of Them

In the fourth and final place, we must avoid the *users* of idols, and that for two reasons: first, because of their deceptive excuses; second, because of fellowship with them. Concerning the deceits with which the idolaters of this last age paint over their idolatry and blind the world, we have a special warning from the Holy Spirit: “*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition*” (Colossians 2:8). To help us avoid them, I note five principal excuses.

1) “We worship images, not idols.”

First, they say, “*We do not worship idols but the images of God, the saints, and angels.*” A poor and shallow shift. The golden calf, Jeroboam’s calves at Dan and Bethel, and Micah’s *teraphim* were images of God—as has been shown—and yet all agree they were idols. Moreover, an image of a *feigned* god is plainly an idol; and the image set up to honor the true God is likewise an image of a *feigned* god. For God will not be honored by any image of man’s devising, however much one’s mind intends the honor to be His. Therefore the object actually honored is a god of man’s own making—one who will hear, be present, and bless *in, at, and before* images. Thus the image supposed to be of God is in truth the image of an idol; and the image of an idol is itself an idol.

They say there is a difference between heathen and Christian images. Let them consider Psalm 115 and show that their images can hear,

smell, speak, or walk better than those of the heathen—and we will grant a difference; otherwise not. Many heathen images were meant for the true God, as well as theirs. Irenaeus reproves the Gnostics not only for making images of Pythagoras and Aristotle, but also for making images of Christ and Paul and worshiping them. Ambrose writes, *“The Gentiles adore wood because they think it the image of God.”*

They also define *idol* falsely, as if it were only a false image representing what is not; but it is also a false image representing what *is*, yet *as it is not*. Thus Roman teachers write, and Catherinus explicitly says: *“The adoration of saints used in the Church of Rome is terminated in God, who is adored not absolutely, but as He is laudable in this or that man reckoned a saint. If he be not a saint, the worship is false, and the ‘God’ so worshiped is indeed a false god, for He is adored as existing in one in whom He is not. The same holds with an unconsecrated host: God and Christ are not adored simply, but as present under the species of bread and wine; if He be not there, then a creature is found in Christ’s stead to whom divine honor is given, and here is idolatry also.”* Thus even when men *intend* to worship the one true God, if they adore Him *where He is not*, they fall into idolatry.

2) “We do not worship images, but God in them.”

Second, they plead: *“We do not worship images properly or principally, but Christ, angels, and saints in them and at them.”* So said the heathen. Lactantius reports them: *“We fear not the images, but those in whose likeness they are fashioned and to whose names they are dedicated.”* Augustine records the same excuse: *“I worship neither the statue nor the devil; in a bodily figure I behold the sign of what I ought to adore.”* Again: *“I do not worship the stone; I adore what I see and serve Him whom I see not—the invisible divine power presiding over the image.”* Chrysostom likewise: *“When charged with worshiping an image, they reply, ‘Not the image, but*

Venus and Mars.’ And when asked, ‘What is Venus?’ the graver sort answer, ‘Pleasure’; and ‘What is Mars?’ ‘A manly courage.’” Yet these excuses could not acquit them of idolatry.

Moreover, only that worship pleases God which He has *prescribed* in His Word. *“In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matthew 15:9). Of worshiping God *by images* there is no word; indeed, Scripture says the contrary: *“You shall not do so to the Lord your God”* (Deuteronomy 12:4)—that is, as the heathen do to their gods. That Christ is not to be worshiped in a crucifix is plain; for when He is worshiped, the Godhead is worshiped, and so the Persons therein. The Trinity is to be worshiped in unity, and the unity in Trinity. Since the Godhead is immaterial and invisible, it is not to be worshiped in any sensible thing, as even Damascene (otherwise friendly to images) acknowledges.

3) “We give worship to God and only service to saints.”

Third, they say, *“We give worship to God alone, but we honor angels, saints, and images with service.”* I answer, religious adoration, invocation, vows, and the like are parts of *God’s service* and may not be given to any creature, by whatever terms they are called. Whether you name them *worship* or *service*, they remain proper to God, who is not mocked by words. It is absurd to imagine that a change of terms can change God’s worship into the creature’s due.

The devil asked no more of Christ than *service (dulia)*. He did not demand divine honor, but to be acknowledged as a minister to whom (as he falsely claimed) the rule of the kingdoms of the world was committed (Luke 4:6). Yet Christ refused, saying, *“You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve”* (Matthew 4:10). Therefore not only religious *worship* but religious *service* belongs to God.

To arm ourselves against this empty distinction, note that *worship* is twofold: worship of *religion* and worship of *society*. Worship of religion is what the creature gives the Creator because He is the Author and Giver of all good; its parts and manner are prescribed in the First Table of the Law. Worship of society is what one creature gives another as an instrument of good under God; it belongs to the Second Table and is commanded in “*Honor your father and your mother*” (Exodus 20:12). Here belongs whatever honor is due to saints and angels: were they to appear, we would pay them civil respect as we do to princes—not a different *kind* of honor, only a different *degree*. We must not give even the least part of religious worship to the highest of creatures. Augustine says, “*Religion is not the worship of anything, but of God.*” Hence neither religious worship nor religious service may be given to saints or angels.

Further, the worship of society is grounded in *neighborhood*—visible presence and outward fellowship. Where there is no mutual conversation nor sensible presence, there is no place for such honor. Therefore we may not give even civil worship to saints or angels, with whom we have no outward fellowship.

Finally, not worship only, but *service* belongs to God: “*You shall not bow down to them nor serve them*” (Exodus 20:5). And with good reason: service is more than worship; worship may be rendered between equals, but service properly belongs from inferior to superior.

4) “Our worship is confirmed by revelations and miracles.”

Fourth, they claim that prayers to saints and the worship of images and relics are confirmed by revelations and miracles. I answer: revelations are not now the rule of faith—the written Word is. “*They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them*” (Luke 16:29). “*To the law and to the testimony*” (Isaiah 8:20). Miracles by themselves do not prove doctrine, for false prophets may work wonders to test men (Deuteronomy 13:1). Scripture plainly says that Antichrist—

who, in all likelihood, is the bishop of Rome—comes “*with all power and signs and lying wonders*” (2 Thessalonians 2:9; cf. Revelation 16:14). Therefore the Roman claims of revelations and miracles are justly suspect. The speaking, weeping, and bleeding of images, and the bleeding of the Eucharist—what are these but satanic delusions?

5) “Scripture condemns only the worship of heathen gods.”

Fifth and last, they protest that Scripture condemns the worship of *heathen* gods, whereas they honor saints and Christian images. I answer: the worship of heathen idols and the worship of God, angels, saints, and images in the Roman Church are, in substance, the same.

The folly is alike in *making* their gods. The heathen plants a tree, cuts it down; with one part he warms himself, with another he cooks his food; with the third he makes a god (Isaiah 44:15–16). So Rome sows, reaps, threshes, grinds, and bakes—feeding the household with part, and of another part making *Christ*, their breaden god.

The Gentiles built houses and temples to their gods; so do papists to saints and angels (2 Kings 5:18; Baruch 6:16). They consecrated altars; so do papists. They used holy water at the temple entry; so do papists. They served their gods with shaven priests; so do papists. They censed their images and lit tapers before them; so do papists. They kept fasts and holy days to their gods—Livy says the Romans fasted to Ceres; Sozomen records they offered select meats and abstained from profane foods. Likewise the papists keep festivals to saints. Of old in England, the third day was dedicated to Woden and the fifth to Frigg—hence *Wednesday* and *Friday*; so Rome dedicates days to saints.

Nor did the wiser Gentiles think their idols *were* gods. They professed to worship *God in them*. The *Recognitions* (under Clement’s name) records their plea: “*As there is one Caesar with many judges, tribunes, and inferior powers, so there is one great God with other gods under Him to govern the world.*” Again: “*Apis,*

Ibis, serpents, goats, and the like were figures and allegories of virtues by which mankind is governed.” And again: “*We worship visible images to honor the invisible God.*” Eusebius likewise testifies that the Gentiles adored images as representations of excellent benefactors. Yet, for all this, they are condemned as idolaters. Celsus, in Origen, says that none but a fool thinks wood, stone, brass, or gold to be gods; they are “services or representations” of gods. Still, idolatry.

So too the Israelites said to a tree, “*You are my father,*” and to a stone, “*You have begotten me*” (Jeremiah 2:27). Likewise, papist preachers say to the crucifix, “*You have redeemed us; You have reconciled us to the Father.*” They answer: “We say this not to the wood, but to Christ, in whose stead the image stands.” I reply: so did the Israelites.

The Gentiles said images were *letters* by which to learn God; papists say images are the *layman’s books*. The wisest Gentiles used images and rites to procure the presence of angels and celestial powers, that through them they might know God; so papists with images of angels and saints. The Gentiles assigned gods over lands, cities, families, houses, persons, estates, arts, and diseases. So popish superstition assigns patron saints to nations—Martin for Germany, James for Spain, Michael for France, Peter and Paul for Italy, George for England—and guardians for beasts: Gallus over geese, Wendelin over sheep, Fulogius over horses, Pelagius over oxen, Antony over swine. Against the plague they pray to Sebastian and Roch; against ague, to Petronilla; for toothache, to Apollonia; for stone, to Libarius; for “holy fire,” to Antony, and so on. The Gentiles, in plague and tempest, bore their idols in procession; so Rome carries the *host* and crucifixes in procession and worships them.

The learned among the heathen knew there was one chief and true God—the Maker and Governor of heaven and earth and all things in them—and that their other “gods” were creatures, men who excelled in gifts and were, as they thought, translated to heaven. Aristotle

says, “This world and the order of all things are preserved by God. What is highest in the world is God’s seat. Nothing in the world is sufficient to preserve itself or can be without His help.” In the Roman laws of the Twelve Tables it is written, “Let men approach their gods with purity, and let all pomp be removed. If they do otherwise, God will avenge.” Lactantius reports of Cicero that, in the book where he comforted himself after his daughter’s death, he plainly says, “The gods publicly worshiped are men.” And the same is evident in his surviving works, where he states that “Hercules, Castor, Pollux, Aesculapius, Liber,” and the like, were men who after death, by common report, were translated into heaven—indeed he thinks the same concerning the chief gods called *Dii maiorum gentium*. Trismegistus likewise says of the heathen deities, “We call them gods not by nature, but by honor.” Augustine records the pagans saying, “Are we to think our ancestors so foolish as to suppose that felicity, love, and such like were gods? No; they believed there is one God whose gifts and functions these are.”

Further, though the heathen worshiped false gods, they also acknowledged and in some measure worshiped the true God. Athanasius writes that they worshiped one unbegotten God and many made gods. Tertullian notes that, even while enslaved to idols, they were accustomed to speak of “God,” saying, “God will give this or that,” “God sees,” “I commend it to God,” “God will repay,” and when they uttered such words they lifted their eyes, not to Rome’s Capitol, but to heaven. Lactantius adds that when they swore, wished, or gave thanks, they named not Jupiter or the other gods but “God,” especially in time of war and danger; yet when the peril had passed, they returned to their temples again. Nevertheless, because they gave divine honor to their supposed gods in prayer and supplication, they stand condemned of idolatry and are said by Paul to have passed by God and to have worshiped the creature (Romans 1:25). As Lactantius rightly says, “It cannot be that the true God be worshiped and other gods also; for if His honor is given to others, He is not worshiped at all, seeing His religion is to believe that He alone is the true God.” So too the Church of Rome truly forsakes God—

whatever it pretends—and cannot be free from idolatry, for it does the very same when it canonizes saints and gives them divine or religious honor.

One defender of that Church argues that heathen idolatry has five degrees: first, worship of stocks and stones; second, of the sun, moon, and stars; third, of dead men; fourth, of the world; fifth, of good angels or devils. He further claims that in all these the honor given by the heathen “begins in the mind and ends not in God but in the creature, whereas the worship maintained by the Church of Rome begins in the mind and ends in God.” I answer: this is false. Paulus Orosius says of the pagans of his day that they confessed they did not follow many gods as such, but “worshiped under one great God many inferior gods as His ministers.” Augustine likewise records their speech: that they worshiped not wicked spirits but angels—“the virtue of the great God and the ministers of the great God.” It follows that they worshiped departed men and angels *for God’s sake*, and worshiped God *in* them, since they honored them as instruments and ministers of the Most High. Thus those among the heathen who had more understanding worshiped the true God in those whom they called inferior gods—just as papists worship God in images. Nor was it their intent to bestow the highest adoration on these “gods,” but to afford them a lower honor as beings beneath the supreme God. Horace, the heathen poet, speaks of the highest God: “He governs the affairs of men and gods; He rules sea and land and the whole world with changing seasons; nothing greater than He is brought forth, nor is there any like Him or second to Him. Yet Pallas receives the next honor to Him.” The papists say the very same today of God and “our Lady.” It is plain, then, that the Gentiles, having many gods, worshiped one as chief—Jupiter—and honored the inferior gods as papists honor saints.

From all this it appears that heathen idolatry and the worship of images and saints in the Roman Church are, in substance, the same. Yet I grant a difference. The wisest among the heathen perceived the vanity of their own religion. Seneca, in effect, says, “We will perform

the rites—but remembering that this worship is more for fashion than for anything else.” Lactantius addresses Cicero to this purpose: “I see you worship these earthly, man-made things. You know they are vain, and yet you do the same as those whom you confess to be the greatest fools.” But the papists will not acknowledge the vanity of images and their worship, nor can they bear to hear of it.

Second, With Respect to Their Fellowship

As we must beware the empty deceits of today’s idolaters—who merely varnish the old pagan service with new names—so we must also avoid their fellowship. For Paul says we may not “be unequally yoked with unbelievers,” nor can there be “agreement between the temple of God and idols” (2 Corinthians 6:14–16). Fellowship with them is either in **religion** or in **the affairs of this life**. Fellowship in religion is of two kinds: first, when we are content to hold the same faith with them; second, when we join with them in the exercises of their religion.

No Fellowship in the Exercises of Religion

First, we may not share one and the same faith with them in the doctrine of God’s worship, for their religion overturns the foundation of our salvation. Paul says, “*Those who worship angels do not hold fast the Head—Christ*” (Colossians 2:18–19). The worshipers of angels thought they could not approach God without angelic mediation and therefore prayed to angels to intercede for them. Theodoret testifies, “This error concerning the worship of angels long remained in Phrygia and Pisidia; a synod at Laodicea, the mother city of Phrygia, by decree forbade men to pray to angels. To this day one can see in those parts chapels of Saint Michael. They advised this out of a feigned humility, saying that the God of all cannot be seen or comprehended, and that men cannot come to Him but must win His

favor by angels. This is what Paul means by ‘humility and the worship of angels.’” Again, Theodoret says, “Paul commands that thanks be given to God the Father *through Christ*, not through angels; and the Council of Laodicea, following this rule and wishing to cure that old disease, provided that men should not pray to angels and forsake Christ.” From his words it further appears that the council judged angels, *when invoked*, to be idols, and the invocation of them abominable idolatry.

Papists reply that the council condemns only those who denied Christ and put angels in His place. Chrysostom indeed speaks so; yet I answer two things. First, Theodoret does not speak of men who rejected Christ altogether and fled to angels; he says they *mixed* law and gospel—something that cannot stand unless Christ be at least confessed in words. Second, whatever the precise error was in Phrygia and Pisidia, Theodoret says the *act of invocation itself*, when directed to angels, was condemned. His very words import so much.

Again, idolatry is spiritual adultery. It breaks the bond of the covenant between God and His people, makes a people of God to be no people, and utterly excludes them from His covenant. Hence we have, on good ground, departed from the Church of Rome, and we may not so much as dream of any union or reconciliation of the two religions. It is not true, as many suppose, that we differ only in matters of circumstance. Idolatry is a principal cause for our renouncing the Roman religion.

Furthermore, it is altogether unlawful to join with idolaters in their exercises of religion. Paul exhorts the Corinthians, “*Flee from idolatry*” (1 Corinthians 10:14)—that is, avoid all feasts and meetings that uphold the honor of idols. He presses his exhortation with several reasons.

- 1. Communion in rite brings communion with its object.**

Those who share in one and the same sacred service have fellowship with the one to whom that service belongs (v. 16). He

proves this by two examples:

- In the Lord's Supper, those who partake of the bread and the cup are made partakers of Christ's body and blood.
- In the Jewish sacrifices, those who ate of them shared in Israel's worship.

Therefore, those who participate in idol-feasts share in idol worship and so have fellowship with the idols themselves (v. 18).

2. Communion at idol-feasts is fellowship with demons.

"The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God" (v. 20). But you may not have fellowship with devils; therefore you may not partake of things offered to idols.

3. The Lord's Table excludes the tables of devils. Those who partake of the Lord's Table may not partake of the tables of devils (v. 21).

Against this, the Corinthians might have said that they did not attend idol-feasts with an evil intention, as if approving idols, but went with family or friends to preserve affection and, if possible, to gain them to Christ. Paul answers, *"Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?"* (v. 22), showing that however they colored their attendance, they incurred God's wrath. He further teaches that it is unlawful to eat things offered to idols even at private meals, if by so doing one's example would offend weak brethren and draw them to act against their conscience (v. 28). From Paul's doctrine it follows that it is wickedness—indeed, outright idolatry—to be present at the mass, though one keep his heart and faith ever so firmly for God.

Objections Answered

1) Naaman in the house of Rimmon (2 Kings 5:18). Some say Elisha gave Naaman leave to bow in Rimmon's temple when he said, "Go in peace." Two answers:

- First, Naaman knelt only in a *civil* respect, that the king might lean on his arm; and he publicly professed that he would worship no god

but the God of Israel.

– Second (and more likely), Naaman’s words show two things. *Confession*: he admits it would be sin to enter Rimmon’s temple and bow before idols—hence his repeated plea, “The Lord be merciful to your servant in this thing.” His purpose was not to bow, but to worship the God who had healed him; therefore he asked for two mule-loads of earth from the prophet’s land, to build an altar as a memorial of his healing and a place for spiritual sacrifice in prayer and thanksgiving (v. 17). *Petition*: he asks the prophet’s prayers that he might be constant; and that if, against his purpose and through human frailty, he should be drawn to bow with his king, God would pardon the sin of infirmity. Elisha’s “Go in peace” signifies his prayer for Naaman’s perseverance and pardon if he should fall through weakness—not a license to join idol assemblies. The text therefore grants no warrant to join idolatrous worship; it teaches the contrary.

2) Daniel and the image of Nebuchadnezzar. It is said that only the three youths refused to worship; therefore Daniel must have bowed. Scripture does not record an accusation against Daniel—perhaps none was made, or complaints were not received because he had favor with prince and people. That he did *not* worship appears from his steadfast godliness and his refusal in lesser matters, such as eating the king’s meat (Daniel 1:8).

3) “There is great difference between pagan feasts and the popish mass.” They say the heathen rites were invented by the devil, whereas the mass was first instituted by Christ and later corrupted. I answer: the mass is a compendium of superstition and idolatry. It directs adoration to bread—or the “forms” of bread; it offers Christ’s body as a propitiatory sacrifice really and repeatedly, though it was offered *once for all* with shed blood; it includes adoration of images, invocation of the dead, masses said to the honor of saints and angels, the worship of relics, and the like abominations.

4) “The godly went to the temple in Christ’s day, though abuses abounded.” True; but, first, they were bound by God’s

command to offer sacrifices and perform other parts of worship *at Jerusalem*, and nowhere else (Deuteronomy 16:16). Second, the outward worship in sacrifices and sacraments was not corrupt *in substance*; errors lay chiefly in doctrine, with which the godly did not communicate. But in the Church of Rome both doctrine and sacraments are corrupted in substance and overrun with idolatrous abominations; and their outward worship has more kin to paganism than to the Lord's first institution.

5) “If we do not attend mass, men count us heretics and take offense; and offense must be avoided.” Offense is either **active** (given) or **passive** (taken). Active offense must always be avoided; passive offense cannot wholly be prevented. We must do our duty though men be offended, remembering Christ's rule concerning such: “*Let them alone; they are blind leaders of the blind*” (Matthew 15:14). Moreover, attendance at mass discourages the weak and confirms the obstinate in their idolatry; thus, those who fear lest offense be taken actually *give* offense.

May Christians Enter Idol Temples?

It may be asked whether Christians may lawfully enter the temples of idols. I answer: they may, where they have a *calling* to do so, provided they do not share in superstitions or give any honor to idols, but rather openly profess—by word, deed, or both—their detestation of idols and their service. So Elijah was present with the priests of Baal; so the three youths stood present when the golden image was worshiped; so God's prophet stood by the altar of Bethel when Jeroboam stretched out his hand to offer incense (1 Kings 13); so Paul was present in Athens and, in the very place of idolatry, observed their devotions (Acts 17:23). At the coronation of Maximilian in Frankfurt, the Protestant princes brought the emperor to the church and to his seat, then withdrew without doing any reverence—thereby professing their dislike of popish idols and their worship.

It is objected that the prophet prayed in the very place where idolatry was practiced, since he prayed at Bethel for the king's arm to be restored (1 Kings 13:6). He did not sin; for to the clean, things indifferent are clean. The place—though polluted by others—was clean to the clean prophet. The Jews, living among idolaters, were commanded to worship God facing the temple at Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:48; Daniel 6:10). God heard the prophet's prayer—restoring the king's arm by miracle—and thereby approved it. A prayer offered in an idolatrous place is no approval of idolatry, if there is open profession against it and the prayer is required by some necessity—as in the prophet's case, to convince the king of his impiety (v. 8).

It is further objected that since the prophet refused to eat there, he should also have refused to pray there. Not so. God appointed abstinence from meat as the sign of detesting Bethel's idolatry—not abstinence from prayer. Nor does this example warrant attendance at idolatrous services in order *there* to worship the true God; for the prophet did not dissemble, but openly professed the truth against idolaters.

On the contrary, if people are not resolved to profess their detestation of idolatrous worship—whether by word, gesture, or some other open way—but only, out of curiosity, desire to see “new fashions,” and on that account enter the temples of idols, they ought not to do so. By such behavior they tempt God; they offend weak believers and, by their example, draw them to do the same; and, lastly, by their very presence they confirm obstinate idolaters in their superstition. The same must be said of those who, without any calling, leave the bounds of the church and travel into idolatrous lands merely to see and to be seen.

Concerning civil society with such persons, two points must be handled: what fellowship may be used with them, and what may not. First, we may use their society when necessity requires, for that cannot be avoided unless we would utterly refuse the fellowship of mankind. Paul, who forbids the Corinthians to keep company with a

“brother” who is an idolater, nevertheless gives them liberty to converse with the idolaters of the world (1 Corinthians 5:10–11). This may seem strange, but the reason is that the number of believers then was small, while the rest of the world was given to idolatry; it was therefore impossible to avoid their society unless one meant to go out of the world. On this necessity Paul permits the Church in his day to use the fellowship of idolaters. For the same reason he says, “If any of them that believe not bids you to a feast, go if you will” (1 Corinthians 10:27).

Second, believers may lawfully join with idolaters in the society of concord. By the general calling of Christianity we are bound to pursue peace with all. On this ground the Church may make covenants of peace with idolaters upon even and just conditions: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness” (Hebrews 12:14); “If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). Thus Abraham made a league of peace with Aner and Eschol, kings among the Amorites, and with Abimelech; Isaac with Abimelech; Jacob with Laban; and Heber the Kenite with Jabin, a foreign king (Genesis 14; 21; 26; 31; Judges 4:17). These examples have sufficient warrant; for what we may lawfully do, we may lawfully bind ourselves to do.

Third, we may engage in any fellowship with them that arises from our particular callings. Thus Christ, the Savior of the world, conversed with publicans and sinners. Thus Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, entered Athens and observed their devotions (Acts 17). It is God’s command that a believing wife is not to forsake her unbelieving husband, if he is willing to dwell with her (1 Corinthians 7:13). If it be alleged that Ezra compelled Israel to put away their Ammonite, Moabite, and other heathen wives (Ezra 10:3), I answer that those unions were no marriages. First, because those nations were, by God’s law, civilly dead—God had commanded their destruction unless they accepted peace when offered (Deuteronomy 20:10). Second, because they were not only idolaters but enticers to idolatry, God expressly forbade the Jews to marry them unless they

repented and changed their religion. In view of that absolute prohibition, those unions were nullities, as incestuous unions are no marriages.

As for fellowship that is forbidden us with idolaters, it is the society of amity—that is, intimacy and special love. Two examples appear in Scripture. One is marriage contracts with idolaters, which Scripture expressly condemns as “an abomination in Israel” and a profanation of God’s name, “when Judah marries the daughter of a strange god” (Malachi 2:11). Boaz indeed married Ruth the Moabitess, but she had already been received into Israel by a former marriage, and she believed in Israel’s God: “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Samson also married a Philistine woman, but that was by divine instigation and, consequently, by special appointment of God (Judges 14:4). Again, it is urged that God expressly allowed Israel to marry heathen women taken captive in war (Deuteronomy 21:10–11). I answer: that law is one of toleration, not approbation—God, for the hardness of their hearts, permitted an evil that could not be wholly removed by policy. This appears in two particulars. Before marriage, the woman must be “deformed,” as it were, by shaving her head, allowing her nails to grow, laying aside the garments of her captivity, and mourning a full month for father and mother. The end was either to breed dislike in the Israelite of his intended marriage, or at least to signify a change of religion, in appearance if not in reality, in the espoused party.

The second example is that of leagues for mutual aid and protection, which may not be contracted between believers and idolaters. Jehoshaphat, for making such a league with Ahab, was reproved: “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord” (2 Chronicles 19:2). What we may not do, we may not covenant to do; and we may not mutually give and receive aid and protection from idolaters. This tends to God’s dishonor, causing idolaters to boast that the people of God cannot stand without their help. It also occasions idolatry and often entangles God’s people in the same

judgments that befall idolaters. The decline of Greece and Hungary has been hastened by leagues of amity with the Turks. It is objected that Abraham made such a covenant with the Amorites—Aner, Eschol, and Mamre—and they aided him in rescuing Lot and in defeating the kings (Genesis 14:13). I answer: first, they may well have been believers embracing Abraham's faith; nothing proves the contrary. Second, if they were unbelievers, the covenant was one of peace only, and they aided Abraham not at his request but by a special and secret motion of God. Third, the Fathers sometimes acted according to prevailing customs which God later corrected by law; their examples are not a rule in all things. Lastly, I suppose Abraham joined them against a common enemy; the protection they afforded him was as necessary for themselves as for him and his household.

One exception must not be omitted. Suppose the husband is an idolater and is content to dwell with his believing wife. She is then to live with him not only in the society of peace but also of amity, performing all duties of love that belong to a wife, so far as conscience allows. Paul's precept is that marriage—and the duties of marriage—are to be maintained by the believing party with an unbeliever, provided the unbeliever is content (1 Corinthians 7:13–14). It may be objected that by this means the believer exposes himself or herself to the danger of idolatry. Not so: God protects those who call upon Him, who do not thrust themselves into danger but bear the hardship into which their calling has brought them. Again, if the unbelieving party entices the other and uses every means, fair or foul, to draw him or her to idolatry, the believer may withdraw for a time and omit certain marital duties; for this is as if the unbelieving party had departed. In truth, the party is said to depart in whom the cause of departing lies; so in the Church, the schismatic is the one who causes the schism, not necessarily the one who separates.

It is further objected: "A Christian may not become a member of a harlot; much less should one be made one flesh with an idolater, since idolatry is a great sin." The cases are not alike. The fornicator

consents to fornication; the believing spouse, in rendering the duties of marriage, does not thereby consent to the idolatry of the unbelieving spouse. The fornicator willingly joins himself to a harlot; the believer would rather be yoked with a believer and not with an infidel.

Lastly, it is asked: “If divorce is lawful for adultery, why not for idolatry, which is spiritual adultery?” I answer: no sin, considered simply as sin and not breaking the marriage covenant, is of itself a proper cause of divorce. It is not every kind of idolatry, but the sin of adultery, that breaks the marriage bond.

How Many Ways the Word “Son” or “Child” Is Used in Scripture

Thus far I have explained the meaning of the commandment, “*Keep yourselves from idols.*” I now turn to the reason for the commandment, found in the term *babes* or *little children*. In Scripture, the word *child* is applied to those who are in some manner inferior to others, and it is used in ten distinct senses.

First, those who descend from others by blood or natural generation are called children—a matter so plain as to need no proof.

Second, those in the direct line of descent are termed children. Christ said to the Jews, “Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness” (John 6:49), though that event occurred fifteen hundred years earlier. Likewise, He said, “You build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed” (Luke 11:47), though those murders had taken place five hundred years before. Thus a widow is as a parent to her nephew (1 Timothy 5:4), and even those who descend by a collateral line may be reckoned as children.

Third, subjects are called children. David addresses Saul as “my father, O king” (1 Samuel 24:11). In like manner, Abimelech is called

both father and king.

Fourth, successors in right of inheritance are named children. Jeconiah, though childless, is said to have begotten Salathiel, because Salathiel, as the next heir of David's line, succeeded Jeconiah in the kingdom of Judah (Jeremiah 22:30; Matthew 1:12).

Fifth, those guided by the counsel of others are called children, as when Joseph said, "God has made me a father to Pharaoh" (Genesis 45:8).

Sixth, servants are sometimes termed children, as Naaman's servants said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you a great thing, would you not have done it?" (2 Kings 5:13).

Seventh, younger men and women, in respect to their elders, are regarded as children. Paul instructs, "Rebuke not an elder, but exhort him as a father" (1 Timothy 5:1).

Eighth, those under the care or guardianship of others are called children. Thus, when Christ commended His mother to John, He said, "Behold your mother," and to her, "Behold your son" (John 19:26). Job likewise declares, "I was a father to the poor" (Job 29:16).

Ninth, those who learn from others are termed children. Jubal is called "the father of all who play the harp and organ" (Genesis 4:21).

Tenth, scholars and disciples are called the sons of their teachers. Elisha cried, "My father, my father!" to Elijah (2 Kings 2:12). Similarly, King Joash addressed Elisha with the same words (2 Kings 13:14). Paul says to the Corinthians, "You have many instructors, but not many fathers" (1 Corinthians 4:15), and to the Galatians, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).

In this same sense, John calls all true believers *my little children*, signifying his tender affection and fatherly care for the universal

Church and for each believer individually. By this affectionate title, he seeks to press more deeply upon their hearts the commandment concerning idolatry, that it may be more diligently remembered and obeyed.

Having thus explained the reason for the command, I now earnestly exhort all who desire their own salvation to take it to heart and to persevere in obedience to the end. To this end, let them first consider the gravity of the sin forbidden. The prophet declares, “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Samuel 15:23). The greatness of this sin appears in two chief respects.

First, to erect any image of God is to abolish His majesty and glory. Paul says, “The Gentiles changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:23). To attempt to represent the presence or majesty of a great monarch by the image of a beast—an ape wearing a crown and holding a scepter—would be an intolerable insult. How much greater, then, is the dishonor done to the infinite Majesty of heaven when men presume to portray Him under the likeness of any created thing.

Second, the worship of idols is in truth the worship of the devil, for it is instituted by him, according to his pleasure, in direct opposition to the will of God. Moreover, we must consider the vile attendants and consequences that accompany idolatry—namely, impurity and fornication. In divine judgment, those who give themselves to spiritual fornication are often abandoned to bodily fornication. Paul says that because the Gentiles dishonored God by idolatry, “He gave them up to uncleanness, to the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (Romans 1:24). When the Israelites turned from God to idols, they frequently fell also into unnatural sins. In Italy, for their idolatries, men are left to themselves—to tolerate brothels and abound in whoredom and impurity.

Third, those who worship idols cut themselves off from God and Christ, as has already been shown.

Lastly, the punishment of idolatry is double. For the soul, there is “its part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8); for the body, captivity or destruction. The Lord says, “Because they have provoked Me to jealousy with that which is not God, I will provoke them to jealousy with those who are not a people” (Deuteronomy 32:21). Thus, in the latter days, the horsemen from the river Euphrates—that is, the Saracens or Turks—shall destroy “those who worship idols of gold, and silver, and brass” (Revelation 9:20), namely, the idolaters of the Roman Church.

That the Church of Rome Maintains Idolatry

If anyone is not yet persuaded that the Church of Rome is guilty of idolatry, let him consider the following reasons.

First, Babylon is a worshiper of idols.

Rome is Babylon.

Therefore, Rome is a worshiper of idols.

The major premise is evident, for Babylon is called the “mother of fornications” (Revelation 17:5) and the “dwelling place of devils” (Revelation 18:2) because of her idolatries. The minor is likewise clear, for Babylon is described as “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:18)—that is, Rome, which in John’s day was the seat of the empire.

It is answered by some that John speaks of heathen Rome before it received the gospel. I reply that this is false. For Rome, under the emperors, did not “make the kings of the earth drink of the wine of her fornications,” since it left every nation to its own religion and devotions. It was the common error of the heathen to approve all religions and to admit the sects of all philosophers. Themistius, the philosopher, sought to persuade the emperor Valens that “the variety of sects is pleasing to God, so long as He is worshiped in various ways.” Leo likewise said of Rome: “This city, not knowing the Author of her advancement, when she ruled almost all nations, gave herself to the errors of all nations, and thought she had attained great height in religion when she refused no falsehood.” Thus, pagan Rome drank from the cup of the nations but did not cause the nations to drink from hers. Therefore, the passage in Revelation refers to Rome as governed by the pope.

Again, in Revelation 13:1, there appears a beast rising from the sea with seven heads and ten horns—which, by common agreement among interpreters, represents the Roman Empire. Another beast rises from the earth (v. 11), having the voice of a dragon but the horns of a lamb. This signifies the state of the Church of Rome governed by the pope. For it “does all that the first beast did,” and “in his sight.” It “gives breath to the image of the beast,” reviving and putting into practice the dignity, authority, and tyranny of the ancient emperors. Thus Irenaeus long ago understood this chapter, saying that the number of the beast is contained in the word *Lateinos*, which means *a Latin*—that is, a Roman.

Abbot Joachim, commenting on Revelation, writes: “Some who bear the appearance of the seat of God—that is, the catholic church—are made the seat of the beast, which is the kingdom of Antichrist, reigning everywhere in his members from the beginning of the church.” Again he says, “We have by tradition from our fathers that Rome is spiritually Babylon.” And again: “The merchants of the earth are the priests themselves, who sell prayers and masses for money, making the house of prayer a house of merchandise.” He continues, “We know that not only bishops and priests, but also abbots, monks, and those reputed religious, though they seem to be so, are entangled in the affairs of Babylon that they may grow rich.”

Honorius speaks yet more plainly, declaring that the pope and his clergy are the very Babylon of the Apocalypse. The substance of his words is this: “Turn to the citizens of Babylon, and see what manner of men they are and by what streets they go. Behold her princes and judges—in them is the seat of the beast. Turn to the clergy—in them you will see the tent of the beast. Look upon the cloisters of monks—and in them you will find the tabernacles of the beast. Behold the houses of nuns—and you shall see in them a bed prepared for the beast.”

From all this, the conclusion necessarily follows: Rome, governed by the pope, is a worshiper of idols. Yet some maintain that if learned

papists and Protestants could confer together, they would be found to differ not in substance but in circumstance. This is false—unless they can somehow make idolatry a mere circumstance.

A Second Reason

That which is merely imagined in the mind is an idol. This is the express doctrine of Theodoret and Origen, who affirm that not only the carved images of imagined beings but even the imagined beings themselves—Titans, Sphinxes, Centaurs, men with dogs' heads, and such—are called *idols*.

Now I argue: the images which the Church of Rome declares to be representations of the true God and of Christ are, in fact, images of things that are not. For there is no such god who annexes His presence to carved or painted images, who hears and helps those who pray before them more than elsewhere, or who will be worshiped *in* or *by* images. If such a god exists, He has either revealed Himself or not. If He has, let the promise of His presence at such images be produced; let the command to worship Him by such means be shown. If neither can be proved—as indeed they cannot—the worship is vain, and the being worshiped is but a fiction of man's imagination.

In like manner, the image of the Virgin Mary is an image of a thing that is not. For there is no mother of Christ who is present with her image and hears the prayers of men and women there offered. No one on earth can, by sufficient reason, prove it so; yet for all our actions—especially those of religious worship—faith must be the ground.

A Third Reason

To turn the glory of God into the image of a corruptible man is idolatry. This Paul demonstrates fully in Romans 1.

Now the papists represent God in the form of a man, and the learned among them defend it. One of their own says, "It is lawful to paint

God the Father in the likeness of an old man, and the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove.” But such paintings change “the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of corruptible man.”

Let Augustine speak: “We must not think,” he says, “that God the Father is circumscribed by human shape, or that when we think of Him a right or left side should enter our mind. Nor, when it is said that the Father sits, must we imagine Him bending His knees, lest we fall into that sacrilege with which the apostle curses those who changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of corruptible man. For it is extreme wickedness that a Christian should set up such an image of God in a temple—much more wicked to set it up in his heart, where indeed is God’s true temple, if it be cleansed from earthly desire and error.” Furthermore, the Father never appeared in such a form; it was the Son who was manifested.

A Fourth Reason

To invoke a senseless or inanimate creature is idolatry. Yet the Roman Church does this when it says, “All hail, O Cross, our only hope, in this time of the Passion; increase righteousness to the godly, and grant pardon to the guilty.” If anyone says these words are directed to Christ, I reply that they are addressed to the wood of the cross itself. For the words immediately preceding in the hymn are these: “Blessed is that Cross on whose arms the price of the world was hung; it became the beam to weigh His body and seized the prey from hell.”

A Fifth Reason

The worship of God devised and established by man is, in effect, idolatry; for it is a worship that God abhors and rejects. He will be worshiped precisely according to His Word, without addition, subtraction, or alteration (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32).

The Worship of God in the Church of Rome Devised by Man

The worship of God in the Church of Rome is devised and instituted by man. This may be clearly shown in five particulars.

I. The Invocation of Departed Saints

Conclusion 1. For the first 350 years after Christ, there was no practice or acknowledgment of prayer to saints in the true church of God. Until two hundred years after Christ, the intercession of saints was utterly unknown, as is evident from the writings of Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement, and Tertullian. Around the year 240, Origen ventured to suggest the doctrine of the intercession of saints—but only as a private conjecture, not as public doctrine. Moreover, about three hundred years after Christ, the learned fathers argued against the Arians in this manner: *Christ is invoked; therefore, Christ is God*. Such reasoning would have been absurd if prayer to saints had already been established.

Conclusion 2. Around four hundred years after Christ, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzen gave further occasion to prayer for the dead. By rhetorical figure they sometimes addressed the departed, speaking to them as if present—after the manner of orators. These speeches may appear to be prayers but are, in fact, mere expressions of wish or remembrance. They even spoke in this way to the souls of the damned, such as Julian, and to things without life, as to the Passover. Furthermore, their words to saints were uncertain and hesitant: *“Hear us, if you have any care for us—if any sense remains in you.”* And they assumed, rather than proved, that the saints were present to hear them.

Conclusion 3. The invocation of saints did not enter the public liturgy of the church until five hundred years after Christ. Augustine, writing about four hundred years after, says of public prayer: *“We do not make gods of martyrs. Their names are recited by the priest, but no prayer is made to them.”* About the year 500, Petrus Gnaphaeus, a heretic, is said to have first inserted the invocation of saints into public prayers. And Gregory the Great, about the year 600, brought prayers for the dead into the litanies of the Western Church.

II. Images of Saints

Conclusion 1. There was no use of images among Christians—especially in their churches—for at least 370 years after Christ. The contrary cannot be shown.

Conclusion 2. Solitary images of God or of saints were not permitted in churches for any religious use until more than four hundred years after Christ. The contrary also cannot be shown.

Conclusion 3. Images set up in churches as “laymen’s books” were not publicly worshiped until after six hundred years. Gregory the Great wrote to Serenus, bishop of Marseilles: *“Because you have forbidden the worship of images, we praise you entirely; but because you have broken them, we reprove you.”* I say “publicly,” because certain private persons and particular churches, after four hundred years, began superstitiously to adore the wood of the cross and its fragments. Yet this was a private corruption, not the act of the catholic church.

Conclusion 4. The public adoration of images was never authorized until the year 789, in the Second Council of Nicea. Before this time, nothing in the writings of the fathers supports religious worship of images beyond mere reverence or civil veneration. Moreover, the decision of that council lacked universality. For soon after, a Synod

at Frankfort—attended by Charlemagne and the legates of the bishop of Rome—condemned the Council of Nicea as heretical. Houedan, the English historian, records this: “*Charles, king of the Franks, received a book of a synod sent him from Constantinople. In which book, alas, many things are found contrary to true faith—especially that, with the consent of nearly three hundred bishops of the East, it was decreed that images are to be worshiped. But this the church of God utterly curses. Against it, Albin wrote an epistle, marvelously confirmed by the authority of Scripture, which he brought to the king in the name of our bishops and princes.*”

III. Religious Worship

One Conclusion. The distinction between *latria* (the worship due to God alone) and *dulia* (the service given to saints) was not known or received in the church until about four hundred years after Christ. Augustine was among the first to use these terms, yet in another sense. He used *latria* to denote the worship prescribed in the first table of the law; and though he used *dulia* for honor greater than civil respect, he expressly denied it to saints. “*We honor the saints with charity, not with service,*” he writes. Again, “*Let not the worship of dead men be our religion.*” Let anyone produce, if he can, an author within five hundred years after Christ who ascribes *dulia*—in the sense of religious worship—to any mere creature.

IV. The Crucifix

One Conclusion. Crucifixes were not in use until about four hundred years after Christ. I grant that the simple cross was used, but not the cross bearing the image of Christ. The testimonies of Justin Martyr, Lactantius, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and Chrysostom are often cited to the contrary. Yet they speak only of the *real* crucifix—that is, of Christ Himself crucified upon His own cross—not of the *formed* or carved crucifix. The *Book of Visiting the Sick*,

which mentions the painted crucifix, falsely bears the name of Augustine; it is a later counterfeit.

Metaphrastes reports that a crystal cross with the image of Christ appeared to Procopius the martyr, who was commanded to fashion one of gold and silver. He carried it into battle and, as it is said, gained victory over the Saracens. But this story is worthless, for Metaphrastes is a known fabulist. Yet even his tale reveals that in the days of Diocletian—around three hundred years after Christ—such crucifixes were not in use, for Procopius made one only by special revelation. It appears that crucifixes were not publicly received in the church until about seven hundred years after Christ. For then the Sixth Council of Constantinople, whose canons are genuine, commanded that the image of Christ be set up in place of the *Agnus Dei*.

V. The Worship of Christ and His Image

Conclusion 1. The adoration of the sacrament—or of Christ *in, at,* and *under* the form of bread, after the Roman manner—was unknown in the church of God for eight hundred years after Christ. For transubstantiation, which is the foundation of that adoration, was not known or accepted by the learned until after that time. Let those of the Roman faith study until their heads and hearts ache—they will never be able to prove the contrary. Honorius III is said to have instituted this adoration about the year of our Lord 1220.

Conclusion 2

The worship called *latria*, or divine honor, was not given by the learned to the image of Christ in any form for a thousand years after His ascension—and even beyond. This the papists themselves see

and confess. Catharin writes, *“Indeed, none of the ancients (as far as I have read and noted) ever said that images are to be worshiped with the worship of latria, but all detested such speech.”* Again, he says, *“It is nowhere found in the ancient writers that an image, as an image, is to be adored with latria, but rather the contrary—that it is not to be adored. This was often protested in the answers of the bishops of the Seventh Synod, and in its decree most plainly; which, I verily believe, never came to the hands of Thomas.”* Of the same judgment is Francis Suarez, the Jesuit, who likewise thinks that Thomas Aquinas never saw the acts of the Seventh Synod, that is, the Second Council of Nicea.

From what has now been said, it clearly appears that many chief parts of religious worship have been devised by men in the Church of Rome. Consequently, their worship is, in effect, idolatry. Yet, suppose for argument’s sake that the worship of Rome were not idolatry; nevertheless, it is still corrupt and unsound, because it is **subject to the possibility of idolatry**—and that is enough to condemn it. The argument stands thus:

The true worship of God is not subject to the possibility of idolatry; for there can be no possibility of darkness in light, nor of evil in goodness. But the worship of God as practiced in the Roman Church is subject to such a possibility. For it is possible that the one who manifests his presence by signs, and hears the prayers offered before images, is the devil himself—and that he performs these things by satanic operation. There is no such danger in the sacraments or in the Word preached, because both are founded upon the express institution of God. Images, and the worship performed before them, have no such divine foundation.

Again, in the adoration of images, their own teachers prescribe three cautions: first, that no confidence be placed in the image; second, that we ask nothing of it; and third, that we ascribe to it no divinity. Yet it is not only possible—but exceedingly common—that the common people neglect one or more of these cautions. Augustine

observes, “*Who worships or prays before an image without being so affected as to think he is heard by it, and to hope that what he desires will be accomplished by it?*” Again, he says, “*The likeness of form and the counterfeit arrangement of lines lead on—and, by a weak and sickly affection, captivate—the frailer sort of men.*”

Moreover, it is possible that the priest himself fails in his intention during the consecration of the host—either through wandering thoughts, or by deliberate malice, or by neglecting some word or phrase of the formula. In that case, there is no valid consecration. If no consecration, then no transubstantiation; if no transubstantiation, then Christ is not adored, but rather a mere piece of bread is worshiped in place of the living God.

Further, it is possible that some of those who are worshiped as saints in heaven are, in truth, no saints at all, but damned souls in hell. Jerome himself said, “*We worship the bodies of many on earth whose souls are tormented in hell.*” Many of the images now venerated in the Church of Rome were at first invented, not to represent the persons of men, but spiritual mysteries, after the manner of emblems.

For example, the figure now called *Saint Margaret*, shown as destroying a dragon after being devoured by it, was originally a representation of the calling of the Gentile church—gathered by the preaching of the gospel out of the very jaws of the devil who once devoured them. *Saint George on horseback* was at first an emblem of Christ our Savior, who conquered the devil for the deliverance of His church. *Saint Christopher*—a mere fiction—was nothing more than a symbol of the Christian life, as his name itself declares. *Christopherus* means “one who bears Christ,” that is, who carries the name of Christ before men.

These and similar emblematic pictures, once designed to express divine mysteries, were in time mistaken for representations of actual saints and are worshiped to this day as such. To this may be added

that many relics are manifestly counterfeit, and that the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is of no better authority—for there is no certainty in history to prove such an assumption ever occurred.

Thus much, then, concerning the idolatry of our times.

Part II

The True Worship of God

Of Divine or Religious Worship

What the Worship of God Is

Having already declared what idols are and how they must be avoided, we must now proceed further. For it is the nature of divine law, when it forbids something, to command the contrary duty. Therefore, when idols are forbidden in this text, the true worship of God is enjoined. The very purpose of this passage is to charge us to preserve ourselves in the true worship of God. Of this duty I will now speak briefly, for it is of great weight and moment.

That we may rightly keep ourselves in the true worship of God, we must first consider what is meant by *the worship of God*; and second, what are the spiritual parts or principal heads thereof.

The Foundation of Worship

That we may rightly understand what is meant by the worship or service of God, six points must be distinctly considered. The first is **the foundation** of God's worship.

They who would truly worship God must lay the foundation of that worship in their hearts; and this foundation consists of two parts: the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves.

Concerning the knowledge of God, the prophet Isaiah says, *“The Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation, and shall vow vows unto the Lord”* (Isaiah 19:21). Likewise Paul says, *“How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?”* (Romans 10:14).

If it be asked, “What knowledge of God is required?” I answer: We must not only know God as He is in Himself—that is, the unity of the Godhead and the Trinity of persons, with their properties and works—but we must also know Him as He is *to us*, that is, our God, extending His mercy and providence over us. For the experiential sense of God’s favor and goodness is what breeds in us the true worship of Him.

As for the knowledge of ourselves, two things must be known. First, what we are by nature: vile, wretched, and miserable sinners—unable to do any good, prone to all evil, and deserving many thousand damnations. This knowledge of our misery is not the cause that moves us to worship God, yet it serves as the occasion of it. The woman of Samaria scorned Christ until she was brought to see her sin; then she revered Him as the Messiah (John 4). The prodigal son, once awakened to the sense of his misery, came and yielded himself in humble subjection to his father (Luke 15:21).

Second, we must know what we are by grace—namely, the children and servants of God, heirs of His kingdom. This knowledge greatly inclines us to the worship of God; for His mercies are the very motives that draw men to render to Him their true and reasonable service (Romans 12:1).

From this doctrine two things arise: our **sin** and our **duty**.

The sin is noted by the prophet: *“There is none that understands, and seeks after God”* (Psalm 14:4). This is evident by daily experience. Many rest content with that natural knowledge of God

which creation affords, and they do not strive to know Him as He reveals Himself in His written Word—especially in the covenant of grace. And such is the force of self-love in men that they cannot bear to consider what they are in themselves, apart from Christ. Thus, most men offer a worship to God—but one without foundation.

Our duty, therefore, is to labor for the knowledge of God and of ourselves, and to grow therein continually. For it is from this knowledge that all the godly have stirred themselves to honor God. David blessed and praised the Lord and brought Him gifts and offerings because he knew that kingdom, power, and glory belong to God, and that all things are His (1 Chronicles 29:10–11). Daniel made solemn confession and prayer because he knew God to be great and terrible, keeping covenant and mercy with those who love Him (Daniel 9:4–5).

The foundation of the last nine commandments lies in the first: “*You shall have no other gods before Me*” (Exodus 20:3). And the foundation of this commandment is the knowledge and faith that Jehovah is our God. This is shown in that the words “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt*” are joined inseparably with the first commandment in the Hebrew text.

Moreover, when God is not rightly known, He is not rightly worshiped. Instead, the idols of men’s imaginations—or devils themselves—receive the worship. Thus Paul says of the Galatians, “*When you knew not God, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods*” (Galatians 4:8). For such as our knowledge is, such is our worship.

The Rule of Worship

The second point concerns **the rule** of worship. Nothing may be called the worship of God except that which He Himself has ordained in His Word and commanded as His own worship (Deuteronomy

12:8, 32). We are forbidden, under the curse of God, to add to or take away from His precepts, wherein He prescribes how He will be worshiped.

When the Jews worshiped the true God after the inventions of the Gentiles, though their intent was to honor God alone, yet Scripture says they “worshiped devils, and not God” (Deuteronomy 32:17). Again, the Lord forbids us in His worship to “follow after our own hearts and eyes” (Numbers 15:39), or “walk in the statutes of our fathers” (Ezekiel 20:18), but only in His commandments. It is vanity, He says, to “teach as doctrines the commandments of men” (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:9).

Therefore, if we would worship God with “reasonable service,” we must “prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2). Those works only are good and acceptable to Him which “He has prepared beforehand for us to walk in” (Ephesians 2:10). “Voluntary religion,” or will-worship (Colossians 2:22–23), is utterly condemned. Thus, nothing may be called divine worship except what God Himself prescribes.

It is objected: “When a work is done without commandment, yet with intent to honor God, it is still His worship.” I answer, this is false. For any work or action to be the worship of God, four things are required:

1. The person must be regenerate;
2. The matter of the work must be commanded by God;
3. It must be done in faith; and
4. It must be directed in intention to God’s glory.

Second, the intention to honor God is not good unless it be to honor Him by obedience to what He commands.

Again, it is said: “A work done in love to God, though not commanded, is worship.” I answer: True love to God keeps itself within the bounds of His Word and will; for “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Galatians 5:14).

It is further objected that “vows in the Old Testament were part of divine worship and were not commanded.” I answer: Though God did not command all men to make vows, yet He declared in His Word that such vows were acceptable to Him, for He prescribed their matter, manner, and observance.

Others allege that Mary, when she anointed Christ, had no commandment to do so, yet her act was acceptable to Him (Mark 14:6). I answer: Though she had no *particular* commandment, she had a *general* one; for her act was an expression of her faith and love to Christ, both of which are commanded.

Likewise, Paul’s example is cited—preaching the gospel freely and expecting reward from God, though he was not commanded to preach without pay (1 Corinthians 9:18). I answer: To receive support for preaching is in itself indifferent, but in Corinth it was not so, because of the potential offense. Therefore, Paul preached freely, as he was bound to do, lest he misuse his authority. For that which is indifferent ceases to be so when it becomes a cause of stumbling and then becomes a duty.

Lastly, some urge Christ’s words: “*He that heareth you, heareth me*” (Luke 10:16), and hence argue that the commandments of pastors prescribe the worship of God. I answer: first, the text properly applies not to all teachers, but to the apostles. Second, even if applied more generally, it must be understood with limitation. For the ministry of Christ’s messengers is this: “*Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). As Christ was sent by the Father, so He sends His ministers (John 20:21). But He Himself said, “*As my Father has commanded me, so I do*” (John 14:31).

The Rule, End, and Persons of Divine Worship

The Rule Applied

The truth of this rule is clear, and we must lay it up in our hearts as a precious treasure, never allowing ourselves to be deprived of it—for its use is great. By it we may discern the profaneness of our times. All men can say, “God must be worshiped.” But when it comes to the point, *what* is the worship with which they honor Him? Surely, whatever they themselves choose. Some worship God with their “good meaning”; some with their “good dealing”; others with the mere babbling of a few words—reciting the Apostles’ Creed or the Ten Commandments as though they were prayers. Such service is common, but alas, it is poor service. For the rule of divine honor is not the will of the worshiper, but the will of the One who is worshiped.

From this we also learn to detest the worship performed in the Church of Rome. For it abounds in will-worship—practices of man’s devising, having no warrant from God, either by commandment or promise. Of this sort are the sacraments of penance, confirmation, matrimony, orders, and extreme unction; the supposed consecration of Christ’s body by five words, “*For this is my body*”; the oblation and sacrifice of Christ in the mass for the sins of the living and the dead; the vows of perpetual poverty, celibacy, and regular obedience; the religious distinction of meats, garments, and times; the hallowing of ashes, palms, bread, and water for driving away devils and preserving the health of body and soul. Let them bring forth the Word of God for these things—if they can.

They plead for them by appealing to “tradition.” I answer: ecclesiastical traditions are not the Word of God, but the word of

man. And as for so-called apostolic traditions, they are either of no weight or doubtful at best. For how can we be certain that they truly came from the apostles, when no one says so but some of the fathers—whose testimony, being human, is subject to error?

The End of Divine Worship

The third point concerns **the end** for which God has appointed all His worship. It is not that we might give or add glory to God—for nothing can be added to absolute perfection—but that we might acknowledge, confess, and praise the infinite glory that is already His.

Furthermore, the end of this acknowledgment is *our own happiness and salvation*. “This is eternal life,” says Christ, “to know You, the only true God” (John 17:3). “Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you” (Psalm 50:15). Paul declares, “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Therefore, we must be ever admonished to worship God with diligence and reverence, for His worship is not His benefit, but ours. In glorifying Him, we find our own salvation.

Of Persons Fit to Worship God

The fourth point concerns **who are able and fit to perform worship acceptable to God**. They only are fit who are turned to God and renewed by the Holy Spirit. The worship offered by any other is not worship, but sin. “*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*” (Proverbs 15:8).

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord declares that the oblations and sacrifices of the Jews “were an abomination unto Him,” and that He

“hated them, because their hands were full of blood” (Isaiah 1:13–15). Again He says, “He that kills a bullock is as if he slew a man; he that sacrifices a lamb as if he cut off a dog’s neck” (Isaiah 66:3). And because of their abominations, it is written, “God hears not sinners” (John 9:31).

Whatever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Therefore, whatever worship is performed by unrepentant sinners is sin, because it is not of faith. The unconverted man does not acknowledge his guilt; he who does not acknowledge his guilt does not acknowledge God’s justice or His mercy; and he who does not acknowledge God’s justice and mercy cannot truly worship Him. Hence, he that turns not to God cannot sincerely worship God.

If it be asked, “How can the worship of God be sin in any man, since it is commanded?” I answer: sins are of two kinds. The first is when something is done that is directly contrary to God’s commandment. The second is when something commanded is done, but not in the manner God commands it. Thus, the worship of God performed by the wicked is sin: for though they do what God commands, they do not do it as He commands.

It may also be asked, “If the worship of God is sin in the unregenerate, should they then not be exhorted to worship God? For we may not exhort anyone to sin.” I answer: exhortations must not be made to do anything that is sinful in itself. Now the worship of God is not sinful in itself, but only accidentally so—because it is performed by ungodly persons, to whom, being unclean, all things are unclean (Titus 1:15). Therefore, the unconverted are indeed to be exhorted to worship God, but in proper order—first to repent and turn to Him, and then to worship Him.

Here we must note the grave error of many, who live without reformation or repentance, yet imagine that if they pray, hear sermons, and receive the Lord’s Supper, they do great service to God—as though He were indebted to them for it. In truth, they do

nothing but provoke Him to anger; not because they worship, but because they worship without faith and repentance. Likewise, their supposed “love of God,” their “strong faith,” and their “confidence in Christ,” are mere fictions of the mind so long as they remain unreconciled in heart and life.

Hence we are taught that if we would indeed serve and worship God rightly, we must first turn to Him with all our hearts—renewing continually our first repentance, and seeking reconciliation with both God and man. “When you stand praying, forgive,” says Christ (Mark 11:25). The believing Corinthians, for lack of this reconciliation, brought judgment upon themselves when they came to the Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 11:29).

The Whole Man Engaged in Worship

It may now be asked, in what part of man does true worship reside? I answer: in the whole man—both body and soul. “Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Yet there is a distinction to be observed: God is principally and properly worshiped in the spirit. *“The true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit”* (John 4:24). Paul says, *“Whom I serve with my spirit”* (Romans 1:9). And Peter exhorts, *“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts”* (1 Peter 3:15).

By “spirit,” we mean the thoughts of the mind, the conscience, and the affections of the heart—for in these lies the first and chief seat of spiritual worship. The body, meanwhile, is but the instrument of the soul’s devotion.

From this we may discern the vanity of the Roman religion, which consists chiefly in external rites, gestures, and ceremonies—borrowed partly from the Jews and partly from the heathen. But the true religion of the New Testament is spiritual, having few outward ceremonies, and those few ordained by God Himself.

The Place of Worship

The fifth point concerns the particular object or place toward which the worship of God must be directed. Keep this rule in mind: the worship of God—both inward and outward—must be aimed at that in which, and at which, God wills to be worshiped. Now God has strictly bound the worship of the Son, and therefore of Himself, to that “mass and lump” of human nature received into the unity of the Second Person. For this is His universal command concerning Christ: “He is your Lord; worship Him” (Psalm 45:11), and, “Worship Him, all His angels” (Psalm 148:2). Therefore, wherever we know Him to be bodily present, we are bound—by directing body and mind to Him according to the place where He is—to do Him homage. This finite, created manhood carries with it the adoration of the Person to every place in which we certainly know that same manhood to exist substantially. It matters not whether it is seen with the bodily eye. It is enough that we are certain—either by sense or by the Word of God—of Christ’s bodily presence.

By virtue of this command, the magi fell down before the child Jesus and worshiped Him, turning eyes and hearts to the part of the house where they saw Him present (Matthew 2:11). The Canaanite woman came and fell at Christ’s feet, worshiping Him where He stood. Thomas, as soon as he knew that Christ stood before him, directed his speech to Him: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). The disciples adored Him in the clouds as long as they could see Him; and when He was taken from their sight, they still adored Him, directing mind and bodily gesture—not to sun, moon, stars, air, clouds, or any earthly creature—but to the place of heavenly blessedness, beyond this visible world, into which He ascended bodily. There Stephen worshiped Him, and so have all God’s people ever since, lifting hand and heart toward heaven.

As for the ark of the covenant, God commanded, “Exalt the Lord our God, and fall down before His footstool” (Psalm 99:5). By this command Israel was bound to worship by directing themselves toward the ark or mercy seat, as though they saw God visibly present there. Now, in the New Testament, the manhood of Christ is the true propitiation and stands in the stead of the ark. Indeed, since it is part of the Mediator, God is rather to be worshiped in it than at the ark; and it carries the adoration of God to the place where it is certainly known to be, more than the ark ever did. Therefore, since adoration is tied to the manhood of the Son of God, and God is worshiped in it, we in the days of the New Testament are bound by no command to direct our worship toward any place or creature on earth; rather, without respect to this place or that, we must worship “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23), lifting heart and mind to heaven, where our Redeemer sits at the right hand of God.

The Properties of Worship

The sixth and last point concerns the properties of God’s worship; they are three.

First, the worship of God is **incommunicable**. “I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images” (Isaiah 42:8). “Him only shall you serve” (Matthew 4:10). It may be objected that divine adoration is given to the manhood of Christ, which is a creature. I answer: adoration pertains to the whole Christ, lest we seem to divide the Person or separate the natures. Yet we must distinguish between Godhead and manhood. The Godhead is the proper object to which religious adoration is simply and directly directed; the manhood is not so, for no creature is to be honored with divine adoration as such. Athanasius says, “God is to be adored with respect to the Godhead.” Cyril: “Do we adore Immanuel as a man? God forbid. That were dotage and error; for thus we would not differ from those who worship the creature beyond the Creator.” Again,

“The Godhead in Christ is the nature to be adored; the humanity is the nature adoring.”

Nevertheless, though adoration is simply directed to the Godhead, that Godhead is not to be adored **without** the flesh. Athanasius again: “When we adore, we do not separate the Word from the flesh. Who would say, ‘Stand apart from the flesh, that I may adore You’?” Therefore, the very manhood of Christ is to be adored by men and angels with the religious honor due to the Son of God—because it is the manhood of the Word and is received into the unity of the Second Person. But how is it adored? Not directly, as the Godhead is; rather, obliquely, by reason of its union with the Godhead. When subjects offer civil homage to their prince wearing crown and scepter, they do not separate the prince from these ensigns; yet they honor the person directly, and the crown and scepter only by consequence, as signs of royal majesty. So the manhood is adored in the Person of the Son—not properly and simply as the Godhead (for that were damnable idolatry), but so far as it is inseparably united to the Son’s Godhead, not as a garment that may be put on or off, but as a personal constituent of the Second Person. Thus the Mediator worshiped is God-man, one Person.

The catholic church has anathematized those who deny that the flesh of Christ is to be adored; for it is the flesh of God, and in one and the same adoration Christ is to be adored with His flesh. Thomas Aquinas puts it well: the adoration of *latria* is not given to the humanity in respect of itself, but in respect of the divinity to which it is united; and according to that, Christ is not less than the Father. From this, note well: since *latria* is given to Christ’s manhood only by reason of personal union, therefore images of God and of Christ—crucifixes and the like—are not to be worshiped with *latria*. There is no such union between them and God, except in the blind conceit of man.

Further, beyond this religious, oblique adoration, the manhood of Christ—considered even as man—deserves a preeminence of honor

above all creatures. He has received “the name above every name,” at which all things bow in heaven and earth (Philippians 2:10), even the royal name of Judge and Lord of all (Matthew 28:18). In this respect we are commanded, “Kiss the Son” (Psalm 2:12).

If, then, the worship of God is proper to Him and may not be given to man or angel, how are angels and glorified saints to be honored? I answer: whether they appear or not, only a general honor is due—namely, **commemoration** and **imitation**. Commemoration is the reverent remembrance of their persons and graces. Of this the virgin Mary prophesied, “All generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). We have an example in Hebrews 11, where the virtues of the saints are rehearsed. Two cautions here: first, do not fix your mind on the saints, but lift it to God, giving thanks for His mercies in them and for their example toward us—“they glorified God in me,” says Paul (Galatians 1:24). Second, keep not a hypocritical memory, as the Pharisees who built the prophets’ tombs while despising their doctrine (Matthew 23:30), and as Rome magnifies the apostles while persecuting their truth.

The second part is imitation. For this imitation to be praiseworthy (Philippians 3:17), five cautions are needed. (1) Do not imitate actions done on the basis of singular, unrepeatable commands (e.g., Abraham offering Isaac). (2) Do not imitate actions done by extraordinary, heroic impulse (Luke 9:55). (3) Do not imitate personal and unrepeatable acts (Peter’s walking on the sea). (4) Do not imitate their miracles; those served to confirm doctrine for a season. (5) Do not follow them in attire, gestures, natural infirmities, or faults—such mimicry is but apishness. Rather, follow them in the substantial duties of the moral law. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1)—that is, in moral obedience.

If saints or angels should certainly appear, one may honor them with bodily gesture—but only with **civil** honor, such as is due to princes and great personages; no more. And when they do not appear (as in these last times), we may not honor them at all by gesture or speech.

Second, the worship of God must be **free and willing**, not constrained. “Your people shall offer themselves willingly in the day of Your power” (Psalm 110:3). “If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has” (2 Corinthians 8:12). Such service is of the kingdom of God; earthly princes have no like. It springs not from nature, but from the Spirit of grace. Therefore we must pray with David to be established and guided by God’s free Spirit.

Third, the worship of God must be joined with **honesty and comeliness**. “Pray for kings and all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:1–2). “Add to your faith virtue” (2 Peter 1:5)—that is, a grave, sober, decent, modest carriage before all. Such civil virtue is the ornament of divine worship; thus the saying must stand: good conscience and good manners go together. The Lord condemns those who take His Word into their mouths while they refuse reformation in their lives (see Psalm 62:4).

The Comeliness of Worship

Comeliness in the worship of God consists in fitting and proper circumstances of time, place, person, and gesture (1 Corinthians 7:35–36; 14:40). Public worship must be performed by public persons, in public places, and with public and solemn gestures. Private worship is to be rendered by private persons, in private places, with private gestures and signs. Secret worship must be offered secretly to God, and its signs concealed from the eyes and ears of men. Thus Nehemiah prayed in the presence of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:4), and Hannah prayed before Eli the priest: “Her lips moved only, but her voice was not heard” (1 Samuel 1:13).

Men therefore err greatly who imagine that the open church is the most suitable place for private and secret prayers to God.

A Definition of Worship

From the preceding points of doctrine taken together, we may frame this definition:

The worship or service of God is that act by which, upon a right knowledge of Him, we freely render the honor proper to His majesty, from the heart, according to His revealed will.

This worship, thus defined, must be distinguished from that honor which is called *veneration*. Worship properly belongs to persons; veneration belongs to things that pertain to persons.

Veneration is the reverent esteem of anything sacred, or the careful preservation and respectful use of it. Augustine, in this sense, says that we “worship” or “reverence the baptism of Christ.” Likewise, in

the canon law it is written, “Let them diligently hear, and faithfully reverence the words of God.” Thus all holy things belonging to God—His Word, sacraments, and memorials of His mercies—are to be reverently used and esteemed. When David brought home the ark and danced before it, he gave no divine worship to the ark, but veneration.

The Kinds of Worship

The worship of God is twofold—**principal** and **less principal**.

The Lord says, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6)—that is, rather mercy than sacrifice. Here mercy is made the chief and principal worship of God, while sacrifice is also worship, yet the lesser and subordinate.

Principal Worship

The principal worship of God is a work of God within us, by which we are conformed to Him in holiness and goodness, and His image is renewed in us. That this conformity with God is the chief and proper worship of God appears by these reasons:

It is expressly commanded: “Be merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful” (Luke 6:36); “Sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). These commandments declare the essence of divine worship. Thus James writes, “Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

Christ likewise teaches, “The true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). By *spirit* He means not only the heart, but also the renewed motions of the heart by the Holy Spirit—as Paul says, “Love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned” (1 Timothy 1:5). Christ here opposes *spirit* to the ceremonial worship of the Jews, which was carnal and outward, standing in rites that could not sanctify (Hebrews 10:1). By *truth* He means not sincerity merely, but all the real duties that were

shadowed forth by the old ceremonies—especially mortification, renewal of life, and the fruits of holiness.

Paul says, “He that serves Christ in these things”—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—“is acceptable to God” (Romans 14:18). And again, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Every man speaks of serving God, but few think of this true service—which consists in being conformed to His image in righteousness and holiness.

The Properties of Principal Worship

This principal worship has two chief properties.

First, it is eternal. It begins in this life and is perfected in the life to come, for it is that everlasting worship by which angels and glorified saints serve God in heaven. In this it differs from ceremonies and sacraments, which have their end in this present world.

Second, it is pleasing to God in itself, even apart from ceremonies or sacraments, so long as these are not despised—as in the case of the penitent thief upon the cross. The reason is plain: God, being a spiritual and infinite Being, is perfectly sufficient in Himself and receives no delight from anything the creature can contribute, but rather from the communication of His goodness to us, and from all those duties by which we reflect His likeness and magnify His grace.

Thus Paul says that “God is not worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything” (Acts 17:25). And the psalmist records the Lord’s words: “I will not reprove you for your sacrifices; I will

take no bullock out of your house” (Psalm 50:8). Rather, He delights in the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise (Psalm 50:14).

The Parts of Principal Worship

The principal worship of God consists of two parts:

1. **Subjection**—yielding ourselves wholly to God and acknowledging His supreme majesty.
2. **Union**—drawing near to Him and cleaving to Him as the fountain of all goodness.

By subjection we confess our distance and dependence upon His greatness; by union we enjoy communion with Him in His grace and holiness.

In Subjection

Subjection to God is when we put away—and, as it were, banish from ourselves—our own reason and will, and make the wisdom of God our wisdom, and His will our will, even when it crosses our own. It is to bring our will into obedience to His, and to depend wholly upon it. This will of God, to which we must be subject, is revealed partly in the written Word—by commandments, promises, and threats—and partly by the events of Providence. When a man is sick, for instance, we know by the very event that it is God’s will he should be sick, for nothing comes to pass apart from the will of our heavenly Father.

If it be objected that subjection is also due to men, I answer that the subjection due to God is absolute. First, because it must be given by the whole man—body, soul, and conscience. Second, because it must

be yielded to Him in all things without exception, whereas subjection to men must always be “in the Lord.”

In subjection there are two essential parts. The first is its **foundation**, which is the knowledge and faith that God is our sovereign Lord and King, and our righteous Judge, infinitely just and powerful, able to save and to destroy both body and soul. The second is, upon this knowledge, a **resignation of ourselves to God’s pleasure**—which appears in two ways: first, when we yield ourselves to be ruled by His Word; and second, when we submit to His will in disposing our bodies, souls, and all that we possess, in whatever way serves His glory and our good. This is true subjection and true service to God.

We have a notable example in David, when he fled from his kingdom pursued by his son Absalom: “Let him say that I delight not in him; behold, here I am, let him do to me as seems good in his eyes” (2 Samuel 15:26).

The Virtues of Subjection

Subjection to God is exercised through three principal virtues: **faith, adoration, and fear.**

Faith is subjection to the command of God, which bids us believe and trust Him in His Word. Of this faith I have spoken elsewhere, showing how the just live by faith. Here let it be added only, that faith is that “single eye” of which our Savior speaks (Matthew 6:22)—the eye that gives light and direction to all the actions of our hearts and lives.

Adoration is the humbling of ourselves before the greatness and majesty of God. In it are two actions: the exaltation of God to the highest degree, and the abasement of ourselves to the lowest. Thus Abraham in prayer called God “his Lord” and himself “dust and

ashes” (Genesis 18:27). Thus Daniel, in confession, ascribed “righteousness to God, and to us confusion of face” (Daniel 9:7–8). Thus the woman of Canaan adored Christ by calling Him “Lord” and confessing herself “a dog” (Matthew 15:27).

Fear is subjection to the threatenings and commandments of God. In this fear, which is a part of divine worship, two things are required: the **foundation** and the **property**.

The foundation of holy fear is the knowledge of three things.

1. The knowledge of God’s **precepts**: “I will cause them to hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me” (Deuteronomy 4:10).
2. The knowledge of His **threatenings and judgments**: “The righteous shall see it”—that is, the destruction of Doeg—“and fear” (Psalm 52:6).
3. The knowledge and consideration of God’s **presence**: Cornelius is said to be “a devout man, and one that feared God,” and the Holy Spirit gives the ground of that fear in his own words: “We are all here in the presence of God, to hear all things that are commanded you of God” (Acts 10:2, 33).

The property of true fear is to make us stand in awe of God in our hearts, and to fear, hate, and avoid the offense of Him. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride, arrogance, and the evil way” (Proverbs 8:13). “His fear shall be before your faces, that you sin not” (Exodus 20:20).

If it be asked why we are to fear offending God, I answer: first, it is to be feared for its own sake, because it is the offense of God. Though there were no punishment to follow, it would still be the greatest evil that could befall a creature—to offend its Creator. Second, it is to be feared because of the punishment that follows. Yet that fear which regards punishment only, and not the offense itself, is no true worship of God.

The Necessity and Excellence of Subjection

Having thus seen what true subjection to God is, we must learn to yield it continually.

First, because it is God's **commandment**: "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). This yoke is subjection to God both in His precepts and in His corrections.

Second, subjection is a thing of **great excellency**. Our subjection brings no benefit to God but much to ourselves. To be subject to God is perfect liberty; it is to have the kingdom of God within us.

Third, it is a matter of **absolute necessity**. The devils and the damned, whether they will or not, must yield subjection; there is no escape from it. Let us therefore willingly submit ourselves now to God.

Fourth, to **deny** subjection, or to murmur against it, is the mark of a wicked man. "Who is the Almighty," says the wicked, "that we should serve Him?" (Job 21:15).

Lastly, consider the **punishment** of those who refuse to be subject. "Those My enemies," says the Son of God, "who would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before Me" (Luke 19:27).

But on the contrary, subjection brings peace and rest to the soul; for the yoke of Christ is easy, and His burden is light.

In Cleaving to God by Faith, Love, and Confidence

The second part of the principal worship of God is **to cleave to Him**—to be inwardly united to Him without any intention of separation. Concerning this we have both command and promise. The commandment is plain: “Serve the Lord your God, and cleave to Him” (Deuteronomy 10:20). The promise follows: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). Again, it is written, “The Lord is with you while you are with Him; if you seek Him, He will be found of you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you” (2 Chronicles 15:2).

We cleave to God chiefly by two virtues—**love** and **confidence**.

Love

In love we are to consider both its **foundation** and its **properties**.

The foundation of love is the knowledge of God’s love and mercy toward us. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). “I love the Lord because He has heard my prayer” (Psalm 116:1). And again, “Love the Lord, all you His saints; for the Lord preserves the faithful” (Psalm 31:23).

The properties of love are two.

First, love maintains a heavenly fellowship and communion with God and Christ. The very nature of love is to unite itself, as far as possible, with the one loved. When that fellowship is lacking, love stirs within us a longing and holy desire after it, according to God’s will, above all things in the world. Thus the spouse of Christ—that is, the church, or every believing soul—says of Him, “I sat down under

His shadow with great delight,” and again, “I am sick of love” (Song of Solomon 2:3, 5). That is, “I faint, for I lack that communion with Christ my Head which I long for.”

I add the words *according to His will* for two reasons.

First, because true love seeks communion with God only by those means He has appointed for the communication of Himself—namely, His Word preached, prayer, and the sacraments—not in visions, dreams, or self-devised revelations.

Second, because genuine love manifests itself toward God in the things by which He wills to be loved—particularly in the love of our neighbor, and especially of the poor. God has appointed our neighbor, in this respect, to stand in His place; and in loving our neighbor with sincerity, we love God Himself. Hence Paul says, “The love of our neighbor is the fulfilling of the whole law” (Galatians 5:14).

Second, love moves the heart to do and fulfill the will of God. The nature of love is to make us ready to accomplish the desire of the one we love. Christ said, “He that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me” (John 14:21). And the apostle John writes, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3).

Confidence

The second virtue by which we cleave to God is **confidence**—that steadfast trust of the soul which rests wholly upon Him. Its foundation is the knowledge of God’s wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, and especially His power and faithfulness in performing what He has promised.

This is clearly seen in Abraham, who trusted God because he was fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to

perform.

The property of confidence is to make us rest upon the bare and naked promise of God—without means, and even against means—and to quiet and compose our hearts in His will when His providence comes to pass. Thus Abraham relied upon God for offspring when he himself was old and Sarah barren, and when he raised the knife against his only son Isaac. Jehoshaphat likewise, when the vast armies of Ammon and Moab came against him, prayed in humble confidence: “O Lord, we know not what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee” (2 Chronicles 20:12).

So then, in times of danger and distress, when outward help and comfort fail, to rest ourselves upon the Word of God alone, and to stand firm upon His bare promise—having nothing else to lean upon but His faithful testimony—is the truest way to honor and worship Him.

The Mixture of the Former

Besides the distinct points of divine worship already described, there is also a kind of **mixed and compounded worship of God**, wherein, in one and the same act, we both yield subjection to Him and cleave to Him. This worship is expressed chiefly in four things: **humility, patience, prayer, and thanksgiving.**

In Humility

Humility is the inward humbling of the heart before God. Of this the prophet says, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). We have a notable example in Manasseh, who, in his affliction, prayed to God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers—and was heard and delivered (2 Chronicles 33:12).

In true humility there are two parts. The **first** is the glorifying and exalting of God, when we ascribe wholly to Him whatever we are, have, or can do that is truly good. The **second** is the poverty of our spirit, which manifests itself in three actions.

1. **Annihilation**, as some call it—that is, when we acknowledge in our hearts that we are nothing in ourselves, and that of ourselves we can do nothing that is truly good; indeed, that we are vile and wretched sinners deserving nothing but everlasting perdition.
2. **Despair**, not the despair of the damned, but a holy despair—when we are utterly void of hope of salvation as it pertains to our own strength, virtues, works, or any power in us.

3. Flight to mercy—when, upon the sense of our spiritual poverty, we go out of ourselves, as beggars out of their houses, and flee to the throne of grace, pleading nothing but mercy—yes, mere mercy, in all times, both of life and death.

Thus we see what humility is, and how we are to humble ourselves before God. Let all who desire truly to serve Him learn well this lesson from our Savior: “Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29).

There are many weighty reasons to persuade us to this counsel.

First, humility is the path to heavenly wisdom. “The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way” (Psalm 25:9).

Second, humility brings a blessed transformation of life when it takes root in the heart. It restrains envy, grief, and resentment that commonly arise when others possess greater gifts or higher callings. When Joshua was troubled that Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, Moses replied, “Do you envy for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” (Numbers 11:29). Likewise, it was no sorrow but joy to John the Baptist that “Christ must increase, and I must decrease” (John 3:30). Humility teaches us not to scorn or condemn others, but to esteem them better than ourselves; not to fret when others surpass us, but to rejoice and give them due honor; to be content with our gifts, our condition, and our calling; to desire no higher place than God has appointed; and to accept being despised, knowing ourselves worthy of contempt.

Third, humility is the posture in which we receive the grace and presence of God. “He fills the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:53). “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). “I dwell with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble” (Isaiah 57:15). And again, “To this man will I

look: to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word” (Isaiah 66:2).

Lastly, humility is the way to eternal life. Christ humbled Himself and was therefore exalted by the Father (Philippians 2:8–9). And those who would enter the kingdom of heaven must become as little children in humility (Matthew 18:3–4). Let us therefore devote ourselves to serve our God by humbling our spirits before His majesty. This is true service to Him, for He regards not the outward service of the multitude that consists only of ceremonies and lip-labor.

In Patience

In patience we must first consider its **foundation**, which is faith and hope.

By **faith** we are persuaded that God is just in all His corrections, wise in ordering them for good ends, and merciful in not dealing with us according to our deserts. Paul says, “Afflictions produce patience” (Romans 5:3)—not of themselves, but as they are joined with the sense of “the love of God shed abroad in our hearts” (v. 5). Likewise, James teaches that “the trying of your faith produces patience” (James 1:3); that is, faith tested by afflictions proves itself genuine and brings forth patience.

By **hope** patience is sustained, for hope preserves what faith begins, causing us to look for relief, or an end, or everlasting life amid afflictions. Hence patience is called “the patience of hope” (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

The property of patience is to make us quietly and willingly yield subjection to the hand of God in every affliction, even unto death, and to moderate our passions by considering His sovereign will. “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still” (Psalm

4:4). “Be silent to the Lord, and wait patiently for Him” (Psalm 37:7). This silence is not of the tongue only, but of the heart—that inward stillness whereby we submit without murmuring, fretting, or rebellion, resigning our wills to God and being content with His dealings.

When God’s hand was heavy upon Job, he worshiped and said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21), adding that we must “receive evil from the Lord as well as good” (Job 2:10). Christ, our perfect example, in His agony prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done” (Matthew 26:39). Though He could have called for “twelve legions of angels” (v. 53), He would not, because His Father’s will must be fulfilled.

This is true patience. The devil and his angels are subject to God in their punishment, yet unwillingly and by constraint. But the child of God, in affliction, willingly yields to the good pleasure of the Lord, not seeking deliverance when he knows it is God’s will that he endure. As Paul says, “I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11). Such patient submission is true service to God, for to those who endure affliction as sons, God “offers Himself as a Father” (Hebrews 12:7).

In Prayer

In **prayer of the heart**, distinguished from mere vocal prayer, two things are to be observed.

First, the **rule** of prayer is the will of God, according to which we must ask whatever we ask. Therefore, for every petition we offer, we must have either a command, a promise, or both.

Second, prayer contains a **double action of the heart**.

1. From a heart touched and feeling, we present to God our holy desires and godly sorrows. These are true and living requests before Him. “The Lord hears the desire of the humble” (Psalm 10:17). “The Spirit intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). By *holy desires* we mean those longings that God’s name may be glorified, that His kingdom may be established in our hearts, that we may obey His will, depend upon His providence for our needs, receive His mercy and forgiveness, and be strengthened by His presence in temptation. By *godly sorrow* we mean grief for the absence or loss of these graces and blessings.
2. The second action is, by faith, to rest upon God and trust Him for the fulfillment of these holy desires. “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:6).

Thus prayer is “the pouring out of the soul before the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:15), “the seeking of God” (Psalm 77:2), and “the fleeing to Him for refuge” (Psalm 32:6–7).

In Thanksgiving

In **thanksgiving** to God there are likewise two parts.

The **first** is remembrance, meditation, and serious acknowledgment of the blessings of God bestowed upon us—especially the blessing of redemption through Christ.

The **second** is the dedication and consecration of our bodies, souls, and all that we possess to God’s service, as a thankful offering to His honor (Romans 12:1). This was prefigured in the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which were first presented before the altar and then offered to God. So we, in the intention of our minds and the purpose of our hearts, must set ourselves apart for His glory. This dedication

was first made in our baptism and is continually renewed in the Lord's Supper.

Thus we have seen the chief heads of the principal worship of God. Let us therefore be exhorted to offer Him the worship of our spirits—faith, fear, love, confidence, humility, patience, and thankfulness of heart. For this reason, we must labor to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. It is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper, neither preaching nor hearing, nor even the outward profession of the gospel, that avails before God—but the new creation in a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. This is the true spiritual worship of God.

The Lesser Principal

Thus far we have spoken of the **principal worship of God**. The **lesser principal** is the outward worship of God, which consists of various exercises of godliness.

Two things must be generally considered concerning outward worship. **First**, though it be lesser in degree, yet it is altogether necessary. We are commanded to love God with all our strength; therefore love must not only be conceived in the heart, but also expressed in the actions of the body. God created the body as well as the soul. Christ redeemed both body and soul. Hence the apostle says, “Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Christ is Head of the whole man—body and soul alike—and for this reason both must be brought into subjection to Him. Paul also says, “With the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).

Outward Worship: Concerning External Adoration

The bodily worship of God is called **adoration**, consisting in such gestures as bowing the knee, bending or prostrating the body, lifting up the hands, or raising the eyes toward heaven. It may then be asked: *May adoration be given to any other than God, and if so, how far?*

I answer: The gesture of adoration properly signifies reverence and subjection. Therefore, adoration may be lawfully given to those to whom reverence, humility, or subjection is due. Now, it is God’s will that men be subject first and chiefly to Himself, and secondarily to certain creatures—but in different kinds of subjection.

The subjection due to **God** is absolute and for Himself alone. This is, first, because He is the sovereign Lord of our bodies, souls, and consciences; and second, because of the infinite excellency of His divine attributes—especially that He is the Author and Giver of all good things, and the Hearer and Helper of all who call upon Him, even in the secret thoughts of their hearts. The adoration that acknowledges and signifies these truths is the adoration proper to God, which is therefore called **divine or religious adoration**. Of this Christ says, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Matthew 4:10).

The holy angels refused this worship when men attempted to offer it to them. Daniel chose rather to be cast into the lions’ den than to give such adoration to Darius—or even to allow the appearance that he did so.

Subjection is also due to certain **creatures** appointed over us by God—whether for the greater gifts He has bestowed upon them, or for the office of government they bear. Yet this subjection is not absolute but limited—*in part, and for God’s sake*—to signify our reverent acknowledgment of His gifts and the order He has established among men. The outward gesture of adoration that accompanies such acknowledgment is called **civil adoration**.

According to the diversity of offices and gifts among men, there are varying degrees of dignity; and so there are corresponding degrees of honor and forms of reverent gesture, of which the chief is the prostration of the body.

From this it follows that it is God’s will that man should yield subjection—and consequently external adoration—only to creatures more excellent than himself. Hence:

1. **It is not God’s will** that man should bow to irrational creatures or give them any form of civil or religious adoration—much less to images.

2. **We are not to adore wicked spirits**, who are God's enemies and condemned to eternal punishment; rather, we are to hold them accursed, as God does.
3. **Good angels**, because they surpass men in nature and gifts, were rightly honored by the patriarchs when they visibly appeared. Yet since they no longer appear in such manner, no adoration is to be given them now.
4. **Civil or political adoration**—such as bowing or showing reverence—may, without sin or injury to God, be given to men who hold office or excel in gifts. Often this is due by divine ordinance and cannot be omitted without fault. Thus Abraham bowed himself before the Hittites (Genesis 23:7); Joseph's brothers bowed before him (Genesis 43:26); Mephibosheth fell before David (2 Samuel 9:6); and Paul commands, "Render honor to whom honor is due" (Romans 13:7).

Of this civil adoration two cautions must be remembered.

First, it must not exceed the custom of the country where it is performed.

Second, it must be done to the person as a mere creature, though he be a prince. If it exceeds in either respect, it inclines toward religious worship.

Cornelius, for example, did not worship Peter as though he were a god by nature—he knew him to be a man—but he revered him as one exalted by extraordinary grace above the ordinary state of men, though not equal to God Himself. Yet this adoration, meant to acknowledge such a condition, was refused by Peter (Acts 10:25–26).

The worship given to the **Pope** is of this kind—civil adoration bordering upon religious honor—since the kissing of the foot is accorded to no other man or prince on earth. Moreover, it is rendered to him not merely as a man, but as the so-called "vicar of

Christ,” claimed to possess power over conscience and the forgiveness of sins.

The Relation of Outward to Inward Worship

The second point to note is that **outward worship does not please God in itself**, but only insofar as it proceeds from inward worship. Outward worship is not spiritual by its own nature, for it consists of bodily actions; it is spiritual only by reason of the inward devotion from which it flows and of which it is the outward sign.

When separated from inward worship, it becomes a mere show—worship in appearance, not in truth. “If the eye be evil,” says Christ, “the whole body is full of darkness” (Matthew 6:23). He also rebukes the Pharisees: “Cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside may be clean also” (Matthew 23:26). To the impure, both mind and conscience are defiled, and so all things become unclean.

Therefore, outward worship without inward truth is but the shadow of service, not the substance. God delights not in empty gestures, but in the heart that bows before Him in spirit and in truth.

The Parts of This Worship Are Three

The outward worship of God is either **general to all** or **special to some**. Worship common to all is of two kinds—**church-service** and **household-service**.

Church-Service

Church-service is that worship which is performed publicly in the congregation of God's people. The foundation of this worship is that we not only separate ourselves from idols, but also join ourselves to the true Church and people of God. For the Church of God on earth is the **kingdom of heaven**, wherein righteousness, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost—with every other spiritual blessing—are to be found. Outside of it are only shame and confusion. The Church of God on earth is, as it were, the **suburbs of the city of God**, the **gate of heaven**; and therefore, entrance into heaven must be made in and through the Church. Hence Luke testifies, "And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). When Jeroboam set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel, the priests, Levites, and all who set their hearts to seek the Lord joined themselves with Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 11:16). In the same way, we must do likewise whenever we dwell among idolaters or superstitious people.

The Four Parts of Church-Service

Church-service stands upon four pillars, as recorded in Acts 2:42: *"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

Preaching

By *doctrine*, I understand the hearing of the apostolic teaching as it is preached—the faithful attendance upon sermons and the ministry of the Word. Concerning this, two things must be taught: **the necessity** of hearing, and **the manner** of hearing.

1. The Necessity of Hearing

The necessity of this duty is shown by many reasons.

First, the hearing of God’s Word preached by human ministry is an ordinance of God Himself. When the Israelites at Mount Sinai said to Moses, “Speak you to us, and we will hear you; but let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19), the Lord approved their request, saying, “They have spoken well” (Deuteronomy 18:17). He then added a promise: “I will raise up for them a prophet from among their brethren, like unto you; and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (v. 18).

Though these words refer chiefly to Christ, they include other prophets and teachers joined with Him, since that was the very desire of the people (Acts 3:22–23). Otherwise, the following words —“The prophet who shall presume to speak a word in My name which I have not commanded, or who speaks in the name of other gods, shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:20)—would have no fitting application to Christ. Thus the preaching and hearing of the Word through human messengers was ordained and established by God Himself at Sinai. Christ renewed this ordinance when He said, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do” (Matthew 23:2–3). And that this ordinance should continue to the end of the world, the prophet Isaiah declares: “In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains.... And many people shall go and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to

the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths” (Isaiah 2:2–3).

Second, the preaching and hearing of the Word is the ordinary means appointed by God both to *begin* and to *strengthen* faith and all the graces that flow from it, and thus to work our salvation. “The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). “It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

For salvation we must have a *special faith*; and special faith requires a *special Word*. The written Word, being otherwise general, becomes particular by application—and this application is made through the preaching of the Word, when men called of God apply to the consciences of hearers His commands and promises in His name. By this it appears what weight and dignity belong to this ordinance of preaching.

Third, unless a person is born anew by the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven; and the hearing of the Word is the chief means of this new birth. “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15). “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). The Word of God is therefore called “the incorruptible seed” (1 Peter 1:23). The hearing of the Word, then, is not—as many vainly suppose—a matter of indifference.

Fourth, the hearing of the Word is a mark of true service and subjection to God. “He who is of God hears God’s words” (John 8:47). “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

Fifth, the absence of preaching and hearing is one of the greatest judgments of God upon the earth. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). The prophet Amos declares that the greatest famine is not of bread or water, but of “hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). Hosea likewise warns: “The days of visitation have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad, because of the multitude of your iniquity” (Hosea 9:7).

Sixth, the preaching of the Word is the chief means to overthrow the kingdom of the devil and to open the kingdom of heaven. When the disciples returned from preaching, Christ said, “I beheld Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). And when promising authority to Peter for dispensing the Word, He said, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

Lastly, it has been the ancient and constant practice of God’s people to attend upon the preaching of the Word. When the Shunammite woman sought the prophet, her husband asked, “Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath” (2 Kings 4:23)—implying that those were the appointed days for resorting to the prophets. Isaiah likewise foretold the practice of the New Testament church: “Many people shall go and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths’” (Isaiah 2:3).

Thus the preaching and hearing of the Word, being divinely instituted, spiritually effectual, and historically practiced by the saints, is a principal part of the outward worship of God in His Church.

The First Objection

The *Enthusiasts* say, “No creature can work faith or regenerate us. The Word preached is but a creature, for it is only a sound composed of letters and syllables; its virtue can do no more than signify to us the will of God.”

Answer: The Word preached and the *right use* of it must be distinguished. The right use of the Word is when we understand it, meditate upon it, and endeavor both to believe and obey it. The Word preached has power—not simply because it is uttered, or because its sound enters our ears—but because, when it is rightly heard, it is accompanied by the blessing of God upon hearts that are humble, teachable, and obedient.

The Word, when used rightly, is not the *principal cause* of faith and regeneration, but only an *instrument*. And it is not an instrument because it contains in itself a natural power to produce faith, as a medicine heals the body, but because, when we hear and ponder the Word, God joins His Spirit to it—working within us that which the Word signifies and testifies—so that we hear not only with our outward ears but also with the ears of our hearts, in submission and faith.

The Lord says, “My Spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth” (Isaiah 59:21). Because of this inseparable union between the Word and the Spirit—whereby the Word, through the senses, conveys to the mind what the Spirit works in the heart—the preaching of the Word is rightly called an *instrument of grace*, and no otherwise.

The Second Objection

They further say, “The preaching of the Word serves only for the conversion of the elect; but since no one knows who the elect are, all exhortations to repentance are therefore in vain.”

Answer: I reply, first, that the minister of the Word, in preaching, is by the judgment of charity to presume all his hearers to be among the elect, leaving the secret determination of that matter to God. Thus the apostle Paul, in his letters, addresses the Ephesians, Philippians, and Thessalonians as *the elect of God* (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:4).

Second, the Word preached does indeed serve *principally* for the calling and conversion of the elect—but not *only* for that. It also serves to harden the obstinate and to leave the non-elect without excuse. The Lord said to Isaiah, “Go, and say to this people, ‘Hear indeed, but understand not; make the heart of this people fat, make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed’” (Isaiah 6:9–10).

We need not wonder, then, that the same Word which converts some should harden others. Those who are hardened deserve their hardening; and God, who is sovereign in mercy, “will have compassion on whom He will have compassion.”

The Third Objection

Another objection runs thus: “Those who are ordained to salvation shall be saved, whether they hear the Word preached or not; therefore there is no great need of hearing.”

Answer: This is a false conclusion. Those who are ordained to eternal life *cannot but hear* the Word. For those who are ordained to the *end* are also ordained to the *means* by which that end is attained. “Whom He predestined, them He also called” (Romans 8:30). And again, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

In God's eternal counsel, the appointment of the means is as certain as the appointment of the end. Therefore, to despise or neglect the means is to despise the wisdom of God Himself.

The Fourth Objection

They argue, "The hearing of the Word is unprofitable without the Spirit of God, and the Spirit is not given to all. Therefore, we must wait until we receive the Spirit, and only then hear."

Answer: By that same reasoning, one might refuse food, drink, clothing, and every means necessary for bodily life. For without God's blessing these things also are unprofitable. According to such perverse counsel, we should wait until we feel His blessing in our bodies before eating or drinking—and so, by our folly, commit self-destruction.

In truth, we must *use the means first*, and then, *in the use of them*, we shall find the blessing of God. So it is with the preaching of the Word: we are to hear it diligently, and in the hearing, the Spirit of God will accompany it and make it effectual.

The Fifth Objection

Lastly, they allege that "The ministers of the New Testament are not ministers of the letter—that is," they say, "of the written or spoken Word" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Answer: By "the letter," the apostle does not mean the written Word itself, but the bare *law* without the gospel. It is called "the letter" because it was written by the finger of God on tables of stone (v. 7). The ministers of the New Testament are not ministers of that law apart from grace, but of the gospel joined with the Spirit—the

Word written not merely on stone, but upon the hearts of the faithful.

Thus, these objections, whether from proud Enthusiasts or the careless multitude, cannot overthrow the ordinance of preaching, which God Himself has appointed as the living means of calling sinners, converting souls, and building up His Church unto eternal life.

Objections of the Common People

The objections of the common people are many.

First, some say, “If Christ Himself would preach, or if an angel from heaven were to speak, we would gladly hear; but since mere men, like ourselves, are the ones who speak, we care little for hearing.”

To this I answer: it is the *ordinance of God* that men should speak in His stead, and that their doctrine should be received as though the Lord Himself were speaking. Christ said, “He that hears you, hears Me; and he that despises you, despises Me” (Luke 10:16). And Paul affirms, “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). He commends the Thessalonians for receiving his teaching not as the word of man, but “as it is in truth, the Word of God,” adding, “which also works effectually in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Moreover, it is God’s will that the “treasure” of His Word be delivered to us “in earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7), that all glory might redound to Him alone. Even in the days of the apostles, there were some at Corinth who would hear none but Christ Himself—and for this proud conceit Paul reproves them.

Second, others say, “We can read the Bible in our homes; there we have the most perfect sermons of Christ and His apostles. Therefore, we can serve God as well at home as those who hear all the sermons in the world.”

To this I reply, first, that though the sermons of Christ and His apostles are perfect in themselves, yet they are not most profitable to us until they are explained, applied, and brought home to our consciences through the ministry of preaching. Just as a whole loaf of the finest bread cannot nourish until it is broken and portioned out, so the Word must be rightly divided to feed the soul.

Second, public preaching is itself a part of the *public worship of God*. Paul says, “Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son” (Romans 1:9). Therefore, it is not lawful for men to lie idly at home, neglecting the assembly of the saints; they must join themselves to the congregation and serve God in the gospel of His Son.

Third, some boast that they have “knowledge enough,” and therefore have no need to hear sermons. But such persons forget that even the wisest “know but in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12), and that the ministry of the Word is ordained “for the building up of the body of Christ, till we all come...unto a perfect man” (Ephesians 4:13)—and that perfection is not attained in this life.

Moreover, the preaching of the Word serves not only to impart *knowledge*, but to stir us to the *practice* of it. Therefore, all men, however learned, must still be hearers.

Fourth, some object that “sermons are sometimes erroneous and may lead into error,” whereas, they say, “there is no such danger in reading.” Hence they conclude that they will content themselves with reading alone.

But Paul answers plainly, “Despise not prophecy” (1 Thessalonians 5:20). And lest anyone object that prophets may at times teach

falsely, he adds, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (v. 21).

If, because of the imperfections of preachers, we should reject preaching altogether, then by the same reasoning we should abolish reading also. For in reading, too, there is sometimes misreading, sometimes misunderstanding, sometimes misapplication of the Word. Yet all these defects are corrected and clarified by faithful preaching.

Fifth, others say, “If we were to frequent sermons, we would be called ‘precise’ and mocked for our zeal.” But we must remember that whoever is ashamed of Christ and His Word, the Father will be ashamed of him at the day of judgment. It was not Nicodemus’s coming to Christ that was faulty, but that he came *by night*, ashamed to be seen as His disciple.

Others add, “No good comes from sermons, for none are worse than those who are constant hearers.” I answer: this fault lies not in preaching or hearing, but in the hearers themselves. There are none worse than habitual frequenters of taverns—yet buying and selling wine is not unlawful.

Even among the hearers of Christ Himself, there were four sorts: three bad, and one only good. The corruption of many is no argument against the ordinance of God.

Lastly, some say, “We will provide for our bodies and leave our souls to God.” But Christ commands, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). To neglect the care of the soul while being diligent for the body is not faith but presumption. True obedience seeks God’s kingdom first, trusting that all other things shall be added in due season.

From what has been said, it is clear that we are all bound in conscience to attend the preaching of God’s Word as often as liberty, ability, and opportunity permit. Those who seldom or never join the

congregation, but take liberty to hear only when they please, greatly offend God and ought, if possible, to be corrected by the lawful authority of the magistrate.

Thus much for the *necessity* of hearing. Now follows the *manner* of hearing. In the right hearing of the Word two things are required: first, that we yield ourselves in subjection to the Word we hear; and second, that we fix our hearts upon it. For God deals with us in and through His Word; therefore, the honor we render to Him must be shown by reverence and submission to His Word. Subjection to God is shown by our subjection to His Word, and our cleaving to God is shown by our steadfast affection for His Word.

Paul commands, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). It dwells in us when we both retain it in memory and grant it dominion over us, allowing ourselves to be ruled and guided by it. This subjection is expressed through *faith*, *fear*, and *humility*.

Faith consists in giving full credence to the entire Word of God, whether it contains promises, commandments, or threats. Thus Paul commends the Thessalonians, who received the Word “with much assurance” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Without faith, the Word is but a dead letter; as it is written, “The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Hebrews 4:2).

Fear is likewise required, for true fear of God consists in reverencing Him in His Word and in avoiding its breach. The Lord Himself declares that He has respect to those who are “of a contrite spirit, and tremble at His Word” (Isaiah 66:2).

Humility in hearing is also necessary, that we may bow ourselves before God by means of the Word. James exhorts us to “receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). When King Josiah heard the law read, “his heart melted” (2 Kings 22:19), and he humbled himself before the Lord.

Likewise, when Peter preached at Pentecost, the hearers were “pierced to the heart” and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

Fixing the Heart Upon the Word

Our hearts are fixed upon the Word of God in two ways.

First, when we make it our *treasure*—loving it above all things and finding our chief delight in it. David testifies, “The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver” (Psalm 119:72), and again, “Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (v. 97). Whoever would be a good hearer and grow in the school of Christ must, from the heart, esteem the Word of God above all earthly riches or pleasures.

Second, we fix our hearts upon the Word when we make it our *stay* or foundation, building our lives upon it. Jude exhorts, “Build yourselves up on your most holy faith” (Jude 20)—that is, upon the Word of God believed. The world around us is like a restless sea, offering no firm footing; therefore, we must cling to the Word as our rock and foundation.

The Word is a foundation in two respects.

1. It is the foundation of our actions. David said, “Your testimonies are my counselors” (Psalm 119:24). When Rebekah felt her children struggle within her, she went to “inquire of the Lord”—that is, to seek His Word from the prophet (Genesis 25:22). So must we seek direction from the Word in all our undertakings.

2. It is the foundation of our comfort, both in life and in death. David prayed, “Remember Your word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your promise has given me life” (Psalm 119:49–50).

Paul likewise declares that “through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

God has promised His presence, favor, and protection in life and death to all who trust in His Word. In this promise we must settle our hearts amid every sorrow and trial, and against all fear of death and condemnation.

Thus concludes the first part of the public worship of God—the hearing and frequenting of sermons. The second follows, namely, *fellowship*.

Fellowship or Almsgiving

Fellowship is a work of mercy, consisting in the relief of those who are in need. It is a noble and essential part of the worship of God, as Scripture declares: “To do good and to share, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). The alms of Cornelius, we read, “ascended as a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4).

For a clearer understanding of this holy fellowship, we will consider five things: **Who must give relief, how it must be given, in how many ways, in what order, and with what spirit or mind.**

1. Who Must Give Relief

Scripture distinguishes between two kinds of people: those who have possessions and are therefore givers, and those who are in want and must be receivers. There is no third category; every person must be either a giver or a receiver. The one who earns his living by labor “must labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs” (Ephesians 4:28).

Even the poor widow cast her two mites into the treasury (Luke 21:3), and though Christ Himself was poor, yet He gave alms (John 13:29). Those who could not bring vessels of gold for the building of the tabernacle brought goats' hair and rams' skins instead, and it was accepted. Therefore, every person who has any ability at all—however small—should give something, however little; for in so doing, they honor and worship God.

2. How Much Should Be Given

First, each person must give according to his ability—and if need requires, even beyond his ability. Paul commends the Macedonians, saying, “I bear witness that they gave according to their means, and beyond their means, of their own accord” (2 Corinthians 8:3). Yet he adds a wise caution: “It is not that others should be relieved and you burdened” (v. 13).

Second, every congregation ought to provide sufficient relief for its own poor, drawing from its own members if possible, or with help from others if need be. Thus Paul instructs, “Let not the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are truly widows” (1 Timothy 5:16).

To ensure sufficiency, three cautions must be observed:

- 1. Those who are able to labor must be required to labor,** and if they refuse, they must not be relieved (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The ability to work is a form of wealth; neglecting labor harms both church and commonwealth. The Lord commands that men should “eat their own bread” (2 Thessalonians 3:12), providing for themselves as far as they are able.
- 2. Vain and superfluous expenses**—in feasting, luxury, costly apparel, and gaming—must be cut off. Such waste weakens our ability to do good and robs the poor of help that is rightly theirs.

3. **In times of extreme necessity**, when no other means remain, we must be willing to sell our goods to provide relief. This is the intent of Christ's command: "Sell what you have and give alms" (Luke 12:33). The Psalmist likewise declares, "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor" (Psalm 112:9). Thus the early Christians "sold their possessions and goods and distributed to all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:45).

3. The Ways of Giving Relief

There are three chief ways of providing relief:

1. **Almsgiving**—the direct giving of goods or money to those who lack both means and ability to help themselves.
2. **Free lending**—lending goods or money without interest to those who can maintain themselves in part if they are thus helped. The Lord expressly commands this duty (Deuteronomy 15:7–8; Luke 6:35). Yet this mercy is now little practiced. The rich are quick to lend for gain but slow to lend out of compassion; thus the poor are left without hope or help.
3. **Forgiving debts**—remitting what is owed by those who have fallen into poverty through no fault of their own. Nehemiah's example in chapter 5 is an excellent pattern of this mercy.

4. The Order of Relief

The poor must not be left to wander from door to door begging for alms. Such public begging proclaims to the world both the hardness of men's hearts and the decay of charity. Moreover, begging breeds disorder, for the bold beggar gains much while the modest one gains nothing.

Allowing begging also establishes a *school of idleness*; once it is known that alms may be had by begging, many abandon honest labor and take up begging as their trade, teaching it even to their children as an occupation.

Therefore, the proper order is that relief be **collected and distributed** by competent and godly men. Among the Jews, tithes and offerings were brought into storehouses and the temple treasury for later distribution according to each person's need (Deuteronomy 14:28–29; Nehemiah 10:37; Luke 21:1). In the early Church, the proceeds of sold possessions were “laid at the apostles' feet,” who appointed deacons to oversee the distribution (Acts 6:1–3).

By God's providence, a similar order exists in our own Church and land. Because it is God's ordinance, all should support and uphold it; those who knowingly neglect this duty cannot be counted true friends either to God or to their country.

5. The Spirit in Which Relief Is Given

Relief must be given with a *right and godly mind*.

First, with a **thankful heart to God**. We must remember that God has given Christ to us; therefore, in gratitude, we must offer ourselves—body, soul, and substance—to His service. Having given ourselves to God, we shall then freely give of our goods to the poor. Paul praises the Macedonians, who “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5). Likewise, Isaiah prophesied of Tyre's conversion: “Her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord...for those who dwell before the Lord to eat sufficiently and for durable clothing” (Isaiah 23:18).

Second, relief must be given in **love**, for the poor are our own flesh. “Though I give all my goods to feed the poor and have not love,” says Paul, “it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Third, it must be given with **pity and compassion**. Isaiah exhorts, “Draw out your soul to the hungry” (Isaiah 58:10), and we are commanded to “remember those who are in bonds as though bound with them, and those who suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body” (Hebrews 13:3).

Fourth, it must be given in **simplicity**—that is, with a single-hearted desire to please and obey God, seeking neither profit nor praise. “He who gives,” says Paul, “let him do it with simplicity” (Romans 12:8). And our Lord adds, “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3). This teaches that we are not to give for show or human approval, but to approve our hearts to God alone.

Fifth, *cheerfulness* is required in giving: “The Lord loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Paul exhorts the rich “to be ready to distribute and willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:18). Likewise, Solomon warns, “Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come again tomorrow, and I will give,’ when you have it with you” (Proverbs 3:28). Job testifies that he “never withheld the desire of the poor, nor caused the eyes of the widow to fail” (Job 31:16).

Sixth, *bountifulness* is required, which the Lord commands when He bids us to “open wide our hand to the poor” (Deuteronomy 15:11), promising a rich reward. “He who sows bountifully shall reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Seventh, *justice* is required—that our mercy may be joined with uprightness, and that we give only of what is truly our own. Mercy cannot stand with injustice. The Lord commands that we “deal our bread to the hungry” (Isaiah 58:7), not another’s bread.

Eighth, *sincerity* is required—that our giving not be in hypocrisy but in truth. “Let us not love in word or tongue only, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). James condemns the empty profession of saying

to the needy, “Be warmed and filled,” without actually giving them what they require (James 2:16).

Exhortation to the Practice of Mercy

Having thus shown the parts and manner of relief, we are now to be exhorted to *practice* this duty as God has commanded. Many strong inducements urge us to it.

First, it is expressly commanded by God to give relief to the needy. To this command He has added both *promise* and *threat*. The promise: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). The threat: “Judgment without mercy shall be shown to him that has shown no mercy” (James 2:13). And upon this ground shall the sentence of condemnation proceed at the last day: “I was hungry, and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink.... Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire” (Matthew 25:41–42).

Second, the work of mercy is excellent in many respects:

1. **It is the best form of spiritual thrift or holy husbandry.** “He that sows bountifully shall reap bountifully,” says the Lord (2 Corinthians 9:6). The poor are as fertile ground, already prepared by God’s providence, into which we may cast our seed of mercy. And for this sowing, we are promised to reap the full harvest ourselves.
2. **It is not giving, but lending—to the Lord Himself.** “He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him” (Proverbs 19:17). The Almighty becomes debtor to our compassion, and in His time repays with increase.
3. **It is the best exchange.** In relieving the poor, we trade earthly treasure for heavenly. “Give alms,” says Christ, “and lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Luke 12:33). What better

bargain can there be than to exchange that which must perish for that which endures forever?

4. **It is a sign and assurance of God's mercy toward us.** "By mercy and truth," says Solomon, "iniquity is purged" (Proverbs 16:6)—that is, we gain inward assurance that our sins are forgiven. Thus Paul exhorts the rich to "lay up a good foundation for the time to come" (1 Timothy 6:19), not as the cause of salvation, but as a confirmation of it. So also Christ bids us, "Make friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). The prayers and testimonies of the poor, whom we have helped, will bear witness for us that we are heirs of heaven. The compassion found in us is the reflection of God's mercy stamped upon the heart; by the small flame of our pity we perceive the infinite fire of His love.
5. **It restores the right use of earthly goods.** "Give alms," says Christ, "and behold, all things are clean to you" (Luke 11:41). That is, repent of covetousness and oppression, and show your repentance by works of mercy. Then shall the corruption of greed be healed, and you shall again enjoy a pure and sanctified use of what God has given you. As the physician says, "Your sickness comes of fullness—abstain, and you shall be well."
6. **It serves, at times, as a means of satisfaction and restitution.** True repentance requires restitution, and when it is uncertain to whom restitution must be made, almsgiving becomes a just and fitting substitute. Thus Daniel counseled Nebuchadnezzar, who had enriched himself by oppression: "Break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor" (Daniel 4:27). Likewise, Zacchaeus, upon his conversion, restored fourfold for his known wrongs; and because many were unknown, he further gave half his goods to the poor (Luke 19:8).

Third, we are moved by the *examples* of mercy in Scripture. “Christ,” who is the fountain of all riches, “became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). When the merchants of Tyre were converted, they ceased from their covetous gain and devoted their merchandise to sacred uses, a portion being set apart for the poor (Isaiah 23:18). Job’s mercy shines as a beacon of righteousness (Job 31:16–20). The believers in the early Church, seeing their brethren in distress, sold their possessions and “distributed to all, as anyone had need” (Acts 4:34–35).

By such commands, promises, benefits, and examples, let every heart be stirred to mercy. For in relieving the poor, we not only serve man, but we worship God Himself, whose image they bear, and who will one day repay all acts of compassion with everlasting reward.

Men have many excuses to avoid this duty of mercy. Some say they are poor and have little, and therefore cannot give relief. But such must know that “if there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he has not” (2 Corinthians 8:12). The widow’s mite, given out of her poverty, was more esteemed by Christ than the abundance of the rich. Others plead that if they give to the poor, they themselves will lack. I answer, not so—for Solomon says, “He who gives to the poor shall not want” (Proverbs 28:27). And again, though what we give may seem lost, “cast upon the waters,” yet “you shall find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Some say they must spare for their children. I reply with David: “I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). One may beg, as Lazarus did, but not both the righteous and his seed. Those who fix their hearts on storing up for their children often withhold from the poor and thereby bring a curse upon their own substance; and that curse is executed when some descendant wastes all in riot and excess.

Others excuse themselves by saying that the poor are wicked, idle, or unworthy, and abuse what they receive. I answer: though Paul

commanded that “if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat,” he also adds, “be not weary in well doing” (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 13). And though some among the poor may curse us with their tongues, yet, as Job says, “the loins of the poor” whom we relieve “shall bless us” (Job 31:20).

The Sacraments

The third part of public worship, which Saint Luke calls “the breaking of bread,” signifies both the *love feasts* of the early Christians and, chiefly, the use of the *Lord’s Supper*—which, together with baptism, is a holy part of God’s service under the New Covenant. Two things must be considered here: its *necessity* and its *manner*.

The necessity of receiving the Lord’s Supper, according to the order of the Church of which we are members, appears because it is a divinely appointed act of worship. We are bound to it by commandment: “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). In the Old Testament, whoever neglected the Passover when he had liberty and opportunity to keep it was “cut off from among his people” (Numbers 9:13). As great a regard as was due to the Passover in the old covenant is due now to the Lord’s Supper in the new.

This exposes two common abuses. First, that some leave the congregation during the administration of baptism, as though it were no part of God’s worship or of any concern to them. Second, that many take liberty to receive the Lord’s Supper as often—or as seldom—as they please, as though it were a matter of indifference. They excuse themselves by saying they are not in charity or that they have fallen into sin; and therefore, if they were to receive, they would “eat and drink judgment to themselves.” I answer: if they are out of charity, let them be reconciled to God and man; if they have fallen into sin, let them renew repentance without delay and then come to

the Table. To abstain is only to double their sin—for they persist in their former guilt and add disobedience to God’s command concerning His sacrament.

The right use of the Lord’s Supper consists in three things.

First, we must observe the institution strictly, without addition, subtraction, or alteration.

Second, communicants must come with not only true faith and initial repentance, but also a fresh renewing of both, in view of their daily sins. The Corinthians had faith and repentance, yet because they neglected this renewal, many of them became unworthy receivers and “ate judgment to themselves.”

Third, the sacrament must be applied to its proper ends: as a means to lead us to Christ, as a seal to strengthen our faith in Him, as a sign of thanksgiving to God, and as a means to increase love among the brethren. To this end, and no other, is the Lord’s Supper to be used.

Hence it is grievously profaned in the Church of Rome, where it is administered only in one kind, contrary to Christ’s institution, and applied to superstition rather than faith—being made a means to convey grace merely by the work performed (*ex opere operato*).

Public Prayer

The fourth part of church service is *public prayer*, in which all are to be present and to join together. This is a debt we owe to God, as David says: “Praise waits for You, O God, in Zion, and to You shall the vow be performed” (Psalm 65:1). To this He adds His promise: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). The united petitions of God’s people are more powerful than the solitary prayers of individuals. Therefore, David declares the “tabernacles of God” to be most dear to him (Psalm 84:1), and that he would rather “be a doorkeeper in the

house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:10). Zechariah foretold the zeal of believers under the New Covenant: “The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also’” (Zechariah 8:21). And this was fulfilled, for the early Christians gathered in whatever place they could find, so long as they might freely call upon God (Acts 16:13).

The manner of joining in public prayer is this: ministers, in preaching, are the mouth of God to the people; in prayer, they are the mouth of the people to God. Therefore, the congregation must, with fervent affection, lift up their hearts with the minister, giving inward assent to the petitions offered in their name. For this cause we all say, *Amen*.

Hence it is a great fault to leave the assembly during prayer, or to sit idle and thoughtless, as if we had no souls, or to let our minds wander on worldly matters while we stand before the Lord.

Thus we see that the true service of the Church consists in the reverent hearing of the Word, in faithful prayer, in the right use of the sacraments, and in works of mercy. Many, therefore, must be admonished to acknowledge their ignorance who imagine that to recite the Creed, the Ten Commandments, or the Lord’s Prayer in the congregation is to serve and worship God fully—though they profit nothing by the Word, the prayers, or the sacraments. Such outward form without inward devotion is not worship but shadow.

Household Worship

Having spoken of church service, we now come to *household service*. Three things must here be considered.

First, it is necessary that in every family the worship and service of God be maintained. This is the express commandment of God: “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands” (1 Timothy 2:8). Hence Zechariah foretells that when God pours out the Spirit of grace and supplication upon His people in the latter days, “every family apart shall mourn” for their sins, whereby they have pierced Christ (Zechariah 12:10–12). The place where Adam’s family assembled is called “the face of God” (Genesis 4:14), because there they prayed and offered sacrifice—and there also God manifested His presence and favor. Joshua declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Cornelius is said to have “feared God with all his household” (Acts 10:2). Paul writes, “Priscilla and Aquila greet you, and the church that is in their house” (1 Corinthians 16:19). Their house was thus called a church, not merely because believers met there, but because it was a household devoted to the worship of God—a little church within the Church.

A family cannot stand without the blessing and protection of God, and this blessing is inseparably joined to His worship. “Godliness,” says Paul, “has promise for the life that now is, and for that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). On the contrary, households that neglect His worship are little better than companies of atheists; for one mark of the atheist is that “he does not call upon the Lord” (Psalm 14:4). Let such as think it enough to pray only in the public congregation take due warning from this truth.

Although it is necessary that God be worshiped in every household, the *time, place, and manner* of such worship are left to the godly discretion of the family’s head, to be ordered with wisdom and reverence.

The Parts of Household Worship

The parts of this worship are two: **instruction** and **prayer**.

Instruction consists in teaching and learning the will of God, and is called by Paul “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). It should include three things:

1. **Instruction in the commandments of God.** “You shall teach them diligently to your children,” says the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:7). Because children and servants are often slow to learn, parents must not be discouraged but urged to *sharpen* these truths upon them—as one sharpens a stake to drive it deep. Again, parents are commanded to “charge their children to observe all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 32:46). Of Abraham the Lord gave this commendation: “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment” (Genesis 18:19).
2. **Instruction concerning the ordinances of God.** The Israelites were required to explain to their children the meaning of the Passover (Exodus 12:26), the consecration of the firstborn (Exodus 13:14), and the twelve stones taken from the Jordan (Joshua 4:22). Likewise, every Christian household should teach the purpose and meaning of baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the public ministry of the Word.
3. **Instruction concerning the works of God—His judgments and mercies.** Parents are commanded to make known to their children and their children’s children the things they have seen (Deuteronomy 4:9). Hezekiah, after his recovery from mortal sickness, said, “The father to the children shall make known Your truth” (Isaiah 38:19).

Prayer, the second part of family worship, has been treated before. It must be both daily and sincere, offered in faith and reverence by the household together before the Lord.

The Duty of the Head of the Household

The *master of the family* bears the chief care and charge of household worship. His office is twofold.

First, he must *prepare and fit* his family for the worship of God, whether public or private. When Jacob was to worship at Bethel, he said to his household, “Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean” (Genesis 35:2). Job likewise “sent and sanctified his children” before offering sacrifice for them (Job 1:5). This sanctifying of the family consists in two things: (1) purging the household from open sins and corrupt practices, and (2) seeing that every member, at least outwardly, walks in the ways of God. When the priests and Levites were negligent, and many of the people unprepared to eat the Passover, Hezekiah prayed for them, and the Lord accepted his intercession (2 Chronicles 30:18–20). So must every Christian head of household stand in the gap for his own home.

To this end, the teaching of God’s Word is laid expressly upon the master of the family: “You shall teach these words diligently to your children” (Deuteronomy 6:7). Paul implies the same when he says, “If the wife will learn anything, let her ask her husband at home” (1 Corinthians 14:35). So the husband must be the spiritual instructor of his household. Yet the wife also bears a subordinate part in this duty, as appears in Bathsheba’s counsel to Solomon (Proverbs 31:1) and in the godly nurture of Timothy by Lois and Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5).

That this instruction may not be fruitless, the master of the house is also given *authority* to command obedience, as Abraham did (Genesis 18:19). Some object that if a householder must teach and exhort, he does the work of a minister. But the teaching of the master of a house differs greatly from that of the minister, as household government differs from civil magistracy. The father teaches by *domestic authority*—as master, husband, or parent—while the minister teaches by *divine authority* in the name of Christ, as His ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20). Ministers stand in the place of God and speak in His name, whereas householders teach as private men

under God, preparing their families to profit from the public ministry.

Private teaching, therefore, is subordinate to public teaching, and must be ruled by it. Men may not teach in their homes whatever pleases them, but only that sound doctrine which they have received from the ministry of the Church. Thus, though the *matter* of instruction is the same in house and church, the *office* of teaching is not.

If it be asked whether the head of the family must teach in person or by another, the answer is: as much as possible, he must perform it himself. Yet if necessity require—through the largeness of the household, or his employment in public affairs—he may appoint a deputy to teach in his stead, as Abraham entrusted his servant with the most weighty business concerning his family, the choice of a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24).

Second, the master of the household must be the *chief leader and example* in all parts of family worship. For this cause, the fourth commandment is directed first to him: he must see that the Sabbath is kept holy and must be foremost in every act of devotion. Christ Himself fulfilled this role in His own household of disciples, among whom He administered the worship of God (Luke 22:17–20).

Let householders therefore consider their duty and be exhorted to perform it with conscience and diligence. Take heed of Moses's example: though he was appointed to deliver Israel and serve God in Egypt, yet the Lord met him in the way and sought to slay him (Exodus 4:24)—because he had neglected to sanctify his own family, leaving his son uncircumcised. So may men in our day expect the like judgments, if they live in the same neglect.

Personal Worship

The final kind of worship is that which concerns the individual person in his own place and calling. This consists in maintaining faith—that is, true religion—together with hope of everlasting life and a clear conscience before God and man. This is the true service of God, not the careless uttering of a few words, morning or evening, without understanding or affection. Paul teaches this in his own example: “After the way which they call heresy, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things written in the Law and the Prophets, and having hope toward God that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:14–16).

That this personal worship may be both rightly performed and faithfully continued, two duties must be diligently practiced.

1. Private Reading of the Scriptures

The first is the private reading and study of Holy Scripture. This was the common and continual practice of the Jews. Christ Himself said, “Search the Scriptures” (John 5:39). They are “a light shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19); therefore we must attend to them while we journey through this world’s night. But we cannot attend to them unless we read them. The Word of God is “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17), and no man can skillfully wield this sword unless he is well acquainted with it. David, though a prophet, read and meditated in the Scriptures continually (Psalm 119:97). Daniel, though divinely inspired, read the writings of Jeremiah to understand the time of deliverance (Daniel 9:2).

Yet in our day, this duty is greatly neglected. In many homes one may find a fine table, yet no Bible. Some will not part with enough money to purchase the Word of life. Others take delight in reading vain tales, songs, and idle discourses, but have no desire for Scripture. This is an evil sign. When the stomach refuses wholesome

food, the body is diseased; so when the heart finds no savor in God's Word, it betrays spiritual corruption. The Scriptures are like fragrant spices—the more they are ground and pressed, the sweeter their aroma. Neglect of them brings God's judgment: "My people are gone into captivity because they have no knowledge" (Isaiah 5:13). And again, "He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

2. Private Prayer

The second means of maintaining faith, hope, and a good conscience is *private or secret prayer*. Isaac went out into the field in the evening to meditate and pray (Genesis 24:63). Moses interceded forty days and forty nights for Israel (Deuteronomy 9:18). Samuel said, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). David prayed morning, noon, and evening (Psalm 55:17), and seven times a day praised God (Psalm 119:164). Our Lord Jesus Christ, though sinless, often withdrew to solitary places and continued in prayer through the night (Luke 6:12). Paul also charges the faithful, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

If any should say, "How shall we hold to true faith and religion when so many disputes and divisions confuse us, so that we scarcely know which is true?" I answer: subject your hearts and lives to God; obey Him in all His commandments, and you shall certainly come to the knowledge of the truth. For "the secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him" (Psalm 25:14), and Christ Himself declares, "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is of God" (John 7:17). Remember this well: truth is not attained by clever disputation, but by humble obedience.

The Keeping of a Good Conscience

To preserve a clear conscience before God, two duties especially are required.

First, we must abide within the limits of our *calling*—that is, the particular duty God has assigned us in relation to Himself and to men. We must beware of leaving our proper sphere or meddling with that which does not belong to us. Let us learn to distinguish between necessary duties and unnecessary activities. The first we must diligently perform; the second we must leave alone, that we be not busybodies in other men's matters.

Second, we must perform the works of our calling in a right manner. For this, several things are needful:

1. They must be done *in obedience to God*—with a sincere intention to please and honor Him.
2. They must be done *in the name of Christ*—with prayer and thanksgiving through His mediation (Colossians 3:17).
3. They must be done *in faith*—depending wholly upon God for His blessing and the good success of our labor.
4. They must be done *in love*—for both God and neighbor; for all true religion and every grace of the heart must express itself in the works of our particular calling. What a man is in his calling, that indeed he is before God.
5. Lastly, they must be done *with patience*. “The good ground,” says Christ, “brings forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). For it is the will of God to exercise His servants with manifold trials in every condition of life.

When the works of our callings are thus performed—in obedience, faith, love, and patience—they are the fruits of a good conscience and the true service of God.

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