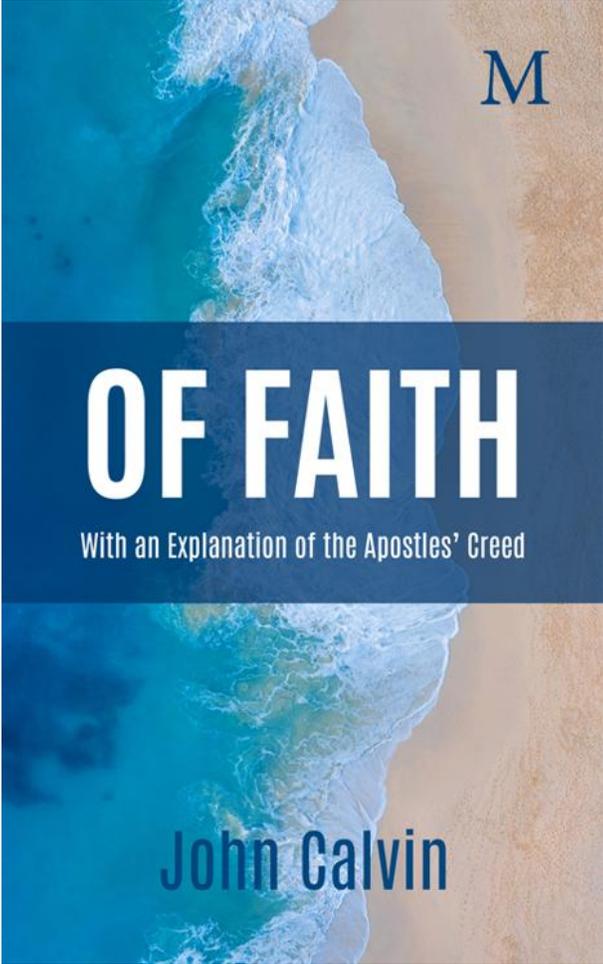


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OF FAITH

With an Explanation of the Apostles' Creed

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by John Calvin

Translated by Sophie Mauroux

Introduction

From the foregoing chapter, the Lord's expectations enshrined in His law are now clear. Should the minutest aspect escape our grasp, He unveils His anger and the dread verdict of eternal demise. Additionally, we have unveiled that adhering to the law, beyond humans' grasp, presents an insurmountable challenge. Consequently, a glimpse inward reveals a bleak panorama, bereft of hope, and an ominous portent of death's clutches, a poignant exile from the divine embrace. Subsequently, we've ascertained that a singular path emerges to evade this abyss—an avenue paved by divine mercy, yet contingent on firm faith embraced with unwavering hope.

Amidst this exploration, the nature of requisite faith beckons explanation—the faith serving as the vessel through which God's chosen heirs step into the heavenly kingdom. The prevalent misconception ensnaring many, where 'faith' merely signifies the

acquiescence to gospel narratives, demands rectification. The roots of this misapprehension intertwine with the sophists and Sorbonnists who, through murky definitions, attenuate the potency of faith. Perniciously, they weave a tapestry of "formed" and "unformed" faith, conferring the appellation 'faith' to a vacuous opinion, devoid of divine reverence and piety. Scripture unequivocally repudiates this notion. While I refrain from a direct assault on their definitions, I wish to elucidate faith's essence as illuminated by the divine discourse. Such illumination underscores their empty prattle.

This distinction is naught but hollow verbiage. While pedagogically useful in discerning the knowledge of God possessed by the ungodly, the sole faith acknowledged is the singular faith echoed by St. Paul, cherished by God's progeny.

In our quest for a profound understanding of faith, it becomes evident that not every word of God securely anchors the human heart in faith. Hence, we must endeavor to uncover the focal point of faith within God's word. While God's voice pronounced, "You shall die" to Adam [Genesis 2:17], and announced, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" to Cain [Genesis 4:10], these declarations, rather than fortifying faith, prove liable to erode it. We concede that faith indeed obliges us to embrace God's truth whenever He speaks, irrespective of His message or manner. However, our current exploration revolves around identifying the bedrock within God's word upon which faith can stand and rest. Should our conscience perceive solely disdain and retribution, terror inevitably takes hold. Consequently, if dread of God consumes the conscience, how can it not flee? Faith, conversely, should draw us toward God, not propel us away from Him. It's evident that our current definition is incomplete, for it's insufficient to merely comprehend God's every volition as

faith. Consider the possibility of substituting "benevolence" or "mercy" for "will"; this might offer a closer alignment with the essence of faith. Our inclination to seek God grows once we grasp that our well-being rests in Him. This revelation is encapsulated in His assurance of caring for our salvation. Thus, the bedrock of faith is founded on the promise of His grace—a testimony that He is our Father, favoring us, and upon which the human heart can confidently repose.

Furthermore, the significance of apprehending God's benevolence is realized when faith prompts us to find solace within that benevolence. To achieve this, knowledge tinged with doubt must be cast aside, for true faith flourishes in unwavering conviction, untroubled by vacillation. Human understanding, shrouded in darkness, remains incapable of fully comprehending God's will. The heart, accustomed to wavering doubt, craves confirmation to rest in faith's persuasion. Hence, both human understanding and the heart necessitate external illumination and affirmation for God's word to resonate fully within us. Now, a comprehensive definition of faith emerges—firm and unwavering knowledge of God's benevolent will toward us. This knowledge, grounded in the promise freely bestowed through Jesus Christ, is unveiled to our intellect and imprinted upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

With meticulous scrutiny, let's dissect each word. Upon this thorough examination, I'm confident that any lingering difficulties shall dissolve. When faith is characterized as the "knowledge of God's will," we are not referring to sensory comprehension. Faith transcends human senses, demanding the spirit to ascend beyond itself for its acquisition. Even after this ascent, faith does not achieve a comprehensive grasp. Instead, it thrives in unwavering conviction, comprehending more through the certainty of persuasion than it

could via human understanding. St. Paul's words resound with wisdom: he urges us to comprehend the boundless dimensions of Christ's love, surpassing earthly comprehension (Ephesians 3:18–19). This elucidates that faith's grasp of an infinite God is accompanied by infinite certainty, surpassing mere understanding. Correspondingly, St. John labels faith as knowledge, affirming believers' unassailable awareness of their status as God's offspring (1 John 3:1). Thus, while certainty prevails, faith is nurtured through unwavering assurance rather than empirical human proofs.

St. Paul further accentuates this disparity. He underscores our earthly pilgrimage, distinct from God, as we navigate guided by faith rather than sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). This underscores that faith thrives amidst realms invisible to the naked eye, beyond our visual perception. Hence, faith's essence resides not merely in comprehension but more significantly in unwavering certainty.

Let us emphasize that this knowledge is not just firm, but "certain and unwavering," underscoring its unshakeable nature. Faith shuns the realm of doubtful and fleeting opinions, seeking instead a resolute and steadfast assurance akin to the confidence we hold in well-tested and understood matters. Some individuals perceive God's mercy with limited consolation, plagued by doubt whether it extends to them. This skepticism constrains their view of God's abundant mercy, causing anxious distress. They acknowledge God's vast mercy showered upon many, yet falter to believe it embraces them or that they can reach it. With this midway perspective, inner peace and confidence elude them, overshadowed by doubt and apprehension. On the contrary, scriptural faith intertwines assurance and confidence, igniting trust in God's goodness. The Apostle draws courage from faith, invoking boldness through confidence, affirming that "through Christ and our faith in him we can now come fearlessly

into God's presence" (Ephesians 3:12). Such is the alignment between faith and confidence that the term "faith" often echoes "confidence."

At the heart of faith resides a pivotal truth: the promises of mercy God extends are not merely external verities, but they are to be internalized within our hearts, becoming personal realities. This intimate embrace leads to the confidence that Paul elsewhere terms "peace" (Romans 5:1), possibly an offshoot of confidence. This peace is a haven, comforting and joyous, granting respite to the conscience amidst God's impending judgment. Without this peace, the conscience writhes in turmoil, seeking temporary escape by veering towards forgetfulness. Yet this fleeting respite is short-lived, as God's judgment resurfaces in memory.

In summation, authentic faith is characterized by the unwavering conviction that God, a benevolent Father, bears a goodwill toward us. This faith propels us to anticipate all blessings from His abundant kindness. Anchored upon God's promises of goodwill, unwavering expectation of salvation takes root (Romans 8:38–39). The Apostle emphasizes this by stating, "if we continue to the end, confident of hope" (Hebrews 3:6). In this declaration, he affirms that genuine hope in God empowers one to boldly proclaim heirship to the heavenly realm. This fact remains unaltered: those of true faith, fortified by the assurance of salvation, fearlessly defy the devil and death, as elucidated in the Apostle's conclusion to the Romans. "I am convinced," he declares, "that nothing can ever separate us from God's love" (Romans 8:38–39). Consequently, he asserts that the eyes of our understanding aren't truly enlightened unless we fixate upon the hope of the eternal inheritance to which we are called (Ephesians 1:18). This theme resonates consistently: the true depth

of God's benevolence surfaces when accompanied by unwavering assurance.

A potential objection arises: "Yet the faithful often experience quite the opposite, battling not just the usual doubts, but facing extreme fright due to vehement temptations." This discrepancy appears at odds with the faith's unwavering certainty discussed earlier. To preserve the integrity of the preceding discourse, let's unravel this quandary. When we speak of faith's certainty and assurance, it isn't a certainty untouched by doubt or a security devoid of worry. Instead, we acknowledge that the faithful wage a continuous struggle against their own doubts. Their conscience is far from a tranquil sanctuary undisturbed by tempests. However, amid these conflicts, they never relinquish the resolute confidence they initially embraced in God's mercy. To fathom this better, we must revisit the dichotomy between Spirit and flesh. This separation endows the faithful with a dynamic struggle: they find themselves simultaneously uplifted by the knowledge of God's goodness and downtrodden by the weight of their own imperfections. This dichotomy plays out within their hearts—the joy of God's promise coexisting with the bitterness of human frailty; the peace of the gospel contrasted with the trembling sight of sin; the embrace of life intertwined with the fear of death. This tumult arises due to the inherent imperfection of faith, as earthly existence never fully realizes the ideal state where absolute confidence eradicates all doubt. Consequently, this ongoing battle emerges as the flesh, tainted with doubt, contends with and seeks to undermine the firm foundation of faith.

In response, someone might inquire: "If doubt intertwines with certainty within the faithful heart, are we not led back to the assertion that faith is neither certain nor clear, but rather mired in obscurity and confusion?" To this, I answer resolutely: No. While

diverse reflections may tug us in different directions, the presence of doubt does not equate to a severance from faith. Being subject to bouts of disbelief doesn't plunge us into the abyss of unbelief. Undermined by uncertainty doesn't imply stumbling into a pit of despair. The culmination of this spiritual warfare consistently demonstrates faith's triumphant conquest over the adversities that seem to threaten its very existence. In essence, the slightest trace of faith sparks a journey where God's kindness and favor become evident. While this perception may be distant, it's an indubitable sight, dispelling any deception. As we progress, growing in wisdom, we draw closer to God's countenance, gaining a surer view. This advancing proximity deepens our intimacy with this knowledge. As the illumination of God's knowledge dawns, ignorance's shroud gradually dissipates. Yet, ignorance doesn't hinder our grasp of God's will, nor does obscured perception dilute our understanding. This marks the core and foundation of faith.

It resembles a scenario where someone confined in a sunless prison glimpses the sun's radiance through a narrow window, casting an oblique and partial illumination. Although the view is not unhindered and unobstructed, even such limited brightness suffices to guide and serve. Similarly, while we dwell within the confines of our earthly vessel, ensnared in shadowy obscurities, the tiniest flicker of God's light unveiling His mercy offers ample illumination for firm conviction. The Apostle, too, addresses these aspects, unveiling divine wisdom's limited portion granted to us in this temporal existence. Yet, in another instance, he emphasizes the resolute assurance intrinsic to even the smallest droplet of faith. He attests that through the gospel, we behold God's glory unmasked, undergoing a transformation into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Amid such obscurity, uncertainties, and ignorance, myriad misgivings and apprehensions may arise—especially considering our proclivity for disbelief. Additionally, various temptations exert their influence, launching sporadic assaults. Chiefly, the conscience grapples with the weight of sin, alternating between self-reproach and silent lamentation, occasionally convulsing with inner torment. Hence, whether adversity seems to signal God's displeasure or the conscience finds reasons for self-critique, these instances become ammunition for doubt to wage war against faith. The adversary's intent: to paint God as an opponent, fueling fear rather than hope, and inciting a perception of God as a mortal adversary.

In this battle, faith arms itself with the shield of God's Word. When assailed by the notion that God stands as an antagonist due to affliction, faith counteracts with the defense that even in suffering, God's mercy prevails, inflicting love rather than wrath. Confronted by the reflection of God as a just judge punishing transgressions, faith raises the shield of mercy, ready to pardon upon a sinner's return. Thus, the faithful soul, though tormented, eventually surmounts these trials. Its confidence in God's mercy remains unyielding and steadfast, metamorphosing doubts into an even greater assurance of this trust. Saints throughout history reflect this phenomenon. Even when confronted by God's chastisement, their laments are directed toward Him. When it appears they may not be heard, they still cry out. After all, why lament to One from whom they expect no succor? How could they implore if they didn't anticipate aid? This exemplifies how disciples, rebuked by Jesus for their wavering faith, still beseeched His assistance (Matthew 8:25–26). We reiterate the earlier assertion: faith's root never fully withers from the faithful heart. Despite potential erosion, its luminance endures, always kindling a spark. Job encapsulates this when he vows to trust God, even if He takes his life (Job 13:15). Therefore, the

saints are never on firmer grounds for despair than when they sense God's hand poised to confound them, based on their current perception.

There exists a distinct type of fear and trembling that not only upholds the certainty of faith but also reinforces it. This occurs when the faithful perceive the divine punishments meted out to the wicked as instructive lessons. These serve to deter them from provoking God's wrath through similar transgressions, thus fostering vigilant avoidance of evil. Furthermore, they recognize their own frailty and learn to rely utterly on God, realizing that without Him, they're more fragile and transient than a mere gust of wind. The Apostle, after recounting God's punitive actions against the Israelites, invokes a sense of trepidation among the Corinthians, urging them to steer clear of repeating the same errors (1 Corinthians 10:6ff). This isn't intended to erode their confidence but rather awaken them from complacency, which tends to smother faith rather than bolster it. Similarly, he draws wisdom from the Jews' downfall to admonish the steadfast, guiding them to guard against stumbling (Romans 11:17ff). This isn't meant to sow doubt in their resolution, but rather to shatter arrogance and misguided self-reliance, preventing us—gentiles—from disparaging the Jews, whose place we've inherited. Moreover, when he advises us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), he isn't demanding uncertainty but instead encourages us to root ourselves in the power of our Lord while maintaining profound humility.

Indeed, nothing solidifies our faith in God's certainty and confidence as profoundly as acknowledging our own deficiencies and recognizing the extent of our wretchedness. This recognition doesn't breed despair but instead underscores our need for God. In this vein, let's reflect on the words of the prophet: "But I, through the

abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you" (Psalm 5:7). Here, the psalmist aptly intertwines the unwavering trust stemming from God's mercy with a sense of holy reverence and trembling before His majesty. (Through the radiance of His majesty, we discern our own defilement.) Similarly, Solomon's wisdom resounds: "Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity" (Proverbs 28:14). This fear begets heightened caution and wisdom, rather than despair. It's a fear that, in moments of self-doubt, seeks solace in God; when disheartened, it finds restoration in Him; when lacking confidence, it finds rest in the hope we have in Him. Thus, the faithful can experience fear and trembling while simultaneously embracing profound consolation. They ponder their insignificance on one hand and God's unchanging truth on the other.

Scripture attributes the fear of God to the faithful consistently. This fear is sometimes called the starting point of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Psalm 111:10), and at other times, wisdom itself (Proverbs 15:33; 29:15). It's a singular fear, arising from two distinct sentiments. God demands both the reverence due a Father and the respect owed a Master. Consequently, those who genuinely wish to honor God endeavor to approach Him as dutiful children and willing servants. The obedience rendered to Him as Father, He designates as "honor"; the service offered as Master, He names "fear." "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?" He admonishes (Malachi 1:6). While He distinguishes these aspects, He initially groups them under the umbrella of "honor." Thus, the fear of God for us encompasses both reverence and fear—a blend of both. It's unsurprising that the same heart experiences both these sentiments. Certainly, considering the kind of Father God is to us

yields a compelling incentive to avoid offending Him, surpassing even the fear of death, let alone the threat of hell. Conversely, given our fleshly inclination toward wrongdoing, we must remind ourselves that the Lord abhors all transgression. Those who disregard this truth invoke His wrath and must not evade His just retribution.

When St. John asserts, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18), he doesn't contradict the above. He speaks of the trembling associated with unbelief, distinct from the fear of the faithful. The ungodly don't fear God because they're concerned about displeasing Him; rather, they dread His ability to punish and shudder at the mere mention of His wrath. Their fear is compounded by its immediacy; they anticipate its impending descent to crush them. In contrast, as previously stated, the faithful's primary apprehension is offending God, not punishment. They're not paralyzed by fear as if hell were imminent; rather, they exercise caution to avert peril. The Apostle addresses the faithful, urging them not to be deceived, as God's wrath befalls rebellious children (Ephesians 5:6). He's not prophesying the onset of God's wrath but warning them that such retribution awaits the wicked due to their sins. This admonition ensures that the faithful don't emulate the wicked and thus meet a similar fate.

Another pivotal aspect under the purview of "God's benevolence" is the attainment of salvation and eternal life. When God's favor rests upon us, we lack nothing to affirm our assurance of salvation. It suffices that God's countenance shines upon us, as the prophet proclaims, "Let your face shine, that we may be saved" (Psalm 80:3). In this vein, the summary of our salvation encapsulates this reality: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians

2:14). This underscores that once reconciled with God, the threats looming over us cease to jeopardize our well-being. Thus, faith encompasses not only the promises for the present and future but also unwavering assurance of all the blessings the gospel heralds.

Yet, faith doesn't assure us of long years, grand accolades, or abundant wealth in this temporal existence, for these are not the divine guarantees. Instead, it rests content in the knowledge that, even amidst life's myriad challenges, God will never forsake us. The bedrock of faith is rooted in the anticipation of the life to come—this is where God's word leaves no room for uncertainty. Regardless of the hardships and distress that might befall those embraced by the Lord's love, His benevolence remains the source of their profound happiness. Hence, when encapsulating blessedness, we evoke God's grace, the font from which all blessings flow. This theme resonates throughout scripture, which frequently underscores God's love/charity when referencing eternal salvation or any form of goodness. David aptly attests that when the faithful bask in God's goodness, it eclipses all desires and surpasses any life's sweetness (Psalm 63:3).

The bedrock of faith is firmly anchored in "the gracious promise," as faith finds its secure footing on this very promise. Although faith acknowledges God's truthfulness across all spheres—be it commandments, promises, or warnings—it truly commences with the promise, gravitating toward it and making it the focus. Faith derives its sustenance from the promise of mercy, which is inherently gratuitous. Conditional promises, on the other hand, hinge on our works and are devoid of life unless we find it within ourselves. To ensure unwavering and steadfast faith, we must rely upon a promise of salvation—one that the Lord offers freely out of compassion, considering our wretchedness above our merit.

For this reason, the Apostle attributes this role primarily to the gospel, which he aptly dubs "the word of faith" (Romans 10:8). This distinction isn't extended to the commandments or promises of the law, as only this divine proclamation, a testament of God's kindness, can bolster faith. This Gospel is the ministry of reconciliation that God employs to draw humanity back to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18). Thus, it stands as the most compelling testimony of God's benevolence and serves as a prerequisite for faith. Consequently, when affirming that faith must rest upon free promises, we don't disregard the faithful's acceptance and reverence for God's entire Word. Instead, we highlight the promise of mercy as faith's true objective. While the faithful certainly acknowledge God as a Judge and Punisher of transgressions, their focus remains on His mercy—His kindness, compassion, patience, goodness, generosity, and love, extended to all His creation (Psalm 86:5, 15; 103:8; 145:8–9).

Furthermore, our emphasis on encompassing all promises in Christ isn't arbitrary, as the Apostle encapsulates the entire Gospel in the knowledge of Christ (Romans 1:17). In another instance, he affirms that all of God's promises find their affirmation and fulfillment in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20), ratifying them. This is easily understood: when God promises goodness, He simultaneously bears witness to His benevolence, rendering every promise a testament to His love. This doesn't conflict with the fact that the wicked may benefit from God's hand while simultaneously incurring His stern judgment. Their lack of recognition or reflection upon the origin of their blessings prevents them from truly understanding God's goodness. In contrast, the faithful, when turning away from promises directed toward them, ultimately store up harsher punishment for themselves.

Although it is through our acceptance of promises that their efficacy becomes evident, their veracity and essence remain undiminished, impervious to our unbelief or ingratitude. Consequently, when the Lord extends His promises, inviting us not only to partake in the fruits of His goodness but also to ponder and honor them, His affection for us is unveiled. We must, therefore, reiterate this truth: every promise is a testament to God's love toward us. It's beyond doubt that God's love is encapsulated in Christ alone, for He is the cherished Son upon whom the Father's affection rests (Matthew 17:5). Thus, this love must reach us through Him. Therefore, the Apostle rightly dubs Christ as "our peace" (Ephesians 2:14) and portrays Him as the conduit that bridges the Father's will to us (Romans 8:3). Hence, whenever a promise is extended, we must perceive it in the light of Christ; Paul's assertion that all God's promises are ratified and realized in Christ is not an erroneous statement.

This straightforward declaration within God's word should suffice to instill faith in us, were it not for our spiritual blindness and obstinacy. Our human spirit, inclined toward vanity, can scarcely grasp the profundity of God's truth. It remains befuddled, unable to fathom His divine radiance. Thus, the bare word alone offers little benefit without the Holy Spirit's enlightenment—a poignant reminder that faith transcends human comprehension. Simultaneously, merely illuminating the understanding with God's Spirit falls short unless the heart, too, is fortified by His power. It's a great folly, propagated by certain theologians, to reduce faith to a mere agreement with God's word, one limited to understanding and devoid of heart's confidence and assurance. Faith is indeed a unique gift bestowed by God in two aspects: firstly, through the illumination of human understanding to comprehend God's truth, and secondly, by fortifying the heart in that truth. The assertion that no one can

believe in Christ except through divine bestowal is perceived as odd by the world. This occurs partly because the profound nature of heavenly wisdom is underestimated, coupled with a disregard for human ignorance and fragility when grappling with God's mysteries. It is also due to the oversight of the central role of heart's steadfastness within faith. Nonetheless, this error can be surmounted. Just as Paul stipulates that a person's spirit is necessary to testify to their own will, the same principle applies to us understanding God's will (1 Corinthians 2:11). Moreover, when God's truth remains questionable even in matters directly perceived by the senses, how can it be unwavering and indubitable when the Lord pledges unseen and incomprehensible things?

In this arena, human wisdom proves inadequate and blinds us. The first stride towards reaping benefits in the Lord's school is renouncing this human wisdom. It acts as a veil that obstructs our grasp of God's mysteries, which only become accessible to the humble (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21). Flesh and blood are incapable of revealing them; the natural person is inept at grasping spiritual matters (Matthew 16:17). Conversely, God's instruction appears absurd to them, as it can only be comprehended spiritually (1 Corinthians 2:10ff). Thus, the Holy Spirit's guidance is paramount, and His power reigns supreme in this realm. No human being has fully comprehended God's secrets, nor served as His counselor. It is the Spirit that enables us to discern even hidden truths, illuminating our understanding. As Jesus Himself elucidates, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father" (John 6:44–46).

Since we can't approach Christ unless we are drawn by the Spirit, the moment of being drawn catapults us above our comprehension. When the soul, illuminated by the Spirit, obtains a new perspective to perceive heavenly truths, the radiance that once dazzled our souls becomes accessible. Through the light of the Holy Spirit, the human understanding gains a taste for the mysteries pertaining to God's kingdom—mysteries that formerly eluded its grasp. This mirrors our Lord Jesus Christ's experience: while He indeed reveals the kingdom's mysteries to the two disciples mentioned by Luke, their understanding remains incomplete until their senses are unveiled to comprehend the scriptures (Luke 24:27). After the apostles received divine instruction, the Spirit of truth was still necessary, infusing their understanding with a deeper insight into the teachings they had previously heard (John 16:13). God's word, akin to the sun, shines upon all to whom it is proclaimed. Yet, it is ineffective among those blind to its brilliance. As we are inherently blind to these spiritual truths, their penetration necessitates the illumination of God's Spirit—the inward Master guiding our understanding.

Ultimately, it's essential that the understanding's acquisition is enshrined in the heart. If God's word merely hovers in the mind, it hasn't been embraced by faith. True reception occurs when it takes root in the heart's depths, serving as an impregnable fortress against the onslaught of temptations. Since understanding illuminated by God's Spirit constitutes true enlightenment, His power is even more evident in fortifying the heart. The heart's lack of confidence surpasses the mind's blindness, and bolstering the heart's assurance proves more challenging than instructing the understanding. Herein lies the purpose of the Holy Spirit as a seal—a seal to inscribe the same promises in our hearts that He first engraved on our understanding, and as a guarantee to affirm and validate them. The apostle succinctly states, "In him you also, when you heard the word

of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:13–14). This vividly portrays how the Holy Spirit marks the hearts of the faithful with a seal, infusing them with confidence, and aptly labeling Him the Spirit of promise for His role in quelling any doubts surrounding the gospel. Similarly, to the Corinthians, Paul remarks, "But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 1:22). In another instance, he attributes the foundation of our hope's confidence and boldness to the Spirit's assurance (2 Corinthians 5:5).

One cannot help but recognize the dangerous implications of the theologians' and sophists' teachings—a toxic doctrine asserting that we can only possess a conjectural understanding of God's grace, based on our own perceived worthiness of it. Should we attempt to gauge God's affection for us through our works, it must be acknowledged that comprehending even the slightest inkling of His grace proves insurmountable. Yet, since faith ought to align with God's unadulterated and gratuitous promise, any room for doubt is obliterated. How will we stand firm against the devil's schemes if we believe that God's favor hinges solely on our merit? However, as we have reserved a dedicated chapter to address this matter, we'll defer its exploration. For the time being, it's evident that conjecture and similar sentiments of uncertainty are diametrically opposed to faith. To bolster their erroneous stance, the sophists frequently misrepresent a passage from Ecclesiastes: "No one can know if he deserves hate or love" (Ecclesiastes 9:1). Yet, it's crucial to emphasize that this statement has been inaccurately translated in the common version. Even young minds can discern that Solomon's intention is to underscore the futility of estimating, based on present circumstances, who God loves or despises. Prosperity and adversity

befall the righteous and the wicked alike, those who serve God and those who disregard Him. This observation leads to the conclusion that God's love or hatred is not always manifested in current events. Solomon employs this to expose the shortcomings of human comprehension, highlighting its inherent limitation in comprehending fundamental truths. This echoes his prior remark, asserting that people often fail to distinguish between the fate of human souls and animals, a deficiency resulting from their inability to perceive the distinction. Should we deduce from this that our belief in the immortality of souls rests solely on conjecture? Would it not be deemed absurd? Consequently, is it not equally preposterous for these sophists to argue that human certainty regarding God's grace is unattainable, as it eludes the discernment of transient events?

The sophists contend that claiming an infallible knowledge of the divine will is rash presumption. I would concede this point, had we been audacious enough to subject God's incomprehensible wisdom to the confines of our limited understanding. Yet, when we simply echo St. Paul's assertion that we have received a Spirit who transcends worldly realms and originates from God, a Spirit through whom we apprehend the goodness bestowed upon us (1 Corinthians 2:12), what grounds do they possess to object without affronting the Holy Spirit? If deeming a revelation from the Spirit as false, uncertain, or ambiguous amounts to a grievous sacrilege, then how can we be faulted for affirming the certainty of His revelations to us?

The sophists might retort that our bold proclamation of the Spirit of Christ is an act of audacity, revealing their immense folly. To envision those who aspire to be the educators of the world displaying such ignorance in the foundational tenets of Christianity is astonishing. Their stance becomes evident through their writings. St.

Paul asserts that only those led by the Spirit are truly children of God (Romans 8:14). Contrarily, the sophists advocate that God's children are guided by their own spirits, devoid of God's Spirit. St. Paul teaches that unless the Spirit, who exclusively testifies to our souls that we are children of God, imparts this designation to us, we cannot claim God as our Father (Romans 8:16). Although the sophists do not prohibit invoking God's name, they effectively deprive us of the Spirit, the guide through whom we should approach Him. St. Paul declares that one who isn't led by the Spirit of Christ cannot be considered His servant. Despite this, the sophists formulate a new version of Christianity, entirely detached from the Spirit of Christ. St. Paul provides no assurance of the blessed resurrection unless we sense the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, while the sophists construct a hope devoid of such spiritual connection.

Perhaps the sophists might assert that they do not deny the Holy Spirit's necessity, yet they advocate humility and modesty, encouraging us to remain unaware of His presence. However, what does the Apostle mean when he instructs the Corinthians to examine themselves, testing whether Jesus Christ dwells within them, and warns that anyone lacking this awareness is reprobate (2 Corinthians 13:5)? St. John echoes this sentiment: "By this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us" (1 John 3:24). Thus, what we truly do is cast doubt upon Jesus Christ's promises when we endeavor to serve Him without the presence of His Spirit, even though He had proclaimed that His Spirit would be poured out upon all His chosen ones (Joel 2:28). In essence, we diminish the Holy Spirit's glory by isolating faith from His realm, the very realm that is His domain. Since these foundational teachings form the bedrock of our faith, it's bewildering to label Christians as arrogant when they glorify the presence of the Holy Spirit—without whose

presence, Christianity itself would cease to exist. The sophists, by their example, affirm Christ's statement that His Spirit remains concealed from the world, and only those in whom He resides truly comprehend Him (John 14:17).

In their relentless quest to undermine the bedrock of faith, the sophists assail it from another angle, suggesting that while we may deduce God's grace based on our current righteousness, the assurance of our perseverance remains uncertain. Nevertheless, they argue, we can maintain a confident hope of salvation even if we possess nothing beyond a "moral conjecture" that we currently stand in God's grace. Regrettably, the apostle's words convey an entirely different sentiment. He unequivocally declares, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39).

The sophists, in their pursuit of evasion, offer a flimsy resolution—contending that the apostle arrived at such knowledge through a distinct revelation. Their attempt to escape is bound by their own web, for here the apostle addresses the general blessings that befall all believers through faith, rather than his personal experience. "Certainly," they assert, "but the apostle himself seeks to stir a sense of caution within us, warning us of our frailty and inconstancy when he admonishes, 'Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall' (1 Corinthians 10:12)." This holds true; yet, he does not intend to invoke fear for the sake of fear itself, but rather to guide us in humbling ourselves under God's omnipotent hand, as St. Peter advocates (1 Peter 5:6). Furthermore, how whimsical it is to restrict the certainty of faith, which ideally should extend beyond this earthly realm and encompass future immortality, to a fleeting moment!

Thus, when the faithful acknowledge that it is by God's grace they are granted the ability, illuminated by His Spirit, to behold the promise of future life through faith, such a glory should not be misconstrued as arrogance. To be ashamed of confessing this glory amounts to ingratitude rather than exemplifying moderation and humility, effectively obscuring and diminishing the magnificence of God's goodness that deserves our utmost reverence.

In a similar vein, the sophists' other fabrications are dismantled using the same rationale. Firstly, they construct the notion that faith is "perfected" when a virtuous affection is amalgamated with the knowledge of God. Secondly, they propagate the idea that ascribing the term "faith" to ignorance and misconceptions about God deceives the ignorant masses. Concerning their first falsehood, they expose their misunderstanding by labeling "informed faith" as ignorant and hollow agreement, thus betraying their lack of comprehension regarding the essence of faith's consent to receive God's truth. As we have already elucidated, the consent of faith emanates from the heart, surpassing the realm of intellect to the domain of affection. Thus, faith is often referred to as obedience—a term elevated by the Lord above all other forms of servitude (Romans 1:5). This appellation is rightfully conferred, given the immeasurable significance of God's truth, a truth corroborated by believers, as witnessed by St. John the Baptist (John 3:26, 5:33). It is therefore unequivocal that the Sorbonnists err profoundly in asserting that "perfected faith" emerges from the union of consent and virtuous affection, for consent, as portrayed in scripture, cannot exist devoid of virtuous affection.

Furthermore, there exists a more conspicuous rationale. Faith, in receiving Christ as offered by the Father, embraces Him not merely as the source of righteousness, forgiveness, and peace, but also as the

wellspring of sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30) and the fountain of living water. Therefore, faith, which necessarily involves apprehending Christ's sanctification, cannot authentically recognize Him without comprehending the sanctifying influence of His Spirit. To put it more succinctly, faith is intrinsically linked to knowledge of Christ, and knowledge of Christ is inseparable from the sanctification of His Spirit—thus, faith and virtuous affection cannot be disentangled.

Those who frequently cite St. Paul's declaration that even if someone possesses unwavering faith enabling them to move mountains yet lacks love, such faith amounts to nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2) are gravely misunderstanding the passage's connotation. They intend to concoct an "imperfect faith," devoid of love. Regrettably, they overlook the context in which the term "faith" is used in this passage. St. Paul is discussing diverse spiritual gifts conferred by the Holy Spirit, including tongues, powers, and prophecies, urging the Corinthians to prioritize gifts that yield greater benefits for the entire church body (1 Corinthians 12:10). He promises to reveal an even more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31). Though these gifts possess inherent excellence, they remain ineffectual without being conduits for love, given that their primary purpose is to edify the church. If they fail to serve this purpose, they lose their essence and worth. To emphasize this truth, St. Paul employs different terminology, employing alternative names for the same graces he previously mentioned. For instance, the "power" mentioned earlier is now referred to as "faith," signifying the power to perform miracles. Given that this capacity, whether termed faith or power, is a unique gift from God susceptible to misuse by the wicked (similar to the gifts of tongues, prophecies, and others), it's understandable that it stands distinct from love. The critical error stems from the sophists' failure to recognize the multiple connotations of the term "faith." They

unreasonably persist in treating it as a consistent concept. The specific passage from St. James they invoke to bolster their claim will be addressed in a subsequent discussion.

The notion of "implicit faith" entertained by some not only obscures authentic faith but eradicates it altogether. Is it not considered an act of faith when one, in surrendering their senses to the guidance of the church, acknowledges and believes? Certainly, faith does not subsist in ignorance but in knowledge—knowledge not only of God, but also of His divine will. Our salvation is not contingent on our readiness to accept all that the church decrees as true, nor do we relegate to the church the duty of inquiry and comprehension. Our salvation is grounded in the knowledge that God, in Christ, has reconciled us to Himself as our benevolent Father. It is through this knowledge that we receive Christ—bestowed upon us for righteousness, sanctification, and eternal life. Our entry into the heavenly realm hinges on this knowledge, not on blindly submitting our spirit to enigmatic matters. When the apostle affirms that one believes in their heart for righteousness and confesses with their mouth for salvation (Romans 10:9), he does not imply that implicit belief in what one does not understand suffices. Rather, he calls for a clear and unblemished comprehension of God's goodness, which constitutes our righteousness.

I do not deny the inevitability of our existing in a realm of ignorance, where many truths remain veiled until we, shedding our mortal bodies, draw closer to God. In matters such as these, I concede that the most prudent course is to suspend judgment and, for now, anchor our will in unity with the church. However, it is fallacious to use this as a pretext to ascribe the label of "faith" to pure ignorance. True faith rests upon the knowledge of God and Christ—not merely reverence for the church. Alas, the chasm the sophists have carved is

vast: whatever the church presents to the uninformed masses, they receive without discernment, even embracing the most absurd errors. This uncritical compliance, which leads people into perdition, becomes all the more problematic considering that they believe with a caveat: "if the faith of the church dictates." Through this approach, they pretend to uphold truth while immersed in error, to cling to light amidst darkness, and to possess knowledge in the midst of ignorance. To counter these deranged notions, I urge readers to contrast them with our teachings. The brilliance of truth itself will furnish an ample arsenal of arguments to silence these sophists.

The essence of faith finds a perfect expression when directed toward the gospel, its ultimate destination. Yet, it is vital to ask what faith should primarily focus on within the gospel. We touched on this briefly when highlighting how the gospel's essence resides in Jesus Christ. This implies that not only are all promises encapsulated within Him, but they are also revealed through Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). However, a more detailed exploration of this theme is warranted.

"Eternal life is to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Indeed, a correct understanding of the Father and Christ is paramount. The Father's nature is discerned exclusively through the Son, for while the Father dwells in unapproachable light, He radiates the brilliance of that light upon us through His Son. Although invisible to our eyes and understanding, the Father offers us His living image through His Son. Thus, the apostle refers to the illumination of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). Christ, acknowledged as the light of the world (John 8:12, 12:46), unveils the splendor of divine glory to humanity. It is accurate to say not only that Christ is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of His nature

(Hebrews 1:3), but also that in Christ, the Father's glory is revealed to us, and His nature is unveiled. The Father has chosen to place all that He possesses in Christ, enabling the Father to commune with us through Christ and glorify His name (John 13:3, 15:15). Consequently, to seek access to the Father, one must return through the only avenue capable of revealing Him—Christ. When Christ identifies Himself as "the way" (John 14:6), He asserts His exclusive role as our guide. Likewise, when He calls Himself "the door" (John 10:7), He proclaims His role as the gateway, as affirmed in other verses: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). Just as we must be drawn by the Spirit of the Father to be stirred to seek and embrace Jesus Christ, we must also acknowledge that the Father, who remains invisible, is only to be sought in Jesus Christ—the image of the Father.

This understanding constitutes genuine knowledge of Christ—accepting Him as the Father offers Him to us, replete with the inexhaustible riches of heaven. Through Christ, we discover a wellspring of joy and all things good (John 1:16). However, to fully appropriate these riches, we must first comprehend the pathway through which they have been procured for us. This pathway entails Christ's obedience—a demonstration evident in His fulfillment of everything requisite for our salvation according to God's eternal purpose. In parallel to the gospel being the ultimate goal of our faith, and Christ being its distinct destination within the gospel, the gospel itself centralizes on Christ's accomplishments and sufferings for our redemption.

To offer a comprehensive understanding of faith, it is imperative to illuminate the facets within Christ that substantiate and fortify it. A

vivid depiction of its essence will facilitate a holistic grasp of its character, much like a painting that encapsulates the whole. In this endeavor, the Apostles' Creed serves as our artistic rendition, encapsulating the entirety of our salvation's narrative with meticulous precision. While the authorship of the creed is disputed, I remain untroubled by the question of its origin. It has unanimously been attributed to the apostles by early church fathers, whether they believed it to be a collective composition or a compilation of teachings summarized by others—a title granted to confer it with authority. Regardless of its provenance, one truth remains unshaken: from the inception of the church, and even from the era of the apostles, it has functioned as a public and assured expression of faith. It is improbable that a single individual authored it, given its enduring authority across generations. The fundamental fact is irrefutable—the creed encapsulates the entirety of our faith's narrative, leaving no aspect omitted. Therefore, we need not excessively agonize over the identity of its author. Instead, we should rest in the certainty of the Holy Spirit's truth, rather than expend energy debating who communicated it or which hand penned it.

Before delving into the exposition of the creed, let us first acknowledge two vital considerations. The first is that the purpose of expounding this narrative is not merely to possess a superficial knowledge of it. Instead, the intention is for our understanding to ascend to loftier realms of comprehension. The creed conveys two kinds of elements—visible and invisible—and we must examine both aspects thoroughly. The spiritual concepts such as the power of God, the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins, while intangible to the eye, demand our belief to extend beyond mere acknowledgment. Our faith should engender confidence and hope, driving us to not only recognize God's omnipotence but also to experience His sustaining power and to genuinely receive the Holy Spirit's influence. This

principle should apply equally to other analogous tenets. The same holds true for visible events in the creed—Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension. Rather than merely external observance, the faithful soul should delve deeper, contemplating the underlying wisdom that informed these events. Our faith's objective is to apprehend the narrative, while its purpose is to contemplate the hidden and unfathomable aspects derived from this narrative. For instance, from Christ's death, we derive assurance in the satisfaction He offered, and from His resurrection, hope for eternal life springs forth.

The second consideration revolves around the structure of the creed. It consists of three segments, each corresponding to the description of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three segments encapsulate the entire essence of our redemption. The fourth segment outlines the spheres within which our salvation is situated. This sequence holds great significance and must not be overlooked. To grasp our salvation's essence, we must initially engage with these three foundational aspects—the vast benevolence and love of the heavenly Father, His sacrificial delivery of His Son for us to restore life (1 John 3:16), the obedience of the Son in fulfilling God's merciful plan for our salvation, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that transmits the blessings of God's goodness in Jesus Christ to us. St. Paul's wishes for the Corinthians encapsulate this concept—invoking the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13). Our blessings are rooted in God's love, offered through Christ's grace, and realized through the Spirit's empowerment. Subsequently, we more deeply explore the faith regarding the church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life—forming the fourth segment of the creed.

Throughout history, Satan, aiming to eradicate faith from its very roots, has perpetuated turmoil surrounding the divinity of Jesus Christ and the distinction of persons within the Godhead. Evil spirits, incited by him, have sown discord among believers, often disturbing the faithful with disputes that challenge the integrity of the scriptures. To commence our exploration of the creed, it seems fitting to address these matters. However, my intention is not to engage in protracted debates with dissenters, but rather to instruct those who possess a teachable spirit. I refrain from presenting a comprehensive argument, despite the gravity of the issue, opting instead to highlight the path we ought to tread and the pitfalls we must avoid. My primary concern remains the education of those who are receptive to the truth.

Foremost, considering the loftiness of scriptural mysteries, a balanced and composed approach is essential to comprehend them. In this context, exercising moderation and sobriety becomes particularly imperative. Our thoughts and language should refrain from surpassing the bounds of God's Word. The task of compressing God's infinite essence into human understanding is an audacious endeavor, especially when we have yet to grasp the nature of the sun's body that remains visible to our eyes. How then can our limited understanding encompass the vastness of God's substance? Let us leave to God the knowledge of Himself. He alone, in the words of St. Hilary, is equipped to testify about Himself, as He is known solely to Himself. We should conceive Him as He reveals Himself, seeking knowledge only through His Word. Chrysostom's five homilies against the Anomoeans provide insightful arguments on this matter. Nevertheless, let us be cautious, learning from the past, and content ourselves with the lessons scripture imparts. When pondering God's essence, let us not entertain speculations but adhere to His Word in our thoughts, reflections, and speech.

Scripture repeatedly and unmistakably attests to the existence of one God—a singular, eternal, infinite, and spiritual essence. Prolonged arguments are unnecessary to validate this truth. The Manicheans' distortion of a few testimonies to assert two principles is sheer folly. Similarly, Anthropomorphites, who attributed a physical form to God based on scripture's anthropomorphic language, gravely misconceived His nature. These anthropomorphic expressions, attributing features like a mouth, ears, hands, and feet to God, are a divine condescension, akin to a nurse's gentle tone when speaking to a child. These expressions do not unveil God's essence but rather adapt His revelation to our limited understanding. Therefore, any attempt to measure God's essence based on such descriptions is futile. Consequently, we affirm the unity of God's infinite, eternal, and spiritual essence.

Yet, comprehending the distinctions among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit within the Godhead is far from straightforward and often perplexes many. Let us divide this discussion into two parts. First, affirming the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, and second, explaining the manner of distinction between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Scripture offers an abundance of evidence to establish both aspects. For instance, when we encounter the term "God's Word," it is illogical to envision a fleeting voice echoing through the air. Rather, it denotes eternal Wisdom abiding within God—a source of ancient oracles and prophecies. Prophets in the Old Testament, as confirmed by St. Peter, communicated through the Spirit of Christ, just as apostles and truth-bearers in subsequent times did (1 Peter 1:10ff; cf. 2 Peter 1:21). This understanding is evident in Moses' account of creation, where God's eternal counsel, not a transient will, set forth the world's genesis (Genesis 1–2). Solomon's portrayal of Wisdom corroborates this understanding—begotten from eternity, it oversaw the world's creation and continues to guide God's work

(Proverbs 8:22). St. John's words provide the most intimate insight, as he declares that the Word, present with God from the outset, is God Himself (John 1:1–2). Each phrase highlights the eternal essence of the Word. Consequently, while heavenly revelations are rightfully termed "words of God," we must recognize the essential Word—the origin and fount of all revelations—unchanging and eternal in God.

Amidst the faithful, there exists a subtle group who, while not openly challenging the Son of God's divinity, secretly attempt to undermine His eternity. They posit that the Word's existence commenced when God, in the act of creating the world, spoke forth His command to bring all things into being. This viewpoint, however, treads upon the majesty of God without due contemplation, as it suggests an element of novelty in His essence. Such an assertion disregards the principle that names ascribed to God in relation to His works were attributed when these works came into being—such as the title "Creator of heaven and earth." Moreover, it is impiety to suggest any name that implies change in God Himself. This perspective distorts the narrative, insinuating that Moses indicated the absence of the Word prior to the act of speaking. Yet, should we deduce non-existence before manifestation? Quite the opposite; as the power of His Word was manifest simultaneously with the creation of light, its pre-existence becomes apparent. Jesus Christ, the Word, confirms this eternal presence, transcending time itself: "Father! Glorify your Son in the glory which I had with you eternally, before the world was made" (John 17:5). This declaration goes beyond temporal constraints, illuminating the eternal nature of the Son and affirming His divine essence.

With the foundation of His divinity established, let us now deeply consider this revelation. However, before we proceed, it is beneficial

to briefly touch upon the Son's appellation as "Son of God." Early church fathers, convinced of the Son's eternal generation from the Father, sought to corroborate this belief through Isaiah's prophecy: "Who will explain His generation?" (Isaiah 53:8). Yet, their interpretation veered from the truth, as the prophet referred not to the Son's begetting but to the multiplication of descendants in Christ's rule. Assertions drawn from the Psalms carry little assurance, for the line "I have engendered you from my womb before the star of the morning" (Psalm 110:3) stands on a translation that diverges from the Hebrew original. In truth, the Hebrew reads: "The dew of his birth is like the emergence of the star of the morning" (Psalm 110:3).

A more compelling argument arises from the apostle's words, proclaiming that all things were created through the Son (Colossians 1:16). This logic upholds the Son's pre-existence, for His creative power necessitates His existence. Nonetheless, similar reasoning falters, as the name "Christ" is ascribed to Him in instances where it may not correspond to His eternal state—just as Christ is attributed to Moses in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4). Similarly, stating that Jesus Christ is "yesterday, today, and will be forever" (Hebrews 13:8) lacks the robustness to assert His eternal suitability as the name "Christ." Thus, misusing scripture to support our cause only exposes our faith to the mockery of heretics.

For me, a single argument suffices to solidify my conviction in the Son's eternity: God, the Father, is truly Father only through His Son, to whom alone this honor rightly belongs. Therefore, as God has eternally been invoked as Father, it follows that the Son, by whose role this relationship was established, eternally existed.

Turning to the heart of the matter—proving the Son's divinity—two lines of evidence converge. The Son of God is unequivocally referred to as "God" in clear scriptural testimonies, and His divinity is substantiated by the potency of His works. In Psalms, David declares, "Your throne, O God, will remain forever; the scepter of your reign is a scepter of uprightness" (Psalm 45:6). Critics might attempt to argue that the term ELOHIM is applicable to angels and celestial beings. Yet, no scriptural instance depicts an eternal throne established for a mere creature. This is not merely "God," but also "One with eternal dominion." This divine authority is not bestowed upon any but the true God. In the following verse, this God is anointed by His God, identifying Him as Jesus Christ, who, in His humanity, humbly submits to God the Father.

Isaiah portrays Him as the Living God, endowing Him with attributes befitting the living God alone. The prophet pronounces, "Here is the name by which He will be called: 'the Living God, Father of the age to come'" (Isaiah 9:6). Attempts to distort this passage to reduce it to "the powerful God" prove futile. Jeremiah similarly testifies that Jesus Christ is the seed of David, destined for the salvation of His people, and the Eternal One of righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5). By ascribing this name to Jesus Christ, the true God's essence is affirmed. This declaration aligns with another prophecy—Jesus Christ avowing, "I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 42:8). This resonates against the Jews' efforts to apply this name to altars and the church. Their contentions are hollow; altars represent monuments, not God's essence, while the church's name signifies God's presence within it.

Amidst these, a more intricate passage emerges—the 33rd chapter of Jeremiah—where what is said of Jesus Christ is attributed to the church. Yet, this passage not only fails to counter our argument but

reinforces it. The prophet initially testifies that Jesus Christ is our true God, the source of righteousness. He then signifies the church's knowledge of this truth, allowing it to boast in His name.

The New Testament overflows with a multitude of testimonies, necessitating the selection of pertinent passages over an exhaustive compilation. It is imperative to highlight the apostles' proclamation that prophecies concerning the Eternal God have found fulfillment or will find fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Isaiah predicts that the God of armies will be a stumbling block for the Jews and Israelites (Isaiah 8:14). Paul affirms this fulfillment in Christ (Romans 9:32–33), thereby identifying Christ as the very God of armies Isaiah foresaw. Similarly, Paul emphasizes that "we must all come to the judgment throne of Christ; for it is written that 'every knee will bow before me, and every tongue will swear in my name'" (Romans 14:10–11; Isaiah 45:23). As God proclaimed this of Himself in Isaiah, its manifestation through Jesus Christ confirms His status as the God whose glory is unparalleled. Furthermore, what Paul conveys to the Ephesians, concerning Christ's ascent to lead His adversaries captive (Ephesians 4:8), resonates with a passage referring to God's victory over His people's enemies (Psalm 68:18). St. John attests that it was the glory of the Son of God that Isaiah witnessed, even though Isaiah referred to the majesty of the living God (John 12:40; Isaiah 6:10).

Moreover, the passages cited by the apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews undeniably pertain to God alone. For instance, "Lord, you have established the heavens and earth from the beginning," and "Worship Him, all you His angels" (Hebrews 1:10, 6; Psalm 97:7; Psalm 102:25). Although these designations honor God's majesty, applying them to Jesus Christ is not misappropriation, as their fulfillment lies solely in Him. He is the one who extends mercy to Zion and takes possession of all peoples and territories, establishing

His kingdom universally. Why would St. John hesitate to attribute God's majesty to Jesus Christ, having initially affirmed in his gospel that He was God Eternal (John 1:1, 14)? Similarly, why would St. Paul shy away from placing Him on the throne of God, after explicitly declaring His divinity by proclaiming Him as the blessed God eternally (Romans 9:5)? To underscore his unwavering conviction, Paul also conveys that Jesus Christ is God manifest in flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). Bearing the title of the blessed God eternally, Jesus merits all glory, as the apostle teaches in another passage (Romans 9:5). This truth resounds unequivocally as Paul underscores that, since Jesus Christ possessed God's glory, He did not perceive it as robbery to be equal to God, humbling Himself unto emptiness (Philippians 2:6–7). Notably, St. John further affirms that Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life (1 John 5:20).

Considerably, St. Paul predominantly bestows the title "God" upon Jesus Christ, openly declaring the oneness of God amidst the existence of numerous deities: "Although one may name several gods in the heaven and on earth, we nevertheless have one God only, from whom are all things" (1 Corinthians 8:5–6). Paul's attribution of God's manifestation in flesh and His acquisition of the church through His blood (1 Timothy 3:16; Acts 2:22ff, 20:28) nullifies the notion of a secondary, unknown god. Moreover, the consistent belief of the faithful substantiates this conviction; the apostle Thomas' confession—addressing Jesus as his God and Lord (John 20:28)—conveys that he worshipped the solitary God he had always known.

Furthermore, if we evaluate Jesus Christ's divinity based on the works attributed to Him in scripture, His divine nature becomes even more evident. When Jesus asserts that He has always worked with His Father, the Jews comprehend, despite their foolishness, that He claims the power of God. As St. John records, the Jews seek

to kill Him, for He not only violated the Sabbath but also behaved as the Son of God, equating Himself with God (John 5:17–18). This passage resoundingly certifies Jesus' divinity. Governing the world through providence and power, and holding all things under His command (Hebrews 1:3), solely befits the Creator. The authority to forgive sins—professed by the Lord in Isaiah—"It is I, it is I, Israel, who wipes out your sins because of myself" (Isaiah 43:25)—incites Jewish outrage, perceiving it as an affront to God. Nevertheless, not only does Jesus assert this power through words, but He also proves it through miracles (Matthew 9:2ff). Hence, the ministry of forgiving sins, along with the power to do so—a power God once revealed—unmistakably resides eternally in Jesus Christ. The discernment of people's thoughts and secrets—a divine attribute—is also evident in Jesus Christ, confirming His divinity.

The realm of miracles stands as practical evidence of His divinity, discernible by the senses (John 2:11). While prophets and apostles also performed miraculous deeds, a significant disparity arises; they merely functioned as instruments of God's gifts, while Jesus Christ innately possessed the power. On occasion, Christ referred glory to His Father through prayer (John 11:41–42), yet more frequently He showcased His intrinsic authority. His conferment of the ability to perform miracles to others, under His own authority, attests to His role as the true Author of miracles. The evangelist narrates His granting the apostles power to raise the dead, heal lepers, and cast out demons (Mark 6:7, 13). The apostles employed these abilities in ways that unmistakably traced their origins back to Jesus Christ. Peter's words to the paralytic, "In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk" (Acts 3:6), highlight this attribution to Christ. Thus, it's unsurprising that Jesus Christ utilized His miracles to expose the Jews' disbelief, for their direct manifestation by His authority unequivocally testified to His divinity. Furthermore, encompassing

salvation, righteousness, and life within Himself, Christ demonstrates His divine essence. He is not merely a recipient of salvation; He embodies salvation itself. When reflecting upon Christ's goodness, one must acknowledge that goodness and righteousness, in the truest sense, reside within Him. The evangelist's teaching echoes this truth: "From the beginning of the world life was in Him, and because He was life, He was also the light of the people" (John 1:2, 4). In light of these profound revelations of His divine majesty, we find confidence and faith to place in Him. This decision, rooted in His Word, counters the notion of entrusting one's faith to a mere creature. St. John exhorts, "Believe also in me" (John 14:1), reinforcing the trust that stems from believing in God. St. Paul affirms, "We believe in Jesus Christ to be justified by the faith of Jesus" (Galatians 2:16), elucidating Isaiah's words, "Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame" (Romans 10:11; Isaiah 28:16), and "There shall come forth a root from Jesse to rule the peoples, and the peoples will hope in Him" (Romans 15:12; Isaiah 11:10). The repetition of the saying, "Whoever believes in me will have eternal life" (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40; 17:3; etc.), underscores this profound truth.

Furthermore, the invocation that hinges upon faith is rightfully directed to Him—a form of invocation that profoundly resonates with God's majesty. The prophet Joel avows, "Whoever calls on the name of God will be saved" (Joel 2:32), while Solomon asserts, "The name of God is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Thus, the name of Christ invoked for salvation underscores His identity as God. St. Stephen's plea, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (Acts 7:59), exemplifies this practice. Witnessed within the Christian community, Ananias attests to the power of Christ's name in invoking salvation (Acts 9:13). Consequently, the fullness of divinity is unmistakably present in Jesus Christ. St. Paul's

confession, expressed among the Corinthians, affirms the supremacy of Christ's name. Exclusively teaching the knowledge of His name, Paul refrains from preaching anything other than Christ (1 Corinthians 2:2). This declaration aligns with God's prohibition to glory in any name other than His own (Jeremiah 9:24). This truth resounds: Jesus Christ is not a mere creation; acknowledging Him as such would be a travesty, for knowing Him constitutes our singular glory. Furthermore, the salutations commonly placed at the beginning of apostolic writings resonate; they extend the same benefits from Jesus Christ as they do from God the Father. This not only signifies that through Christ's intercession, we acquire God's benefits but that Christ Himself bestows them. Such knowledge, rooted in practical experience, far surpasses speculative deliberations. The faithful soul attests to the unmistakable presence of God, tangibly sensing His existence through revival, enlightenment, salvation, justification, and sanctification.

This leads us to affirm the same foundation to affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The scriptures attribute qualities to Him that transcend our human experiences and the realm of creatures. Primarily, He extends everywhere, upholding, preserving, and imparting life to all things in the heavens and on earth. His infinite expansiveness excludes Him from the category of creatures, as divine omnipresence and the bestowal of life upon all beings inherently emanate from God. If rebirth into incorruptible life transcends physical power's grandeur, how exalted is the Holy Spirit, the source of this life? Scripture abundantly teaches that He, by His own power, initiates regeneration (John 3:6) and even promises future immortality (Romans 8:11).

In the fullness of divine revelation, the offices inherently belonging to divinity are attributed to both the Spirit and the Son in scripture.

He, the Spirit, uncovers the deep mysteries of God [1 Corinthians 2:10], providing counsel that transcends the realm of mere creatures. Wisdom and eloquence, characteristics befitting God's majesty alone, are ascribed to Him—a reality that aligns with the words of our Lord to Moses (Isaiah 11:2; Exodus 4:11). Through the Spirit, we partake in the divine realm, experiencing the life-giving power that emanates from Him. Our righteousness finds its source in Him; sanctification, truth, grace—all that embodies goodness—emanate from His boundless essence. St. Paul underscores this truth, stating, "There is only one Spirit from whom we receive all kinds of good" (1 Corinthians 12:11). Particularly noteworthy, scripture refers to Him as "God." St. Paul deduces that we are temples of God, dwelling within us, a notion that should not be taken lightly. Throughout the Scriptures, our Lord's promises of choosing us as His temples and tabernacles find fulfillment through the indwelling of His Spirit within us (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19; 2:12). The apostle's writings alternate between calling us the "temple of God" and the "temple of His Spirit" [1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19]. As St. Peter reproaches Ananias for deceiving the Holy Spirit, he declares that Ananias lied not to people, but to God (Acts 5:4). Isaiah's prophetic words are attributed to the Holy Spirit by St. Paul (Acts 28:25ff; Isaiah 6:9–10). When Isaiah depicts God's distress due to the people's stubbornness, St. Paul attributes this affliction to the Spirit of God (Isaiah 63:10).

In summation, a single argument suffices to firmly establish the triune divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If our baptism signifies initiation into the faith and devotion to one God, the name in which we are baptized designates our God. Thus, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are encompassed within the same divine essence, evidenced by our baptism performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. St. Paul links these three—God, faith, and baptism—so closely together (Ephesians 4:5–

6) that he demonstrates their interdependence. The unity of faith, affirming a single God, logically implies that differing faiths would necessitate different gods. Baptism, as a sacrament of faith, confirms this unity. It follows that baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) demands our belief in them. This command underscores the inseparable unity of the triune God, declaring the three as one.

As we firmly establish the truth of a singular God, the conclusion emerges that the Son and the Holy Spirit share the divine essence. The misconceptions of the Arians become evident as they conceded the title of God to Jesus Christ while denying His divine substance. Similarly, the Macedonians erred by limiting the Holy Spirit to the bestowal of grace, dismissing the reality that He is the source of wisdom, understanding, strength, and all powers. The truth, however, remains undivided—the Spirit's grace flows in diverse forms, while His essence remains whole, in harmony with the apostle's words (1 Corinthians 12:11).

In the pages of scripture, a delicate distinction between God, His Word, and the Holy Spirit emerges—a distinction that calls for reverence and sober contemplation, given the immense mystery it entails. The wisdom of St. Gregory of Nazianzus resonates deeply: "I cannot think of one of them without being surrounded by the three; I cannot discern the three without being carried back to the one." Thus, while acknowledging the reality of a distinction, we must tread carefully to avoid envisioning a trinity of persons that bewilders the mind and does not ultimately lead to unity. Certainly, the terms "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" signify genuine distinctions, avoiding any inclination to perceive them as mere labels to differentiate God in various ways. Yet, it is essential to recognize that this distinction implies unity rather than division. Consider, for instance, how the

heavenly Father designates His Son as a "companion" or "neighbor" in Zechariah (Zechariah 13:7). This term implies a distinction between the Father and the Son, as there exists no familial relationship between God and creatures. Similarly, the Son emphasizes His differentiation from the Father by asserting the existence of another who testifies on His behalf (John 8:18).

Scripture, too, substantiates this distinction between God and His Word. When the Father creates all things through His Word, it underscores the differentiation between them. Importantly, this distinction does not originate with the incarnation of the Son, as the pre-existent Son dwelled in the Father's bosom (John 1:18) before descending to take on human form. This truth affirms that the Son's reign in glory existed from the beginning.

Likewise, the distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Father is evident in the Spirit's procession from the Father, while the distinction between the Spirit and the Son emerges when Jesus Christ speaks of another Comforter coming (John 15:26), a distinction reaffirmed across various passages. Yet, explaining the essence of this distinction proves a challenge. While some analogies from human affairs have been borrowed by early church fathers, they themselves confessed the limitations of such analogies. Thus, an element of caution is warranted, lest our words be misconstrued and misused.

Indeed, the distinction is expressed in scripture: the Father is the origin of all actions and the source of everything; the Son embodies wisdom, counsel, and the arrangement of all things; the Holy Spirit represents power and efficacy in all actions. The unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's eternal existence is irrefutable—God's wisdom and power could never exist independently, making it senseless to

prioritize one over the other. Although divine unity necessitates no hierarchy of first or second within eternity, the order between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remains significant. The Father is identified as the first, followed by the Son emanating from Him, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from both. This sequence mirrors the human mind's natural inclination, contemplating God, His Wisdom, and His Power in an orderly progression. This order is evident in passages like Romans 8, where the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead, showcasing unity without distinction (Romans 8:9, 11). This harmony resonates with St. Peter's testimony that it was the Spirit of Christ through which the prophets spoke (1 Peter 1:11), aligning with scripture's frequent assertion of the Spirit as both the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.

In truth, the distinction within the triune God does not negate unity; rather, it affirms the unity. It confirms that the Son shares the same divine essence as the Father, evidenced by their mutual possession of the same Spirit. Similarly, the Holy Spirit's essence is not separate from that of the Father and the Son, for He is their Spirit. This unified essence is uniquely expressed within each Person, reflecting their distinct roles. The Father fully resides in the Son, and the Son in the Father, as affirmed by Christ Himself: "I am in my Father and my Father is in me" (John 14:10). The consensus of the church fathers aligns with this understanding; they refute any differentiation within the Essence among the Persons. While some early fathers seemingly presented differing ideas, such as referring to the Father as the beginning of the Son, they ultimately upheld the unity of the divine essence. The seemingly contradictory language is better reconciled when considering that sometimes they explained that the Son possessed His divinity and essence from Himself.

The claims of Sabellians, who liken God's titles to adjectives like "powerful," "good," "wise," and "merciful," are easily refuted upon deeper reflection. These titles are descriptions that illuminate God's nature toward us, while the titles "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" reveal His inner essence. The distinction between these names and attributes is crucial. Furthermore, we must not confuse the Spirit with the Father and the Son merely because God is referred to as Spirit (John 4:24). Indeed, it is fitting for the entirety of God's essence to be characterized as spiritual, with the Father, Son, and Spirit being harmoniously united within this essence. Just as scripture identifies God as Spirit, it also affirms that the Spirit is of God and proceeds from God (John 15:26).

Those who approach these truths without contentiousness recognize how the Father, Word (Son), and Spirit exist harmoniously within a single divine essence. Even the most stubborn opponents struggle to refute this point. The Father and the Son are God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet, the truth that emerges remains unwavering—there is only one God. On the other hand, scripture explicitly names three distinct entities, highlights their individualities, and distinguishes them. This is the essence of both three and one: a singular God, a singular essence. Who are these three? Not separate gods, not distinct essences, but rather, three attributes or qualities. The early Greek church fathers aptly described this as one essence containing three hypostases. Those using Latin language, while agreeing on the essence, modified one term slightly. They asserted the existence of one essence and three persons, perceiving the latter term as indicative of a relational aspect.

Critics and dissenters raised objections, comparing the terms "essence" and "hypostasis" to human inventions absent from scripture. However, the unassailable reality remains that three

distinct entities coexist within the same divine deity. It is essential to recognize that these words merely convey concepts found within scripture. The call to remain within scriptural boundaries is valid, urging us to avoid introducing new terms that could lead to division and disputes. Engaging in unnecessary word-battles and quarrels detracts from the truth and weakens love and charity. While the critique of using words not found word-for-word in scripture is reasonable, it's important to strike a balance. Demanding every word align syllable-by-syllable with scripture would be impractical and dismiss many valuable sermons. However, if "strange words" refer to inventions driven by curiosity, defended with superstition, leading to strife instead of edification, and straying from scriptural simplicity, it is a prudent stance. Reverence for God in both thought and language must match our understanding of His majesty, as our human thoughts and expressions fall short of grasping His fullness.

Nonetheless, finding a middle ground is necessary. While scripture guides our thoughts and words, there's room to clarify concepts that may be obscurely presented therein. This is permissible as long as our explanations faithfully align with scriptural truth, are rooted in reason, and avoid excessive liberty. Instances of this abound in our daily lives. Can it not be argued that the church adopted the terms "Trinity" and "persons" to defend the truth against slander and misconstruction? Criticizing these terms as novel suggests discomfort with the light of truth—especially when these words serve to elucidate scriptural truths that are challenged by adversaries. In the face of contemporary challenges, clear explanations are essential to confront those who evade the truth. Just as early church fathers confronted erroneous teachings with straightforward explanations, these clarifications left no room for misinterpretation, curbing the potential for deceit.

Arius, in his attempt to align with the testimonies of scripture, confessed Jesus Christ as God and the Son of God. However, he persisted in claiming Christ was created and had a beginning like other creatures. In response, the early church fathers proclaimed Christ as the eternal Son of God, of the same substance as the Father, to expose Arian impiety. Had Arians confessed Christ's divinity from the start, they might not have denied His divine essence. Critics who question the intention of these fathers to incite conflicts ignore the gravity of these matters. A single word, carefully chosen, ignited fervent debates, revealing true believers from heretics.

Following Sabellius, who dismissed the significance of the titles "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit," and likened them to the attributes of God such as "powerful," "good," and "wise," we must address his misguided claims. While Sabellius acknowledged the Father and the Son as God, he later retreated, asserting that his words were akin to calling God "good" or "wise." Yet, he ventured further, suggesting that the Father was the Son and the Son was the Holy Spirit, erasing all distinction. Those in that era, upholding the honor of God, confronted Sabellius, urging him to recognize the trifold nature of one God. In response, they established the truth that within the divine essence, a trinity of persons coexists.

If these names were not coined haphazardly, then we should not be hasty in condemning them. It is preferable for these terms to be buried, if only the faith remains unwavering worldwide—that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, yet distinct in their characteristics. The word "hypostasis" appears to carry the same significance in the apostle's words as the early church fathers assigned to it here. The apostle refers to the Son as the image of the hypostasis of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3). I disagree with interpreting "hypostasis" as essence, suggesting that Christ merely

reflects the Father's image, like wax conforming to a seal. Instead, I believe the apostle implies that the Father, while distinct, fully manifests Himself in the Son. His very person—His hypostasis—radiates and is unveiled. It would be improper to label Christ as the image of His Father's essence, as He encompasses the essence wholly, not partially or through transfer, but in its entirety.

However, I am not so naïve or dogmatic as to provoke intense disputes over simple terms. It's evident to me that the early church fathers, though deeply respectful in their discussions, did not always reach unanimity in every instance. They varied in expressions and forms of speech, as evidenced by the councils and writings of St. Hilary and St. Augustine. Discrepancies also existed between the Greek and Latin perspectives. To illustrate, the Latin fathers interpreted the Greek term "homoousios" as "consubstantial," signifying the Son's sameness of substance with the Father. Conversely, St. Hilary mentioned "three substances" in God over a hundred times. He lamented the necessity of expressing profound truths through human words, and acknowledged the limitations of language in conveying divine mysteries. It's crucial to recognize this diversity within the church's tradition.

St. Hilary's moderation serves as a reminder not to hastily condemn those who don't fully embrace our vocabulary. Educating them about the necessity behind our expressions and gradually familiarizing them with our terminology is essential. In a climate of defending against Arianism and Sabellianism, any resistance to these explanations may raise suspicions of sympathy with these errors. Arius admitted Christ's divinity, but in secret, he wavered, suggesting Christ was created and had a beginning. He confessed Christ's unity with the Father but privately implied it was a common privilege for the faithful. Affirming that Christ is of the same substance as the

Father dispels such falsehood without straying from scripture. Sabellius claimed that the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lacked significance. By asserting the existence of three entities within God—while maintaining their unity—we address this error and silence the heretic.

While some may find superstition in these terms, it's undeniable that scripture proclaims one God, signifying unity in divine essence, and yet it also names three, highlighting distinct characteristics. When these truths are acknowledged plainly and without deception, the exact words used become secondary. Now, let us proceed to expound upon the creed.

THE FIRST PART

I believe in God the Father almighty

Let us first consider the manner of speaking. To believe in God signifies more than mere mental assent; it implies acceptance, devotion, and commitment to Him and His Word. The phrase originates from the Hebrew language, which equates "to believe in God" with "to believe God" and have faith in Him. The faithful, in uttering this confession, declare their acceptance and acknowledgment of God as their own, binding themselves to Him as His devoted servants. This covenant enables them to join in exclaiming, "You have been our God from the beginning; therefore, we will not perish" (Habakkuk 1:12). When we claim God as our own, we secure life and salvation in Him. The appellation "Father" is coupled with "God" to reinforce this assurance. Through His beloved Son, upon whom His divine favor rests (Matthew 3:17), God reveals Himself as our Father, inviting us into a spiritual relationship from

which all heavenly and earthly bonds derive, as affirmed by St. Paul (Ephesians 3:14). Through faith, we not only approach God but also encounter Him as our Father, for we cannot know Him apart from His Son, who conveys to us this extraordinary privilege. With God as our Father, we become His cherished children, and as His children, we also become heirs (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

In attributing to God the attribute of almightiness, we do not subscribe to the sophists' notions of impotence and inertia. On the contrary, we recognize His power as active, effective, and all-encompassing. God is deemed "almighty" not because He remains passive while capable of performing all things, but because He exercises dominion over all creation. Through His providence, He orchestrates the affairs of heaven and earth, executing His divine plan and counsel (Psalm 115:3). As He accomplishes His desires and nothing escapes His watchful gaze, all transpires by His divine decree and authority. While we touch on this concept briefly now, a more extensive examination will be undertaken later. Through faith, we glean a twofold consolation in God's omnipotence. Firstly, we grasp His boundless ability to do good and ensure the salvation of His faithful. His hand governs and oversees all creation; heaven and earth are under His sovereign rule, and every creature is subject to His command. Secondly, faith finds solace in His protective care, as everything that could endanger us is subject to His will. Even the devil, with all his malevolent schemes, is restrained by the divine will. In essence, all forces opposing our salvation are under God's command.

Creator of Heaven and Earth

As we contemplate the Creator of heaven and earth, the wicked are compelled by the mere observation of the world to acknowledge His

existence. However, faith provides a distinct perspective for contemplating God as the Creator, as mentioned in Hebrews 11:3: "By faith we understand that the world was created by God's word." Indeed, comprehending the significance of designating God as the "Creator of the world" requires faith. Although it might seem that we comprehend this truth within our minds and confess it with our words, our earthly minds typically cease their contemplation at recognizing God's power in creation. These minds, when striving their utmost, merely acknowledge the power and wisdom He employed in the act of creation. Subsequently, these earthly minds vaguely grasp a general act of sustaining and directing the creations, attributing the motion of all creatures to this.

Nevertheless, faith ascends to higher realms. Beyond acknowledging God as the Creator of the world, faith recognizes Him as the Sustainer and Everlasting Ruler. This goes beyond a universal force guiding the cosmic framework; faith apprehends His meticulous providence, which sustains, preserves, and imparts life to all His creations, down to the smallest birds of the sky. While the distinction may appear subtle, human wisdom scarcely reaches the profundity of this insight, a reflection exemplified in Psalm 104. In this psalm, David meditates on the intricate divine care underlying creation, especially evident in verses like, "All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground" (Psalm 104:27-30). Similar expressions are woven throughout Scripture. We learn that life itself is sustained by God, as emphasized in Acts 17:28, while dew and rain originate from His hand to nourish the fields. At His command, the heavens turn as hard as iron. From

Him emanate both peace and war, life and death, light and darkness, plagues and health, abundance and famine, all expressions of His goodness and justice.

Through these teachings, the faithful conscience derives a particular solace. If God provides sustenance to the raven, creatures that beseech His aid (Psalm 147:9), how much more will He nourish us, His people and the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 79:13)? If He takes note of a sparrow's fall through His knowledge and will (Matthew 10:29), how much more will He safeguard our salvation? He pledges to preserve us as the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2:8). Recognizing that life transcends mere physical sustenance and depends on the life-giving word from God's mouth (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3), we find reassurance in His promise of unwavering assistance, ensuring our needs are met. When we encounter barrenness, famine, or disease, our perspective shifts from attributing such circumstances to chance, acknowledging them as expressions of God's wrath. In summary, understanding God as our Creator, Protector, and Nourisher compels us to recognize our identity as His, our lives as lived according to His will, and our actions as directed by His grace.

Ascribing the glory of creation to the Father in no way excludes the Son and the Holy Spirit. Instead, this attribution is to be understood in the context of the personal characteristics of the Divine, as we have previously expounded. As the Father is designated as the beginning of all things, we acknowledge Him as the Maker of all. However, this creation occurs through His Wisdom and by His Spirit. To truly fathom God as the Creator of heaven and earth and as the almighty Father, we must place our trust in His providence. We must meditate on His mercy and paternal benevolence, magnifying Him in our hearts and expressing honor, reverence, and love for our

heavenly Father. Wholeheartedly devoted to His service, we accept all things from His hand, even those that appear contrary to our well-being. Believing that His providence orchestrates adversities and trials for our salvation, we find solace in the midst of challenges. Therefore, regardless of circumstances, we must never doubt His favor, love, and unwavering commitment to our well-being, as the first part of the creed imparts the lesson of fostering such unwavering confidence.

THE SECOND PART

In Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

The profundity of Jesus Christ being the focal point and essence of our faith becomes evident when we consider that every facet of our salvation finds its culmination and unity in Him. The prophet's declaration that "the Lord came to save His people" (Habakkuk 3:13) emphasizes that the Lord, through His Christ, fulfills the work of His mercy to redeem His people. Firstly, our Redeemer is named "Jesus," a title bestowed by the Father, reflecting His mission to save and deliver people from the grip of sin (Matthew 1:21). In Christ alone, we discover salvation. The bestowal of this name holds divine significance, underscoring the unique avenue of salvation found solely in Him. Thus, the Scriptures affirm that "there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This name, therefore, signifies to all believers that they should seek salvation exclusively in Him and offers unwavering assurance that it is indeed attainable therein.

Furthermore, the title "Christ," meaning Anointed, accompanies "Jesus." While the term "anointed" possesses relevance in other

contexts, it holds a distinct significance for Christ, as He receives this title with singular privilege. God anoints all recipients of His Spirit's grace, extending even to faithful believers. Consequently, all the faithful are God's anointed. This spiritual anointing is shared by prophets, kings, and priests, characterized not merely by external ceremonial acts but a deeper spiritual consecration. However, all such anointings pale in comparison to that of our Savior. While others received diverse portions of grace according to God's measure (Romans 12:6), Christ alone possesses the fullness of these graces. John the Baptist emphasizes that God granted Christ His Spirit without limits, enabling believers to draw from His abundance and receive grace upon grace (John 3:34; 1:16). The prophet Isaiah predicted that the Spirit of the Lord would rest upon Him, not conferring a solitary grace but equipping Him with wisdom, understanding, strength, counsel, knowledge, and piety (Isaiah 11:2). This prophecy was realized at Christ's baptism, when the Spirit descended upon Him, visibly confirming His spiritual anointing (John 1:32).

Indeed, the Spirit of God is aptly referred to as "anointing," with His graces symbolized as "oil." Without His nourishment, we remain barren and desolate, devoid of vitality. God's Spirit, having abundantly indwelt Jesus, selected His soul as a conduit through which to pour out on us. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers occurs through participation in Jesus, each one receiving through shared communion. This highlights the distinction between Christ's anointing and ours. Our Lord received the full measure of spiritual riches from God, and He bestows portions of these upon us. By resting upon Him, the Spirit establishes Him as the source from which we partake and commune in the graces of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, this anointing ordained Jesus as King by the Father, subjecting all powers in heaven and on earth under His dominion, in accordance with Psalm 2:8. He was also consecrated as Priest, fulfilling the role of mediator with the Father. These concepts hold immense significance in reinforcing and nourishing our faith. The nature of His kingdom transcends the earthly and corruptible; it is spiritual, belonging to the realm of the afterlife and the heavenly kingdom. His reign is directed not solely for His benefit but primarily for ours. He empowers and fortifies us, adorning us with His magnificence, enriching us with His blessings, and elevating us to the majesty of His kingdom. By participating in His authority, He endows us with the strength to combat the forces of evil, sin, and death. Through His righteousness, we are clothed and adorned, poised in anticipation of immortality. In this manner, our lives become fruitful for God through good deeds.

Regarding His priestly role, the benefits are no less profound. He intercedes with the Father on our behalf, securing divine favor through His mediation and the eternal reconciliation He achieved through His death. By making us participants in His sacrifice, He not only advocates for us but also allows us to offer prayers, thanksgivings, ourselves, and all that we possess to the Heavenly Father. The ancient promise that His people would become both kings and priests (Exodus 19:6) finds fulfillment in our Savior. Through Christ alone, we gain access to the realm of righteousness and the sacred dwelling of God. To summarize, through the name "Jesus," our confidence in redemption and salvation is confirmed. Through the title "Christ," we are invited to partake in the communication of the Holy Spirit and the sanctifying fruits He imparts. Christ's sanctification on our behalf, as He declared (John 17:19), establishes a bridge for us to commune with God, participate in His blessings, and receive His graces.

The appellation "Son of God" signifies a profound reality concerning Jesus Christ. He is not a Son by adoption or through the grace granted to other faithful individuals. Instead, He is the genuine and natural Son of God, making Him extraordinary and distinct. While the Scriptures bestow the privilege of being called "children of God" upon the regenerated, Jesus Christ alone is uniquely termed the true and exclusive Son. How can He truly stand apart amidst the multitude of brethren unless He inherently possesses what others receive as a gift? It is imperative to exercise caution when encountering viewpoints that regard Jesus Christ as the exclusive Son of God solely due to His conception by the Holy Spirit in the virgin's womb—a notion that echoes the fallacious notion held by the Manicheans, who imagined humans to be of divine substance due to God breathing life into Adam. In contrast, Scripture unveils that the Son of God is the very Word of God, begotten by the Father prior to all ages.

While it is true that some cite references such as God not sparing His own Son (Romans 5:8, 10) and the angel declaring that the virgin-born child shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:32), a deeper exploration is required. Such arguments warrant careful consideration. If the premise that Jesus Christ became the Son of God only at the moment of His conception in the virgin's womb is upheld, then it logically follows that He began to be the Word of life only when He manifested in human form. In this vein, the argument raises questions concerning passages like the prophecy stating, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). However, a pivotal passage from St. Paul clarifies this ambiguity. He asserts that Christ was "born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God

with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:3-4). This declaration underscores the separation between His divinity and flesh. Indeed, this statement's lucidity negates ignorance, emphasizing that any resistance would stem from obstinacy. It is vital to acknowledge that Jesus Christ was the Son of God in His incarnate form, although speaking edifyingly calls us to perceive Him not solely as the eternal Word of God, but also as the embodiment of humanity, a concept that will be expounded upon further.

Finally, the title "Lord" is conferred upon Jesus Christ, for the Father has ordained Him to assume the roles of our Lord, King, and Lawgiver. Correspondingly, when He manifested in flesh, He explicitly demonstrated His intention to govern and rule. As the apostle declares, "But to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:6). This statement signifies more than His role as a Teacher or Master, urging us not only to heed His teachings but also to recognize His authority and sovereignty. He is our Leader and Chief, commanding our submission to His power, our obedience to His will, and the alignment of all our endeavors with His purpose. As the firstborn of the Father's household, He wields dominion over His brethren, distributing the inheritance's blessings according to His divine discretion.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

The luminous mystery of the incarnation possesses the ability to both enlighten the understanding and provoke contemplation. Nevertheless, when misunderstood, this profound truth can lead to confusion and laborious contemplation. Therefore, a brief

elucidation is in order before we proceed. Firstly, it is indispensable that the Mediator bridging the gap between humanity and divinity should be authentically both God and [hu]man. Our transgressions erected a barrier between us and God, estranging us from the heavenly realm and causing God to seem remote. Only one possessing the capacity to span this chasm was capable of effecting reconciliation—an entity capable of traversing this expanse. Could it be an offspring of Adam? Yet fear restrained Adam's descendants from approaching the Divine presence. Could it be an angel? Even they required a chief to unite them harmoniously with God. The question arises: Who could fulfill this role? Indeed, it would have been a forlorn situation had not the grandeur of God condescended to humanity, for our feeble nature lacks the means to ascend to His majesty. Consequently, it was imperative for the Son of God to become Immanuel—God with us—uniting His divinity with our humanity, thereby establishing an inseparable bond. Without such a union, the hope of God dwelling within us and offering assistance would remain feeble in the face of the vast disparity between our insignificance and the magnificence of Divine Majesty.

In presenting Jesus as our Mediator, St. Paul explicitly designates Him as "man" (1 Timothy 2:5). While he could have alternatively referred to Him as "God" or perhaps omitted the term "man," Paul's choice illuminates his awareness of our frailty. By identifying Jesus as "man," he signifies that Jesus is our near companion, as He shares in our humanity. Paul's intent is to underscore a concept more comprehensively addressed elsewhere—that our High Priest is not devoid of compassion for our weaknesses. Having encountered temptations akin to ours but remaining without sin, Jesus empathizes with our human predicaments (Hebrews 4:15).

A deeper understanding emerges upon contemplating the role of the Mediator. This role is no ordinary task—it encompasses the restoration of God's grace, transforming us from children of humanity into children of God. Likewise, it grants us a heavenly inheritance, elevating us from heirs of perdition to heirs of salvation. Yet, who could fulfill such a monumental responsibility? None other than the Son of God, made Son of man, divinely joining His nature with ours. Thus, He imparts His inherent attributes to us through divine grace. This unique unity assures us of our status as God's children, as the natural Son of God adopts our humanity, merging His essence with our earthly existence. By embracing our human condition, He extends to us what was originally His, endowing us with divine favor. Consequently, the unique Son of God—possessor of heavenly privilege—extends kinship to us, granting us assurance of our status as heirs to the heavenly realm. Indeed, we become co-heirs with Him, partaking in His divine inheritance.

The necessity for our Redeemer to be both true God and true man stems from two pivotal aspects. First, His purpose was to vanquish death—Life itself was the sole force capable of achieving this feat. Additionally, He was to conquer sin—a task reserved for Righteousness alone. His mission also included subduing the celestial forces of darkness, the malevolent entities known as devils—a feat only possible for a Power transcending both the earthly and heavenly domains. Such attributes reside uniquely in God. Thus, through His boundless mercy, the Lord emerged as our Redeemer, triumphing over death and sin.

Our redemption further entailed the restoration of mankind's obedience, counteracting the disobedience that led to our downfall. In assuming the role of Adam, Jesus embraced humanity's name and nature, offering obedience to the Father on behalf of all humanity.

He thereby demonstrated humanity's potential to fulfill God's requirements. By accepting the burden of human flesh, He bore the penalty of sin, a punishment etched upon the same flesh that had transgressed (Romans 5:12ff). Moreover, as the only One capable of defeating death as God, yet unable to experience death solely as man, Jesus united divinity with humanity. This union enabled Him to withstand human frailty and endure the sting of death, ultimately achieving victory. To deny Christ's divinity or humanity is not merely a disservice to His greatness and goodness, but also a detriment to faith itself, undermining the foundation upon which unwavering faith stands.

To further linger in substantiating His divinity would, I am convinced, be redundant. His true human nature was impugned by both Manicheans and Marcionites who aimed to dismantle it. The Manicheans speculated that He brought a spiritual form from the heavens, while the Marcionites propagated the notion that He inhabited a phantom or illusion—a mere semblance of a body. However, numerous scriptural references robustly repudiate these two fallacies. Long ago, the promise of blessing was not predicated upon a celestial progeny or a feigned human guise; rather, it was rooted in the lineage of Abraham and Jacob (Genesis 17:7, 16). The eternal throne was not pledged to an ethereal entity, but to the Son of David and the fruit of his lineage (Psalm 132:11). Thus, when manifested in flesh, He is hailed as the Son of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1), not because His origin commenced with His virgin birth as if He was first shaped from the aether, but due to His fleshly lineage, as clarified by St. Paul (Romans 1:3, 9:5). Elsewhere, St. Paul attests that He descends from the Jews (Galatians 3:16). Thus, by embracing human designation as "man," Jesus deems Himself "Son of man," denoting that He is a man born of human lineage. Given the frequency, variety, and simplicity with which the Holy Spirit

emphasizes this truth through diverse voices, who could have anticipated audacity to equivocate on this matter?

Moreover, a host of testimonials exist to dispel such unfounded aspersions. St. Paul asserts that "God sent His Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). A plethora of passages convincingly illustrate His vulnerability to cold, heat, hunger, and other human frailties. Nevertheless, we must select those that fortify our hearts with authentic confidence, such as when it is stated that He did not exalt angels above humans in His incarnation, but "He took on our nature so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14, 16). Through this union, He identifies us as His brethren, a kinship evidenced by His willingness to intercede and extend mercy (Hebrews 2:11, 17). Furthermore, the assertion that "we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are" (Hebrews 4:15) offers substantial comfort. Heretics falter when distorting passages to bolster their misconceptions. Marcion and his associates contorted Paul's declaration that Christ took on human likeness and form, erroneously asserting that Christ adopted an illusionary form rather than a true body. Yet, Marcion overlooked Paul's intent in this passage. The apostle did not aim to clarify the physical form Christ assumed; rather, he underscores Christ's humility in choosing to manifest Himself in human appearance (Philippians 2:6–8). Meanwhile, the Manicheans fashioned a corporeal form for Christ from air, arguing that Christ—designated as the second, heavenly Adam—originated from heaven. However, the apostle in this passage does not address Christ's celestial essence, but the spiritual authority conferred upon Him to impart life. Conversely, faithful affirmation of Jesus Christ's true human nature is substantiated by this passage. Had He not shared our nature, St. Paul's vigorous argument asserting the necessity of Christ's

resurrection—hinging on the truth that Christ's resurrection guarantees ours—would be rendered insubstantial (1 Corinthians 15:16ff).

Regarding the phrase "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14), it ought not to be misconstrued as a transformation into flesh or a mingling of substances. Rather, it signifies that the Word assumed a human body—akin to a temple—in which to dwell. The Son of God, already existing, became the Son of man, not through a fusion of essences, but through a unification of personhood. Thus, He harmoniously blended and united His divinity with the humanity He embraced. Though both natures retained their distinct attributes, Jesus Christ remained singular, devoid of two separate personas.

If we seek a parallel to this mystery of the two natures in Christ, the concept of a person offers an apt metaphor. A person consists of two distinct natures, with each retaining its inherent qualities; a soul is not equivalent to a body, and vice versa. Thus, certain attributes uniquely pertain to the soul or the body. However, the nature of a person incorporates characteristics of both the soul and body. Consequently, a person, comprised of these two distinct elements, remains indivisible. This metaphor illustrates that a person embodies a single nature comprising two distinct components, each maintaining its individuality while coexisting harmoniously.

Scripture indeed employs this discourse regarding Jesus Christ. It alternately attributes qualities that exclusively pertain to humanity, divinity, or both combined natures. This precise fusion of the two natures within Jesus Christ, skillfully articulated by the early church fathers as "communication of properties," is revealed through scriptural passages. My assertions find validation within these scriptures; I merely amplify these truths. Christ's assertion that He

existed before Abraham's creation (John 8:58) could not be applied to His humanity, which emerged centuries after Abraham's era. Phrases like "firstborn of all creation," denoting precedence over everything and the sustainer of all (Colossians 1:15–17), exceed the bounds of human attributes. Such accolades belong inherently to divinity. Conversely, designations such as "Servant of the Father" (Isaiah 43:10) and statements about His growth in age and wisdom (Luke 2:52), His admission of lesser knowledge than the Father's (Matthew 24:36), His inclination not to seek His own glory, and His limited awareness of the final day (John 3:13) align aptly with His humanity. His divinity, as God, is akin to the Father, omnipotent and all-knowing. The concept of communication of characteristics is discerned in St. Paul's assertion that "God obtained His church by His blood" (Acts 20:28) and "the Lord of glory was crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:8). Though God lacks blood and does not endure suffering, Christ, being both God and man, was crucified and shed His blood for us. This form of expression, although unconventional, bridges the actions of His humanity with His divine nature. Similarly, the assertion that God gave His life for us (1 John 3:16) demonstrates communication of attributes between Christ's humanity and His divine nature. Christ's statement that no one ascended to heaven except the Son of Man, even when He was not yet bodily in heaven (John 3:13), indicates that due to the unity of His two natures, He attributes qualities of one nature to the other.

To truly grasp Christ's essence, we must explore passages where both natures are united. Such passages abound in the Gospel of St. John. These declarations neither exclusively belong to Christ's humanity nor His divinity; they encapsulate His person, which unites divinity and humanity. Such passages underscore Christ's authority to forgive sins, raise the dead, grant righteousness, holiness, and salvation (John 5:27; 10:18; 17:12), and to judge the living and the dead,

thereby sharing the Father's honor (John 5:22–23). He is the world's Light (John 1:9; 8:12), the compassionate Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), the exclusive Door and the Vine (John 10:7, 9; 15:1, 5). These attributes were not assumed upon incarnation but preexisted before the world's creation. They decidedly do not conform to human attributes. We should also consider St. Paul's statement that Christ shall deliver the kingdom to God the Father, having executed judgment (1 Corinthians 15:24). The reign of the eternal Son of God knows no commencement nor termination. While His reign has no end, He willingly subjected Himself to the limitations of human flesh, relinquishing majesty to obey the Father (Philippians 2:7). Yet, posthumously exalted, He received a preeminent Name (Philippians 2:9) and will eventually surrender His glory, along with the entirety of His fleshly inheritance, to the Father. This exchange maintains unity and affirms God's comprehensive sovereignty.

Such reflections ease the burden of many vexations. It's astounding how some, lacking insight, torment themselves when confronted with these forms of expression—utterances that ascribe to Christ attributes fitting neither His humanity nor divinity alone, but cohesively to His person as God and man. Pondering the profundity of this mystery with due reverence, one discovers its harmony. However, the misguided may sow confusion, misapplying attributes intended for Christ's humanity to discredit His divinity and vice versa. Their stance insinuates that Christ is not truly a man in His divinity, nor divine in His humanity. This audacious endeavor attempts to negate both Christ's divine and human nature—rendering Him devoid of both. Rejecting such misguided notions, we affirm that Christ, united with two distinct yet undivided natures, stands as our Savior and the authentic Son of God, even through His humanity—not simply on account of His humanity. It is imperative to shun the error of Nestorius, who not only misconstrued but

divided Christ's natures, culminating in a dual Christ concept. Scripture instead resounds with clarity, affirming that the Virgin Mary is the mother of our Lord, and that He who shall be born of her will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35, 43).

We avow His birth from the Virgin Mary, recognizing Him as the true descendant of Abraham and David, as foretold in the law and prophecies. This dual purpose kindles faith with profound meaning. Through His embodiment, the Son of God perfects human salvation, inviting us into communion with Himself and His divine treasures. By stepping into our human role, He overcomes the grasp of the devil and death, securing victory and triumph for us. Furthermore, tracing His lineage back to David and Abraham reinforces the certainty that our Redeemer is the long-awaited fulfillment of God's ancient promise (Genesis 17:16, 22:17–18; Psalm 132:17).

The assertion that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit underscores His divine purity. The One sent to purify us would not bear an impure origin. The human vessel chosen by God to dwell within should remain untainted by the corruption of humanity. Thus, the Holy Spirit's extraordinary power transcends natural law, sanctifying Jesus Christ's conception. His birth reflects perfect holiness and purity, teaching us to seek these virtues solely in Him, as His conception remained untainted by human corruption.

Subsequently, Christ's fulfillment of our redemption takes center stage. His mortal incarnation was guided by the divine purpose of appeasing God's wrath through His obedience. He humbly submitted to the Father even unto death. This obedience becomes the crux of our salvation, as St. Paul aptly notes: "Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made

righteous" (Romans 5:18). In this context, our salvation finds its essence: the Son of God forsaking His own will, dedicating His life to the Father's pleasure, and enduring death's agony, all to reconcile the divine wrath stirred by human rebellion. This obedience's merit lies at the core of our redemption, reconciling the heavenly Father with humanity's prior state of enmity. Christ's self-sacrifice offered a fragrant plea, appeasing God's just judgment and securing eternal sanctification for the faithful. Through His sacred blood, the price of our redemption, He quenched the flames of divine anger, purifying our sins.

When seeking assurance of salvation, we must anchor ourselves in this redemption—God's favor made manifest, the heavenly portal opened for us, and righteousness attained on our behalf. Scripture continually reinforces this truth: Christ's sacrifice restored God's goodwill toward us, serving as the cornerstone of our confidence and life. His blood washes away the defilement and stains of our sins, as articulated by St. John's words: "The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Thus, our redemption finds its essence in Christ's satisfaction, liberating us from sin's chains and restoring us to righteousness and holiness. Through His atonement, we are reconciled with a God who abhors nothing in us but our sin.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified

We solemnly acknowledge that He endured suffering under the governance of Pontius Pilate, undergoing crucifixion—a testimony not only to authenticate historical truth but also to unveil the depths of our redemption. Christ's death, orchestrated meticulously to vanquish sins and expunge the condemnation spawned by transgression, necessitated a specific manner of demise. To flawlessly execute every facet of our redemption, a particular form of

death was ordained. This chosen path was paramount, wherein He assumed our condemnation and bore the weight of God's wrath, effecting our liberation from both.

Primarily, He endured judgment under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor, subject to the verdict of the judge, to emancipate us from condemnation in the presence of the supreme Judge. Had He been slain by bandits or felled in a tumultuous riot, these modes would not have sufficed as a form of atonement. But His trial before a tribunal, charged by witnesses, and sentenced by a judge, underscored His portrayal as an offender. Here, two facets deserve reflection, serving as solace for our faith. When Christ, indicted and suspended between malefactors, fulfilled the prophecy "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:9; Luke 22:37), it actualized the heralded fulfillment, as He assumed the burden of retribution fitting sinners. Paradoxically, His absolution by the very mouth that condemned Him (Pilate, constrained to attest to His innocence multiple times—John 18:38, 19:4) echoed the ancient prophecy, wherein He paid for the theft He had never committed (Psalm 69:4). Thus, Christ embodies both the role of a sinner and an innocent victim, magnifying our comprehension of His vicarious suffering and redemption. Therefore, He suffered under Pontius Pilate, condemned unjustly yet absolved righteously.

The choice of crucifixion carries profound mysteries. The cross bore a divine curse, affirmed not solely by human perception but ratified by divine law (Deuteronomy 21:23). Through His crucifixion, Christ willingly embraced the curse, a necessity arising from His divine purpose. This pivotal act mandated that the curse we merited, a consequence of our sins, be transferred to Him, a divine act of deliverance. This principle was prefigured in Mosaic sacrifices, where victims named "sin" bore the weight of sin's curse, symbolizing a

symbolic acceptance of the curse. Christ fulfills and transcends these symbols, as the substance of these ancient shadows. Thus, He becomes the ultimate sin offering, His soul a sacrifice for transgressions, transferring the curse back onto Himself, thereby sparing us from its grip (Isaiah 53:10-11). In this divine exchange, He who knew no sin bore the sin of humanity, so that we might inherit God's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Similarly, Christ's crucifixion holds the essence of this divine transaction, signifying our liberation from the curse. The cross, a symbolic sign of curse, transformed into a symbol of blessing. As Christ embraced the cross, He broke the shackles of the curse, turning it into a means of liberation. His crucifixion exemplifies the fulfillment of the prophecy that "all our sins were laid upon Him" (Isaiah 53:6), where sins were imputed to Him for ultimate redemption. This transformation from curse to blessing finds resonance in Paul's words, highlighting Christ's role as a curse-bearer to bring about our salvation (Galatians 3:13). The ancient declaration "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10) paved the way for the blessing promised to Abraham, extending salvation to all. Notably, Christ did not passively accept the curse, but actively shattered its power, substituting blessing for our curse.

In Christ's condemnation, we discover absolution; in His curse, we unearth blessings. Amidst the echoes of His crucifixion, faith finds refuge in the certainty of salvation—through His sacrifice, redemption, and the profound exchange of curses for blessings.

Dead and buried

Behold, the profundity of His journey unfolds—from the embrace of death to the embrace of the tomb—revealing His relentless

commitment to fulfill our sacred duty, to ransom our souls from the grip of sin's debt. Death, an inescapable shackle, had ensnared us, but Christ willingly surrendered Himself to its dominion, the ultimate ransom for our liberation. The apostle's words resound, "He tasted death for all" (Hebrews 2:9), encapsulating His self-sacrifice. Through His demise, life was secured; by His death, death's tyranny was abolished. His manner of demise differed from our own; He yielded to death's clasp, not to be obliterated, but to obliterate death itself, dismantling its authority. He faced death head-on, not as a victim, but as a victor, rendering the devil's reign futile. Through His death, He emancipated us from the shackles of death's terror (Hebrews 2:14-15). This is the initial harvest reaped from His sacrificial death.

A second harvest emerges as death's transformative power permeates our mortal beings, arresting our earthly desires. By its very force, death quashes the old self within us, rendering it impotent (Romans 6:6). In harmony with this transformative purpose, the burial of Christ underscores our burial to sin. The apostle's voice resounds, "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death" (Romans 6:4), unveiling a profound linkage to His burial. Further, he asserts that "through Christ's cross, the world is dead to us and we to the world; we have died with Him" (Galatians 6:14, 2:19). Here, the call is not merely to mimic His death but to partake in its efficacy, lest we render our Redeemer's death ineffectual.

Hence, a twofold grace emanates from the death and burial of Jesus Christ: liberation from death's clutches and the crucifixion of our earthly inclinations. As we walk alongside Him on His path to the grave, the transformative impact of His death reverberates within us. We emerge liberated from the tyranny of death's shadow, and yet,

something profound transpires beneath the surface. Our mortal impulses are subdued; our old selves, entombed. Through this transformative journey, the resonance of Christ's death shapes our lives, inviting us to share in the transformative power of His sacrifice. May we not merely bear witness but partake in His crucifixion, allowing our lives to echo the victory achieved on the cross. Through His death and burial, the seed of renewal is sown, inviting us to embrace the transformative path toward resurrection and renewal.

He descended into hell

Amid the discussions of early church scholars regarding the inclusion of this phrase within the creed, let us not omit its essence, for it unveils an enigmatic and profound truth. While historical records suggest variations in its adoption, we must not disregard its significance. Some church fathers acknowledged this descent, albeit interpreting it diversely. The origins of its insertion may dwell in obscurity, yet we find within it a complete embodiment of our faith, woven with scriptural threads. Herein lies a quintessential element, essential to our redemption.

Some equate this phrase with the earlier mention of burial, deeming it a mere restatement. Admittedly, the term "hell" is at times synonymous with "grave." However, two compelling reasons counter this notion. It would be incongruous to obscure a clear concept with cryptic language, a needless repetition. A second explanation, revolving around the notion of Christ liberating Old Testament fathers from a subterranean prison or "limbo," is grounded in legend rather than truth. Citing Zechariah and Peter as support yields tenuous connections. Zechariah's "pit without water" symbolizes the abyss of sin, and Peter's reference pertains to Christ's proclamation

of redemption, not liberation from a subterranean domain. Therefore, discernment warrants rejection of this fable.

Instead, a more certain interpretation unveils itself, a truth profoundly steeped in divine wisdom. Christ's descent embodies unparalleled significance, as He confronted death's abyss to intercede against divine wrath. In this divine struggle, He contended with the powers of hell, grappling with the specter of eternal death. The prophet's voice echoes, proclaiming His role as a guarantor and debtor, bearing the weight of sin's punishment (Isaiah 53:4-5). Yet, He emerged victorious, vanquishing death's dominion (Acts 2:24).

Seek clarity within this context: Can one fathom the agony of feeling forsaken by God, to endure isolation, bereft of divine aid, engulfed in the prospect of destruction? Christ trod this agonizing path, grappling with the weight of suffering. His anguished cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46), resonates as an authentic lament. Conjectures that it reflected the emotions of others are untenable, for the depth of bitterness underscores its authenticity. It does not insinuate God's wrath toward Christ, for how could the Father be angry with His beloved Son, with whom He declared His pleasure (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22)? Christ's intercession for humanity would lose meaning if His actions had estranged the Father from Himself.

However, Christ bore the weight of divine punishment, experiencing the signs of divine displeasure. He wrestled with the devil's power, death's dread, and the anguish of hell. Through this profound struggle, He emerged triumphant, dismantling the forces that shackled humanity. His victory alleviates the fear of death's clutches, for He journeyed into the abyss and conquered its dominion. Thus, through His descent, the abyss is transformed, from a pit of despair

into a chasm of hope that we might no longer fear in death the things which our Prince has destroyed.

The third day He rose from the dead

Beyond the visage of Christ's cross, death, and burial, faith must venture to gain profound fortitude. While Christ's death encompasses the consummation of salvation—reconciliation with God, appeasement of divine justice, annihilation of the curse, and liberation from merited retribution—the dawn of living hope arises not through His demise but His resurrection (1 Peter 1:3). Just as His resurrection victoriously overcame death, our own liberation from its grip hinges firmly on His triumph. The apostle's words illuminate this truth—Christ "died for our sins and was raised for our righteousness" (Romans 4:25). His death vanquishes sin, while His resurrection rekindles righteousness. This division within our redemption clarifies that Christ's death eradicated sin and death, whereas His resurrection established righteousness and bestowed life anew.

As we've discussed the mortification of our earthly desires through partaking in Christ's cross, another fruit, stemming from His resurrection, awaits contemplation. The apostle's insight emerges: in sharing His death's likeness, we participate in His resurrection to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Another passage echoes this notion—dying with Christ mandates mortifying our earthly aspects, while being raised with Him impels us to seek heavenly things (Colossians 3:1). These verses not only call us to emulate the resurrected Christ's transformative power but also emphasize our rebirth in righteousness through His potent resurrection.

Furthermore, His resurrection assures us of our impending revival. As Christ's resurrection forms the bedrock and essence of our own

resurgence, certainty of our future resurrection takes root within us.

A fleeting note—He "rose from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20), underscoring His actual demise and revival. His victory over mortality, encapsulated within mortal flesh, remains a testament to His unparalleled journey.

He ascended into the heavens and is seated
at the right of God the Father almighty

Even as Christ's glory and might were magnified through His resurrection, relinquishing the humility of His mortal form and the ignominy of the cross, His reign attained its zenith upon His ascension. This truth emerges as the apostle declares that He "ascended to fulfill all things" (Ephesians 4:10). The expanse of grace intensified, His majesty expanded more fully, and His omnipotence was more profoundly manifest—nurturing His own and quelling His adversaries. Embracing the heavens, His bodily presence withdrew from our view. However, His absence wasn't a cessation of aid to His earthly faithful but a governance fortified by a more pervasive potency. The assurance of His perpetual presence, vouched until the world's end, found realization in this ascension. As His body soared above celestial realms, His authority surged beyond earthly confines.

In tandem with His ascension, He assumed His rightful place at the Father's right hand (Ephesians 1:20). This metaphor mirrors the practice of monarchs appointing deputies to govern on their behalf. Christ, elevated to a position of authority, operates as the Father's partner in overseeing creation. This term illuminates His ordination as Lord over heaven and earth, formalizing His sovereignty and dominion, enduring till the final judgment. The apostle clarifies this concept, depicting Christ as elevated above all principalities, powers, dominions, and names, now and forever. This verity reinforces the

direction His ascendancy takes—His rule over creation's heavenly and earthly spheres, guiding their destinies, and commanding obedience.

While some err by perceiving this term as signifying Christ's blessedness, it signifies a dominion that encompasses the subjection of all creatures—celestial and terrestrial—to His majesty. The apostolic references (Acts 2:33, 3:21; Hebrews 1:3) allude to Christ's entrusted authority. The notion that "seated" entails His heavenly blessedness overlooks the depth of His omnipotent dominion. Although St. Stephen observes Him standing (Acts 7:56), it signifies His power's majesty, not His bodily posture. "Seated" symbolizes His heavenly throne.

The ascension confers manifold benefits upon our faith. Christ's passage to heaven reopens an entrance sealed by Adam. As He enters heaven in our humanity and on our behalf, the apostle's proclamation gains resonance—through His ascension, we are united with Him in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 2:6). Assurance sprouts from possession in our Head, not mere hope. Moreover, His presence with the Father emboldens us. In the heavenly sanctuary, Christ functions as our perpetual Advocate and Intercessor (Hebrews 9:11, 7:25), captivating the Father's gaze with His righteousness and deflecting attention from our transgressions. He reconciles our hearts to the Father, affording us access through His intercession (Romans 8:34). Graces and mercies are bestowed upon us, dispelling dread and turning the Father into a gracious figure, not an intimidating one.

Lastly, we unearth Christ's profound authority, the source of our strength, deliverance, and triumph against evil. His ascent vanquished adversaries, enriching His people with spiritual blessings

(Ephesians 4:7ff). Positioned on high, His effusion of power empowers us, bestowing spiritual life, sanctification, and precious gifts upon His church. His vigilant shield safeguards against harm, and His dominion annihilates all who oppose His cross and our salvation. Ultimately, He reigns supreme, conquering every foe until His enemies, shared by the faithful, are vanquished, the church perfected.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead

Henceforth, the disciples of Jesus Christ possess ample markers to discern the potency of His presence. Yet, given that His sovereign dominion remains veiled beneath the modesty of His human form, faith is justly directed towards His forthcoming tangible appearance. He will descend visibly, akin to His ascent (Acts 1:11), revealing Himself in the resplendent majesty of His kingdom—an aura of immortality, an infinity of divine power—accompanied by His angelic retinue. We are instructed to anticipate our Redeemer's return from heaven, when He will segregate the righteous from the unrighteous (Matthew 25:31ff). None, alive or deceased, can evade His judgment. The resonating trumpet call will reverberate across the earth, summoning all to stand before His judgment throne—both the living and those who have passed before (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

Some interpret "the living and the dead" as the virtuous and the wicked. It is evident that several early church fathers grappled with interpretations of these words. However, the initial significance is more fitting, as it aligns with the simplicity and convention of Scripture. It doesn't oppose the apostle's assertion that all are destined to die once (Hebrews 9:27). Though those alive during the judgment will not meet natural demise, their transformation—akin

to death—renders the term apt. While not everyone will experience prolonged slumber, all will undergo metamorphosis (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). This signifies the abrupt destruction and renewal of earthly existence. This transformation, a kind of death, remains applicable to the living and the deceased before the judgment. The deceased in Christ will rise first; then the living shall join the Lord in the air, as articulated by St. Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). Likely, this creedal article emerged from St. Peter's discourse in Acts 10:42 and St. Paul's poignant address to Timothy, where the living and the dead are explicitly addressed (2 Timothy 4:1).

From this truth, we draw unique solace: the One appointed to judge is the same One who deigned to ordain us as co-participants in His glory. He ascended His throne not to condemn but to redeem—such is His profound mercy! Could a Prince of boundless compassion truly cast away His people? Would the Head shatter its own members? Could the Advocate condemn those under His protective wing? If the apostle dares to assert that none can accuse us when Christ intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:34), it stands certain that our Intercessor, Christ, will not condemn us. He has assumed our cause, vowing to bolster us. It is no trifling reassurance to affirm that we shall face no tribunal except that of our Redeemer, from whom salvation is anticipated. Furthermore, the One who presently promises eternal bliss through the Gospel will then cement this pledge through judgment. So magnificently has the Father honored His Son with the authority to judge (John 5:22, 27), providing balm to His servants' anxious consciences. Without this sure hope, dread of judgment might prevail.

As we contemplate the comprehensive essence of our salvation, we must be vigilant against dispersing even the slightest fragment of it elsewhere. The name of Jesus itself proclaims that salvation resides

solely in Him (Acts 4:12). Should we yearn for the endowments of the Holy Spirit, His anointing provides them. If strength is our pursuit, it's found within His dominion. The quest for purity is met by His immaculate conception. Gentleness and kindness radiate through His birth, uniting Him with us to show compassion (Hebrews 2:17, 5:2). In His suffering lies redemption; in His condemnation, our absolution. His cross abolishes the curse, offering us blessing. Satisfaction is derived from His sacrifice, purity from His blood. Our reconciliation unfolds through His descent into the depths. The mortification of our earthly desires rests within His burial; the dawn of a fresh existence is encapsulated by His resurrection, bestowing the prospect of immortality. As we aspire to our celestial inheritance, His ascension assures it. And when seeking aid, comfort, and the bounty of goodness, His kingdom provides. In our anticipation of judgment, His role as Judge ensures our safety.

In essence, as the reservoir of all goodness resides within Him, we must draw upon His wellspring rather than seeking it elsewhere. Those who, while primarily focused on Him, still wander in search of diverse hopes, stray from the true path by dispersing their thoughts—despite their attention to Him. Yet, once we've truly comprehended His boundless riches, such doubt can find no foothold within our minds.

THE THIRD PART

I believe in the Holy Spirit

Following faith in the Father and the Son, we journey onward to embrace faith in the Holy Spirit—an essential cornerstone in our journey towards salvation. For the truths revealed about our

cleansing and sanctification through Jesus Christ are only realized when He is bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit. The apostle underscores this by stating that we are cleansed and sanctified in the name of Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11). This implies that the graces bestowed by Jesus Christ are imprinted within us by the Holy Spirit. Thus, after acknowledging the Father and the Son, it is fitting to embrace faith in the Holy Spirit, who confirms the fruit of divine mercy and the grace attained through Jesus Christ.

When the term "Spirit" resonates, let us recall the multifaceted roles that scripture attributes to Him, and anticipate the blessings He imparts according to its testimony. Scripture teaches that every manifestation of God's grace is the handiwork of His Spirit, for the Father operates through the Son by the Spirit. Through the Spirit, God creates, sustains, imparts life, and safeguards all of His creations. The Spirit calls and draws the faithful to God's embrace, justifies them, instills new life and sanctifies them, bestows a variety of graces, and fortifies them with celestial power until they reach their ultimate destination. When the Holy Spirit dwells within us, He enlightens our understanding, revealing the generous gifts of God's benevolence through Jesus Christ. He is aptly likened to a key that unlocks the treasures of the heavenly realm, and His illumination serves as the eye of our comprehension, enabling us to perceive them. Thus, He is also referred to as a Guarantee and Seal (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:13), affirming the certainty of God's promises within our hearts. At times, He is hailed as the Master of truth, the Originator of light, and the Source of wisdom, knowledge, and insight. He purifies us, setting us apart as sanctified vessels for God, adorning us with His holiness to become God's abode. By watering our souls, He encourages us to bear fruits of righteousness. Hence, the Spirit is often symbolized as "water,"

echoing the prophet's verses: "All you who are thirsty, come to the water" (Isaiah 55:1). Additionally: "I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground" (Isaiah 44:3). Christ's words align with this imagery when He invites all who thirst to partake of the living water (John 7:37). Furthermore, the Spirit is referred to as "water" due to its purifying potency, as seen in Ezekiel's prophecy where the Lord promises clear waters to cleanse His people (Ezekiel 36:25). He refreshes us with His divine nourishment, imbuing us with the essence of life, which is why He is symbolized as "oil" and "anointing." The Spirit burns away the impurities of our corrupt desires, igniting love within our hearts, which is why He is likened to "fire." He breathes divine life into our beings, enabling us to live not for ourselves, but under His guidance. Hence, any goodness that arises within us is the fruit of His grace and power. Conversely, our inherent qualities amount to spiritual blindness and moral waywardness.

It's abundantly clear that directing our faith towards the Holy Spirit is indispensable and advantageous. In Him, we encounter the radiance that illuminates our souls, our spiritual rebirth, the dissemination of all graces, and, most importantly, the embodiment of all goodness originating from Jesus Christ.

THE FOURTH PART

I believe the holy catholic church, the communion of saints

In this unfolding journey, we come to embrace faith in the holy catholic church and the communion of saints—a sanctuary of unity and sanctity that beckons us to contemplation. To begin, let us reflect on the phrasing "believe the church" rather than "in the church."

Although the latter form is more prevalent today and had currency in the early church, the early church fathers, including St. Cyprian and St. Augustine, advocated for "believe the church." Their reasoning, indeed, holds substance. "Believe in God" resonates with entrusting Him as the epitome of truth and anchoring our confidence in Him. However, extending such phrasing to "in the church" or other aspects like forgiveness of sins and resurrection of the flesh seems incongruous. While I do not seek to quarrel over semantics, it is wiser to embrace clarity in our expressions rather than veer into needless obscurity.

With utmost heed, let us remember our earlier counsel: hitherto, the foundation, the catalyst, and the root of our salvation have been unveiled. Now, we venture into understanding the ramifications. One who apprehends the omnipotence of God, the benevolence of Christ's righteousness, and the potency of the Holy Spirit has perceived the catalyst of salvation. Yet, the methodology through which salvation takes form within us remains veiled until we consider the realm of the church, the absolution of sins, and the promise of eternal life. Hence, after comprehending God's role as the source of life, it naturally ensues that we explore His divine work that materializes within us.

Firstly, the church is presented to us as an object of belief rather than mere acceptance. This prompts us to acknowledge that all believers are interconnected by the bonds of faith, constituting a collective body under the leadership of Lord Jesus—the guiding light and leader. Above all, the church stands unified under the lordship of Christ, functioning as a cohesive body with Christ as its head. This mirrors the eternal decree of God's choice, where He elected His own to gather within His dominion (Ephesians 1:4, 21; Galatians 3:28). By embracing faith in the church, we recognize a unified assembly—a

congregation that goes beyond mere numbers. We affirm our integration into this body, casting aside any uncertainty. To inherit the celestial realm, it is essential to establish our connection with Jesus Christ, our Head, and be in communion with fellow believers. After all, scripture unequivocally underscores that salvation finds its boundaries within the church's unity. Thus, the prophecies that allude to salvation in Zion and Jerusalem should be discerned as emblematic of unity (Isaiah 2:3; Joel 2:32). Likewise, when the Lord proclaims eternal condemnation, He declares those who stand apart from His people as ineligible, forever unenrolled among the children of Israel (Ezekiel 13:9).

Furthermore, this union is christened as "catholic" or universal, symbolizing a congregation of God's elect intertwined and bonded in Christ. They function like the limbs of one body, uniting in true harmony. Though distinct, they share a common life sustained by the Spirit of God, fostering identical faith, hope, and love (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:12–13; Ephesians 4:4). Not only do they share a common inheritance, but they also partake in the divine essence, basking in the presence of God and Jesus Christ.

In our expedition, we now arrive at the profound realm of faith encompassing the holy catholic church and the communion of saints—a journey that unfolds in sacred splendor. To commence, let us fathom the words "believe the church" instead of "in the church." While the latter is customary today and echoes through the echoes of antiquity, the voices of St. Cyprian and St. Augustine advocate the former with conviction. A reason undergirds this preference: "Believe in God" resonates as a trust in His truth and the bedrock of our confidence. Yet, extending this syntax to "in the church" or parallel expressions like the remission of sins and the resurrection of flesh

feels incongruous. While I avoid wrangling over semantics, clarity of expression takes precedence over ambiguity.

With unwavering intent, let us heed the counsel shared earlier: thus far, the bedrock, the catalytic spark, and the core of our salvation have been unveiled. Now, our voyage leads us into the intricate tapestry of its realization. One who comprehends the omnipotence of God, the benevolence of Christ's righteousness, and the potency of the Holy Spirit has embraced the catalyst of salvation. Yet, the mechanism by which salvation unfurls within us remains shrouded until we navigate the realm of the church, the absolution of sins, and the promise of eternal life. Thus, having grasped God's role as the fountain of life, it becomes imperative to explore His divine work within us.

Primarily, the church emerges as an object of faith, a sanctuary where daily refinement burgeons, albeit perfection still eludes. It advances ceaselessly yet has not attained the zenith of holiness—an idea that shall be expounded further on. Prophetic foretellings concerning Jerusalem—a place sanctified, where the unholy are prohibited from entry, and God's temple transcends impurity (Joel 3:17)—mustn't be misconstrued as implying blemish-free church members. Rather, the faithful ardently aspire toward consummate purity and sanctity, and by divine grace, this unrealized perfection is attributed to them. While at times, signs of sanctification may remain hidden amidst humanity's tapestry, we must anchor ourselves in the conviction that from the dawn of existence till eternity's close, the church has endured. The spectrum of human existence, corrupted by Adam's sin since inception, has never deprived the Lord of instruments fit for honor. Hence, each epoch has been bathed in His mercy, underscored by unswerving promises. As He affirms, "I have established a covenant for My chosen ones. To

David, My servant, I pledge eternal preservation of his lineage; an everlasting seat I shall ordain" (Psalm 89:28–29). Further, "The Lord has chosen Zion, His divine abode, as His perpetual dwelling" (Psalm 132:13–14). And these words resonate: "Behold, the Lord proclaims—the Lord who set the sun for the day and the moon for the night: when this rhythm halts, the seed of Israel shall cease" (Jeremiah 31:35–36).

The subsequent clause, "the communion of the saints," although overlooked by early church scholars, merits our veneration. Just as believing in the church is requisite, understanding what it signifies is equally imperative. This dimension of the phrase unveils the church's essence and character—an amalgamation wherein Jesus Christ unites the faithful. This unity bears paramount significance, enabling them to partake in all things virtuous. Yet, it is pivotal to note that each individual possesses diverse graces, as eloquently put by St. Paul, acknowledging the manifold gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4). This unity does not demand the dismantling of societal structures wherein every individual possesses his rightful domain; it hinges on a coherent communion aligned with the apportionment of blessings and graces. Sharing the blessings bestowed by the hand of God becomes a necessity, even if these blessings are bestowed upon individuals and not others (1 Corinthians 12:11). Similar to the diverse roles within the human body, unity emerges, underpinned by mutual service (Romans 12:4–6).

Proceeding, faith in the holy church and its communion infuses us with abundant fruit. Recognizing our connection with this church through faith in Christ breeds rich rewards. This revelation assumes monumental importance—salvation stands fortified upon pillars so sturdy that even if the world crumbled, salvation would remain unshaken. First, it stems from God's irrevocable election and

remains steadfast unless His eternal providence were to shatter. Furthermore, Christ preserves His wholeness, preventing the severance of His faithful or the disintegration of His body. We are assured that truth walks hand in hand as we abide within the church. Lastly, the promises stand true: God's presence shall eternally grace Jerusalem's precincts (Psalm 46:5). This unity of the church possesses the potency to embrace us within God's presence.

Likewise, the term "communion" ushers in profound solace. It underscores that all graces bequeathed to His members and ours intertwine, solidifying our hope through the blessings bestowed upon others. To sustain unity with the church, it's not imperative that we perceive a visible congregation. The edict to "believe the church" entails recognizing its presence, whether visible or unseen. Our faith does not waver when we acknowledge an invisible church beyond our comprehension. Our task isn't to delineate the elect from the reprobate—that prerogative belongs to God alone. Instead, we hold unwavering certainty: those who, through divine mercy and the power of the Holy Spirit, partake in Christ's essence, are sanctified as God's rightful heritage. And in this inheritance, we too find our place—a testament to unbounded grace.

Now, we set forth to explore the visible church that our senses perceive. Its nature demands our discernment. The Lord has etched discernible marks onto His church for our recognition, albeit His sovereign judgments remain concealed. While distinguishing His chosen ones is His sole prerogative, He has instated an order that imparts daily lessons in our limited discernment. Those deemed beyond redemption sometimes traverse the path to salvation, while seemingly unwavering believers falter. God alone perceives those who'll persevere to the journey's end—the ultimate juncture of salvation. However, recognizing our yearning to distinguish His

children, the Lord accommodates our capacity. While absolute faith may evade us, love shall guide us, and we shall recognize as church members all those who, through confession of faith, virtuous lives, and participation in the sacraments, declare allegiance to the same God and Christ as we do.

From this, let us unveil the essence of the church—a sacred communion bound by the thread of common devotion. As we explore its core, we uncover a defining truth: wherever God's word is spoken with purity and the sacraments reverently administered in Christ's name, the church is truly present. The promise of our Savior echoes as a beacon of truth: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20). As we embark on this profound exploration, let us proceed with a clear vision: the universal church embraces those who embrace God's truth, bound by the tapestry of shared religion. Beneath this universal mantle, local assemblies in cities and villages unite believers under the banner of faith. Those who confess faith, while not genuinely part of the church, are considered members until they face public scrutiny.

However, assessing churches and individuals necessitates nuanced perspectives. There are instances where individuals, though unworthy in private estimation, find acceptance within the church, thanks to its collective tolerance, as the body of Christ. In these cases, we perceive them as brethren, though our private views may differ. A contrasting approach applies to the multitude. If a congregation upholds the ministry of the word and reveres its sacraments, it undoubtedly stands as a church. In these congregations, the word and sacraments bear fruit. Thus, unity within the universal church endures despite diabolical attempts to fracture it. Moreover, we must not undermine the authority vested in

local ecclesiastical assemblies, essential for addressing communal needs.

The bedrock of the church resides in the preaching of God's word and the administration of sacraments. These are not hollow rituals; rather, they bear fruits nurtured by divine blessings. While immediate fruits might not manifest in every instance, a reverent embrace of the gospel and diligent sacramental observance will undoubtedly yield results. Whenever the gospel echoes fervently and sacraments are dutifully upheld, an unshakable church presence emerges. It is incumbent upon us to acknowledge its authority, heed its guidance, value its counsel, and respect its admonishments. Separation, mockery, and disdain for its unity are gravely discouraged. So deeply does God value the communion of His church that withdrawing from a community where the ministry of the word and sacraments are practiced amounts to betrayal of the faith. His high commendation of the church's authority mirrors His own authority. Thus, let us vigilantly embrace the prescribed markers and esteem them according to God's discernment.

Yet, Satan schemes fervently to undermine these markers. He seeks to either obliterate the authentic signs distinguishing the church or provoke disdain for them, rupturing unity. Witness the era when the pure gospel was shrouded, the same malevolence seeks to dismantle Christ's ordained ministry within His church—a dire threat to its edification (Ephesians 4:11–13). The temptation to sever ties from a congregation that bears Christ's church marks is perilous—a snare to reckon with. Thus, vigilance is imperative on both fronts. To unmask the pretenders parading as churches, we must scrutinize every congregation that claims the church's mantle through the lens God provides. A congregation adhering to His word and sacraments possesses genuine credentials. Conversely, a congregation asserting

church status while sidelining God's word and sacraments must be met with vigilance and not rashness.

We conclude by affirming that the unsullied ministry of the word and the unadulterated sacramental administration provide an assuring pledge. In congregations where both are upheld, even in the presence of faults, the church thrives. It is vital that we avoid condemning assemblies that uphold both—even if stained by vice. Moreover, there exist varying degrees of theological importance. Some teachings are sacrosanct and non-negotiable, akin to the bedrock of Christianity—such as the unity of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, and salvation through divine mercy. Others are subjects of discourse yet coexist harmoniously, nurturing unity. Consider the disparity in beliefs about the immediate afterlife—some affirm a swift transfer to heaven while others perceive existence in God. Such variances do not warrant division or obstinacy. As the apostle aptly counsels, "If in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you" (Philippians 3:15). This insight underscores that differences in less crucial matters shouldn't incite turmoil or rebellion.

Verily, it is an undeniable truth that the preeminent essence lies in unanimity across every facet and circumstance. Nevertheless, given that there exists not a single soul devoid of entanglement in certain realms of ignorance, we are presented with a binary choice: either forsake the congregation entirely, or extend forgiveness to those whose ignorance is confined to matters innocuous to salvation and unblemished by defiance against faith. In this discourse, I am not inclined to champion the cause of any misapprehensions, no matter how trivial, nor do I wish for them to thrive through dissembling and adulation. Instead, I posit that in our journey, we must not hastily forsake the ecclesia wherein the fundamental tenets of our redemption and the sacred rites, ordained by our divine Sovereign,

are meticulously preserved. And yet, in our endeavor to rectify what appears amiss within the ecclesiastical domain, we discharge a solemn duty. The counsel of Saint Paul resonates deeply here, wherein he declares: "Let the vessel bearing a loftier revelation come forth to voice, while the initial orator abides in silence" (1 Corinthians 14:30). By this, the truth stands evident that each member of the congregation is entrusted with the charge of edifying others in accordance with the measure of grace bestowed, as long as this undertaking transpires in seemliness and harmony. It demands of us to neither sever our affiliation with the community of believers nor disrupt the established order or governance.

Turning our attention to the blemishes adorning moral conduct, a wider margin of leniency ought to be granted. In this domain, it is all too facile to stumble, ensnared by the devil's intricate snares. Throughout ages, there have existed those who, feigning an immaculate sanctity akin to heavenly angels, spurned any communion with their fellow beings, discerning naught but human frailty therein. Of yore, such were the sect known as the Cathars, denoting the pure, and akin in spirit were the Donatists. In our contemporary milieu, akin tendencies are espoused by certain Anabaptists, those who aspire to wear the mantle of superiority and perceive themselves as surpassing the rest. Others, ensnared by a fervor for righteousness bereft of circumspection, incur transgressions more by their inconsiderate zeal than through audacious presumption. Upon witnessing that the fruits reaped among the recipients of the gospel do not mirror the teachings imparted, they hasten to decree the absence of a legitimate assembly. While their sense of offense is not unwarranted and indeed, we are the architects of their distress more often than we admit, we can scarcely exonerate our cursed indolence, a negligence which Divine Justice shall not leave unchastised—its retribution already heralded

through grievous chastisements. Alas, woe be unto us who, through our intemperate license, inflict wounds upon feeble consciences and propagate scandalous impressions!

Yet, those whom we address are not devoid of fault, for they too transgress boundaries. In their quest for impeccable sanctity, they venture beyond the precincts of due moderation. When the Lord implores the practice of compassion, they abandon this injunction, immersing themselves entirely in severity and austerity. In their belief that sanctity prevails solely within a realm where flawless purity and piety reign, they depart from the fold of God's assembly, under the illusion that they sever connection with the company of transgressors. They argue that the Church of Christ stands sanctified. Yet, they must hearken to His utterances: His declaration that it amalgamates the virtuous and the wayward alike. The parable likening the Church to a net which ensnares diverse species of fish, only discernible upon their haul ashore, echoes with truth (Matthew 13:47–48). Similarly, His words in another allegory, equating the Church to a field wherein good wheat is sown but interwoven with unrelenting weeds, signify the inseparability of these elements until the harvest's culmination (Matthew 13:24ff). As our Lord attests to the Church's perpetual vulnerability to this disheartening state, marred incessantly by the presence of the misguided, it is futile for them to seek a congregation devoid of impurity or taint, a futile endeavor indeed.

Verily, there emerges the assertion that the dominion of vices, spanning vast domains, stands intolerable to endure. Though I concur that an alternative scenario would be more desirable, yet as rebuttal, I present unto them the wisdom of St. Paul. Behold, in the midst of the Corinthians, it was not a mere smattering who had succumbed, but the collective entity itself had veered towards

corruption. A multitude of transgressions, colossal in nature, had taken root—virtue tarnished, teaching marred [1 Corinthians 3:3ff; 5:1ff]. Iniquities, not trifling but substantial, festered. Moral decrepitude found kinship with doctrinal distortions. Now, what course of action did the holy apostle, a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit, upon whose testimony the very edifice of the church rests, undertake in response? Did he advocate for segregation? Did he cast them from the fold of Christ's dominion? Did he invoke a final anathema to eradicate them entirely? Not only did he refrain from such measures, but rather, he pronounced them the church of God, a congregation of saints, acknowledging their identity as such. If, amid the Corinthians, a congregation endured through times marred by quarrels, factions, and discontent; amid legal wrangling and discord; amidst prevailing malevolence and the endorsement of wickedness, deplorable even by heathen standards; amidst the defamation of Saint Paul, their rightful patriarch, and the mockery of the resurrection—a denial striking at the core of the gospel—and wherein Divine blessings were channeled towards ambition, rather than love; in a milieu where impropriety and chaos unfolded; even so, if, during such an epoch, the congregation persevered, owing to its steadfast adherence to the preached word and the sacraments—pray, who would dare strip from those who scarcely incur a tenth of such transgressions, the designation of "church"? I query, what fate would those who scrutinize contemporary congregations with such severity mete out to the Galatians, who had verged upon dissent against the very gospel? Nonetheless, even amidst their lapses, Saint Paul acknowledges a fragment of the church's presence among them.

Let the faithful equip themselves with such spiritual weaponry, lest in their fervor to manifest unyielding ardor and zeal for righteousness, they inadvertently sever ties with the celestial realm—the sole dominion where righteousness reigns. For as our Lord

ordained, the preservation of communion within His church mandates the convening of public assemblies, wherein His word and the sacred rites are upheld. Whosoever, on account of aversion to the depraved, forsakes this fellowship, treads a path susceptible to estrangement from the communion of saints. It behooves them to recognize that within this expansive assemblage, a multitude exists that is genuinely virtuous and innocent in the eyes of God—beings beyond perceptible sight. Let them also ponder that amidst the pool of sinners, a contingent is burdened by remorse and, nudged by reverence for the Divine, aspires towards betterment. Reflect, it is not mere transitory acts that warrant judgment—ofttimes, the most pious falter gravely. Contemplate, the word of God and His sanctified sacraments bear greater potency and relevance in preserving the church than the misdeeds of certain tainted elements in sundering its unity. Lastly, reckon that God's judgment carries more authority in delineating true ecclesiastical presence than the counsel of mortals.

However, if congregations maintain a virtuous equilibrium, they shall not incubate wickedness within their fold, given the awareness that such souls revel in their vices. The Lord, in His wisdom, has averted the rampant spread of corruption by instituting a salutary antidote. To this end, excommunication has been ordained—an act which expels those who, under a veneer of Christ's faith, transgress dishonorably and iniquitously, tarnishing His name. Such souls are unworthy to claim the mantle of Christ's appellation. Thus, when the congregation expels obvious adulterers, fornicators, thieves, swindlers, robbers, abductors, murderers, seditious agents, brawlers, perjurers, and blasphemers—as well as transgressors who indulge in excess, intemperance, and squander, and those who perpetrate falsehoods—should these souls prove impervious to counsel, the church's exercise of this jurisdiction remains eminently reasonable. This regimen asserts the authority granted unto it by God. Lest

anyone belittle this ecclesiastical verdict or deem it trifling to be condemned by the verdict of the faithful, let it be known that the Lord attests this to be naught but a proclamation of His own decree—a pronouncement upheld in the celestial realm. Thus, those ordained with God's word to denounce falsehood and waywardness wield that same word to embrace repentant hearts in compassion (Matthew 18:15–18). Those who opine that congregations can persevere indefinitely without the adhesive force of such discipline are grievously misled, for it is undeniable that the remedy, foreseen by the Lord as requisite, cannot be forsaken. The palpable benefit derived from this regimen accentuates the extent of our need for it.

Behold, the initial significance emerges in the prevention of the wicked from being reckoned amidst the assembly of Christians, thus averting the great offense to God—an insinuation that the ecclesia serves as a sanctuary for the wicked and their unrighteous ways. Since the ecclesia constitutes the corpus of Christ, its sanctity remains impervious to the intrusion of decayed members, for such defilement would inevitably cast a shadow upon its Head. Thus, to eliminate any lewd aspersions upon the Divine name, those who, through their iniquities, besmirch the banner of Christianity must be exiled. Another utility surfaces in shielding the virtuous from contamination spurred by the lifestyle of the ungodly—such ensnarements occur frequently. For, owing to our innate tendency to stray, naught proves easier than emulation of a nefarious model. The sagacity of the apostle is manifest in this regard, as he enjoined the Corinthians to sever ties with one who had committed incest, affirming: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6). The apostle, perceiving great peril, disallowed virtuous souls from commingling or fostering intimacy with the wayward, asserting: "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or

greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

A third utilization emerges, wherein excommunication serves as a crucible for the penitent, inducing them to amend their ways, their confounded state impelling them to metamorphose for the better. Thus, their iniquities warrant chastisement, particularly for the sake of their salvation—so that the rod of the church might serve as a beacon, guiding them towards recognition of their transgressions, which may fester and harden in the absence of corrective measures. Those severed from the ecclesiastical fold are not thereby relinquished from the realm of salvation, but disciplined for temporal reformation, impelling them to forsake wickedness and embrace a sanctified and honorable path. This principle is echoed in the apostle's subsequent declaration: "If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:14). Similarly, elsewhere, when he conveys that an incestuous individual in Corinth has been "delivered over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5)—in my understanding, this signifies that temporal condemnation is imposed to yield eternal salvation. Though certain interpretations posit that it entails temporal torments orchestrated by the devil, I regard this as speculative, whereas my understanding aligns with the exposition provided.

Thus, it befits us not to efface those who undergo excommunication from the fold of the elect, nor to surrender them to a sense of hopelessness, assuming their demise is foregone. Indeed, it is legitimate to regard them as strangers to the ecclesia, as per the framework outlined earlier; however, this perspective should only pertain to the duration of their separation. Even if we detect in them

an abundance of pride and obstinacy, rather than humility, we should entrust them into God's hands, commending them to His benevolence, while nurturing a hope for a brighter future that transcends their present state. In essence, we must refrain from condemning to eternal damnation those solely under the dominion of God, yet evaluate the quality of each individual's deeds in consonance with God's law. In following this principle, we tether ourselves to the judgment unveiled by God, rather than indulging our own preconceptions. We must exercise caution in pronouncing judgments, lest we inadvertently constrain God's omnipotence and subject His compassion to our limited perceptions. In the dispensation of His mercy, the most wicked can be transfigured into virtuous beings, and strangers may find refuge within the ecclesia. Thus, human perspectives are foiled, and human presumptions are reprimanded—a presumption that frequently extends beyond its rightful domain if left unchecked.

As for the proclamation of Christ, wherein He asserts that what His word-bearers bind or loose on earth will likewise be bound or loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19, 18:18), it does not necessarily imply our capacity to delineate individuals within His ecclesia. This promise resonates twice, each with distinct import. Initially, the Lord does not intend to bestow visible markers enabling us to outwardly discern those bound or absolved. Rather, He attests that those who, on this terrestrial plane (in this present life), accept the gospel's teachings by faith—embracing the redemptive offering of Christ—will veritably be absolved and unshackled in heaven, in the presence of God on His celestial throne. Conversely, those who scorn and reject the gospel bear witness to their continued bondage, both on earth and before God in heaven, indicating a state of intensified captivity. In the latter instance, wherein excommunication is addressed, the authority to bind and loose is vested within ecclesiastical censure.

Such censure neither dooms the excommunicated to eternal damnation nor instills despair, but rather, serves as a cautionary measure. It alerts them to the impending perdition, unless they mend their ways. Distinct from anathema—termed execration by ecclesiastical scholars—whereby one is deprived of all hope of pardon and consigned to the dominion of the devil, excommunication, instead, chastises moral conduct. While it may entail punishment of the individual, this act simultaneously invokes impending damnation, steering them onto the path of salvation. Should they comply, the church stands ready to embrace them in fellowship, welcoming them to partake in communion.

Henceforth, if we are to properly uphold the precepts of ecclesiastical discipline, although it is not sanctioned to partake in close association or profound intimacy with the excommunicated, let us, nonetheless, endeavor with utmost earnestness to extend efforts wherein they might be drawn back unto righteousness, and subsequently be reunited with the communion of the church. This might be achieved through exhortation, teaching, or through the channels of mercy, kindness, and fervent prayers to God. The apostle himself imparts this wisdom to us: "Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:15). This very spirit of gentleness is expected from the entire congregation, particularly when receiving those who exhibit signs of repentance. For the apostle does not advocate severe stringency, nor does he endorse unwavering sternness. Instead, he envisions the church as extending itself willingly, embracing the wayward souls, lest the one repenting be inundated with excessive sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:7). Should this equipoise be unguarded, the peril lies in descending from disciplined guardianship into the abyss of Gehenna, metamorphosing from reformers into executioners.

The significance of God's word and the sacraments within our midst has been previously elucidated—the veneration and reverence we ought to extend, ensuring they remain as indelible tokens and badges of the church. The truth is, no moral transgressions can render an assembly devoid of churchhood wherever this ministry stands whole. Moreover, even in instances where minor imperfections mark the teaching or the sacraments, their potency remains undiminished. Furthermore, it has been clarified that errors warranting pardon are those that do not assail the foundational doctrines of our faith or oppose the articles universally embraced by the faithful. As for the sacraments, the tolerable faults are those that fail to subvert or dismantle the institution ordained by the Lord.

However, should the circumstances culminate in the propagation of falsehoods that undermine core elements of Christian doctrine and obliterate essential knowledge; if the sacraments are divested of their significance—this, in turn, signals the church's dissolution, akin to the rending of a person's throat or the piercing of their heart. Contemplating the realm of the papal dominion in this light reveals the measure of churchhood that subsists therein. Behold, falsehoods have tainted the priesthood, tarnishing the ministry of God's word; the sanctity of our Lord's Supper has been violated, replaced by an egregious sacrilege. The service to God is obscured, befouled by innumerable superstitions. Practically all the teachings essential for the sustenance of Christianity lie interred and trampled upon. Public congregations are reminiscent of academies of idolatry and impiety. Hence, in abstaining from participation in such ignoble and sacrilegious endeavors, we do not isolate ourselves from the ecclesia of God. For, the communion of the church is intended not to unite us in practices of idolatry, impiety, ignorance of God, and other forms of wickedness, but rather to anchor us in reverence for God and obedience to His truth. A more profound comprehension of the

respect we ought to extend towards the beleaguered churches oppressed under the yoke of the Roman idol can be garnered by juxtaposing their plight with the historical archetype of the ancient Israelite ecclesia, as portrayed by the prophets.

In times when God's covenant flourished unabated in the realms of Judah and Israel, a genuine ecclesia was nurtured, for the foundational elements were firmly in place. Within the Law, the edicts of truth were inscribed; their dissemination was entrusted to priests and prophets. The sacrament of circumcision served as the rite through which they were inducted into the fold of God's people. Other sacraments, enacted to solidify faith, complemented this ceremony. Hence, it remains indisputable that the testimonies and appellations, with which our Lord dignified His ecclesia, held pertinence within that era. Subsequently, due to their drift from God's law, they gradually relinquished this esteemed status through their engagement in idolatry and superstition. Would anyone dare strip the title of "church" from those to whom our Lord bequeathed the ministry of His word and the stewardship of His sacraments? Conversely, who would have the audacity, without exception, to confer the designation of "church" upon an assembly wherein the word of God is openly desecrated or the ministry of the word—essential to the church's vitality—is shattered?

"What if," one may inquire, "a semblance of the church existed among the Jews subsequent to their descent into idolatry?" The answer, though intricate, becomes clear upon contemplation. If we perceive the church through the prism advocated here—characterized by reverence for its judgments, adherence to its authority, acceptance of its counsel, heed to its chastisements, and steadfastness within its communion—then the prophets vehemently decry that such assemblies steeped in idolatry should not be deemed

churches, but rather, should be regarded as profane and tainted synagogues. For, had they truly constituted churches, prophets like Elijah, Micah, and other servants of God would have been ostracized from their ranks. Both the priests and the people, along with the prophets, considered these individuals more accursed than the uncircumcised. If these were indeed churches, it would transpire that the church would metamorphose from a vessel of truth into a harbinger of falsehood—a bastion not of the living God but of graven idols (1 Timothy 3:15). Yet, among the Jews, vestiges and privileges unique to the ecclesia still lingered, chiefly in the form of God's covenant. Its perseverance, upheld through unwavering resistance to the tide of impiety among the people, as opposed to mere acquiescence, cemented its veracity. Thus, by virtue of God's unwavering grace and goodness, the divine covenant stood unshaken, impervious to the perfidy of the people. Circumcision, too, remained untarnished despite the impurity that had tainted their hands, remaining a sign and sacrament of this covenant. Hence, our Lord proclaimed that the progeny born of this people were His own (Ezekiel 16:20-21).

With equal conviction, should someone presently regard the congregations under the papal dominion as assemblies ordained by God, even as they stand ensnared (as we perceive) in idolatry, superstition, and errant doctrines—believing that they must remain steadfastly in their communion, even aligning themselves with their teachings—they would find themselves led astray. If indeed these gatherings are deemed churches, then the authority of the keys is entrusted unto them. Yet the keys are irrevocably interwoven with God's Word, which in these very churches is expelled and cast aside. Furthermore, if they indeed hold the mantle of churches, then Christ's promise, wherein actions bound or absolved on earth resonate in heaven, must find fulfillment there. However, given that

all those who sincerely proclaim themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ are banished and excommunicated from their midst, it follows that either Christ's promise is rendered hollow and vacuous, or these assemblies are bereft of their ecclesiastical character in this regard. Lastly, concerning the ministry of the Word—those realms merely echo with doctrines of impiety and an array of fallacies. Therefore, either they fail the test of being churches in this aspect, or we find ourselves bereft of the means to discern between the gatherings of the faithful and the assemblies of the Turks.

Yet, it remains within our allowance to acknowledge that vestiges and semblances of churchhood linger there—remnants that our Lord has preserved amidst their shattered state. Foremost among these are the enduring presence of God's covenant, steadfast and indomitable, and the sacrament of baptism, symbolizing this covenant. This sacrament, sanctified by the very utterance of the Lord, retains its potency despite the impious disposition of humanity.

In summation, we neither categorically reject the existence of a church therein, nor do we simply acquiesce to its presence. They embody churchhood to the extent that our Lord safeguards the remnants of His scattered people within their midst. Furthermore, certain traces of the church endure, particularly those that cannot be vitiated by the snares of the devil or the frailty of human wickedness. On the contrary, given that the criteria we have just discussed are absent within them, if we seek a church that adheres to proper order, I contend that a lawful manifestation of the church remains absent. The antichrist has upheaved and upended every facet, transforming these environs into a reflection of Babylon rather than the sanctified city of God. It is a matter of common knowledge that the antichrist holds dominion there, implying that these may indeed be recognized

as God's assemblies, albeit ones sullied and defiled by the abhorrent practices of the antichrist.

The Forgiveness of Sins

The blessing of forgiveness finds a harmonious union with the church, for it is granted solely to those who partake in the church's fellowship. As the prophet Isaiah declares, this celestial Jerusalem must first be erected, wherein the subsequent grace unfolds: the expunging of transgressions for all who are its citizens. I say "must first be erected" not because the church could endure without the absolution of sins in any manner, but because the Lord has pledged His mercy solely within the communion of the saints.

Indeed, forgiveness of sins marks our initial entry into the church and the realm of God's kingdom; devoid of it, we lack the covenant or the rightful claim to God's kinship. The words of the prophet Hosea resonate: "In that day," declares the Lord, "I will establish a covenant with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky. I will shatter the bow and the sword and warfare will cease from the land. I will make a lasting covenant with them, characterized by righteousness, justice, kindness, and compassion" (Hosea 2:18-19). This demonstrates how our Lord reconciles us to Himself through His boundless mercy. Similarly, elsewhere, when He foretells gathering His dispersed people, He proclaims, "I will cleanse them from all the guilt they incurred by rebelling against Me" (Jeremiah 33:8). Thus, the church extends its embrace to us through the inaugural act of baptism, symbolizing that entrance hinges on the cleansing of our impurity by His benevolence. The deeper nuances of this forgiveness and its mechanisms shall be explored meticulously elsewhere.

Yet, let us observe here what the sequence of the creed imparts: forgiveness of sins does not rest upon our merits but emanates solely

from God's gracious favor. Following the creed's proclamation that through Christ's righteousness, God's benevolence beckons us and that He yearns to assume the role of a benevolent Father for us, and after expounding upon the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit through which we partake in Christ's nature, the creed concludes by addressing the church, which is born from these truths. Subsequently, the creed articulates the concept of forgiveness of sins, the conduit through which we become integral to the church. This sequence emphasizes that forgiveness does not emanate from any source other than Christ Himself, buoyed by the Holy Spirit's authority. We must dismiss the notion that our Lord includes us within His church solely once, through the medium of forgiveness. Rather, He sustains and preserves us through it. After all, why would our Lord bestow upon us a pardon devoid of practical utility? God's mercy would be rendered ineffective and ineffectual if it were a one-time bestowal. Each faithful soul bears testimony to this, as none are exempt from myriad weaknesses throughout life, weaknesses necessitating God's mercy. Hence, since we carry the remnants of sins as long as we live, it is undeniable that we could not persist even a single moment within the church's fold if God's grace did not continually uphold us through the forgiveness of our transgressions. On the contrary, the Lord has summoned His own to eternal salvation, beckoning them to trust that His grace stands ever prepared to bestow mercy upon their transgressions. Consequently, we are summoned to believe that through God's merciful provision of Jesus Christ's merit and the sanctification wrought by His Spirit, our sins have been and are continually being pardoned, a reality that unfolds daily as we remain intertwined with the body of the church.

In response to those who strive to strip the church of its unique role in salvation, we must fortify consciences against this insidious fallacy. Similar to the Novatians of yore, our current age witnesses

the presence of Anabaptists who mirror this distorted notion. They hold that God's people, once baptized, are reborn into an untainted, angelic existence, untouched by the blemishes of the flesh. Should these individuals stumble into impurity following baptism, the Anabaptists deny them anything but the unyielding rigor of God's judgment. In essence, they withhold all hope of forgiveness and mercy from the sinner who, having received God's grace, falters into sin. Their concept of forgiveness of sins revolves exclusively around the initial regeneration. Despite scripture's clear refutation of this falsehood, let us address the grave peril of this error, both for those who propagate it and those influenced by it.

Foremost, given that God's command urges all the faithful to daily implore forgiveness, this very act is an admission of our sinful nature. Such petitions are not in vain, as our Lord Jesus never ordained a petition He would not fulfill. He not only assures that the entirety of the prayer He imparted will reach the Father, but also specifically underscores the efficacy of this particular plea. Thus, what more do we seek? The Lord desires His saints, each day throughout their lives, to acknowledge their status as sinners, and in return, He promises them pardon. How audacious it is to either deny one's identity as a sinner or, when one stumbles, to banish them from grace altogether! Furthermore, whom did He instruct to forgive seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22)? Was it not our brethren? This directive impels us to mirror His mercy. Thus, He pardons not merely once or twice, but whenever a humble sinner, afflicted and wounded by awareness of their sins, beseeches Him.

Let us begin with instances from the church's inception. The patriarchs, after receiving circumcision and entering God's covenant, undoubtedly imbibed their father's teachings on righteousness and virtue. Nonetheless, they conspired to slay their brother (Genesis

37:18ff). This act, reminiscent of the most hardened criminals, culminated in the sale of Joseph, an act of heinous cruelty. Simeon and Levi avenged their sister's dishonor by murdering the inhabitants of Shechem, a violent act their father condemned (Genesis 34:25ff). Reuben committed abominable incest with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22). Judah, driven by lust, committed dishonorable deeds by consorting with his daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:16ff). Yet, rather than erasing them from the ranks of God's chosen people, they ascended as leaders. What of David, the chief justiciar, who, seeking to expiate his transgressions, committed an even graver sin by shedding innocent blood (2 Samuel 11:15)? Already regenerated and bearing greater testimony to this than other children of God, he succumbed to a wickedness that would appall even the pagans. Despite this, mercy embraced him.

To avoid protracted enumeration, consider the numerous promises of God's mercy toward the Israelites. Time and again, the Lord's benevolence shone upon them. Moses pledges compassion and restoration if the people repent after straying into idolatry and forsaking the living God: "The Lord your God will bring you back from captivity and have compassion on you; He will gather you from all the nations where He has scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back" (Deuteronomy 30:3-4). Restricting this discussion avoids its interminable length, for the prophets brim with such promises, showering mercy upon a people steeped in myriad sins. Rebellion stands as one of the gravest sins, equated to divorce between God and His church, yet His benevolence pardons even this. Jeremiah's prophetic words echo this sentiment: "Is there a man who divorces his wife and she leaves him? Does he not return to her again? Why then do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?"

...Return, faithless people, for I am your husband" (Jeremiah 3:1, 14). A fervent desire emanates from one who declares, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). Consequently, Solomon consecrated the temple as a place where prayers for forgiveness of sins would resonate: "When Your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back and acknowledge Your name, praying and making supplication to You in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel" (1 Kings 8:46-50). The presence of sacrificial offerings for sins in God's law is not arbitrary; had He been ignorant of His servants' perennial imperfections, this remedy would not have been prescribed.

Let us contemplate whether, with Christ's arrival, wherein the plenitude of grace has been fully revealed, this divine favor has vanished for the faithful. Does this imply that they dare not beseech forgiveness for their transgressions? Does it suggest that when they stumble, mercy remains elusive? Such an assertion would insinuate that Christ came to dismantle rather than redeem His own. Would God's benevolence, which graced the saints of old, be entirely extinguished? However, if we stand by the Scriptures' resounding proclamation that grace and love have manifested fully in Christ (2 Timothy 1:9-10) and that the abundance of His mercy extends through Him (Titus 3:5-6), if we acknowledge that reconciliation with humanity has been achieved, we must affirm that His mercy now flourishes more plentifully than ever before. Witness the living examples before us. Peter, who had heard directly from Christ that failing to confess His name before mortals would result in rejection before heaven's angels, denied Him thrice, even with blasphemy. Yet grace did not elude him (Matthew 10:33, 26:69-75, 9:13). St. Paul chastened the disorderly in the Thessalonian community, inviting

them to repentance (2 Thessalonians 3:15). Peter did not forsake Simon Magus but encouraged him, urging him to seek God's forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Reflect upon the past when grievous sins stained entire congregations. How did St. Paul respond? He redirected the congregation toward righteousness instead of pronouncing a final curse (2 Corinthians 12:15, 19). Galatians' apostasy from the gospel was no trifling matter. The Corinthians were even less excusable, mired in grave vices. However, neither group was alienated from God's benevolence. In fact, those who had committed more severe offenses—acts of wantonness, indecency, and impurity—were specifically summoned to repentance. The covenant between Christ, all His adherents, remains immutable, a bond declared unwavering by His words: "If his sons forsake My law and do not follow My statutes, if they violate My decrees and fail to keep My commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take My love from him" (Psalm 89:30-33). In the creed's progression, grace and mercy are underscored to abide unceasingly in the church. It follows the mention of the church with the forgiveness of sins. Thus, it must be present among the church's members.

Certain individuals, adopting a more nuanced perspective, refrain from labeling every sin as unpardonable. They limit this category to willful or deliberate violations knowingly committed. Nonetheless, they assert that only sins of ignorance are eligible for forgiveness. Yet, considering that God's law prescribes offerings to absolve voluntary sins, and distinct offerings for those committed unwittingly (Leviticus 6:2ff, 4:2, 13, 22, 27), what recklessness it is to deny hope of pardon for deliberate transgressions! I contend that Christ's singular sacrifice possesses the potency to forgive the intentional sins of the faithful. God substantiates this through the physical sacrifices, symbols of Christ's offering. Who would absolve

David by alleging ignorance, knowing he had received sound instruction in the law? Could he remain ignorant of the gravity of adultery and homicide? Did he not condemn these acts in his subjects daily? Did the patriarchs perceive fratricide as commendable? Could the Corinthians, who received ample instruction, fathom that immorality, fornication, hatred, and strife pleased God? Even after receiving solemn admonition, did Peter fail to recognize the sin in denying his Master? Let us not, through our harshness, close the door on God's mercy that beckons us so generously.

I recognize that certain early church scholars interpreted daily forgiven sins as minor transgressions arising from frailty. Additionally, they opined that the solemn penance required for serious offenses should not be repeated, similar to baptism. However, their words should not be misconstrued as promoting despair among those who falter again after experiencing repentance. Nor should they downplay the significance of daily faults in God's eyes. They acknowledged that saints often stumble into unfaithfulness—sometimes swearing needlessly, succumbing to excessive anger, even venturing into outright insults—thus falling into vices that our Lord abhors. Their phrasing aims to distinguish between private and public sins or offenses causing grave scandal within the church. The rigorous penance imposed upon those deserving ecclesiastical correction sought not to render God's pardon unattainable. Rather, it aimed to deter others, ensuring they steered clear of offenses warranting excommunication. Scripture, however, demands a more tempered and compassionate approach. It teaches that the strictness of ecclesiastical discipline should never plunge the beneficiaries of correction into abject sorrow.

Nonetheless, those who remain steadfast in their stance against voluntary sins often invoke the apostle's authority, suggesting he extinguishes all hope of absolution for such transgressions. He asserts that for those who have once been enlightened, tasted the grace from above, shared in the Holy Spirit, and savored God's word and the powers of the age to come, if they slip once more, it is irrevocable for them to be led back to penance. They are likened to crucifying the Son of God anew and scoffing at Him (Hebrews 6:4-6). In another passage, he states, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment" (Hebrews 10:26-27). These verses once gave the Novatians ground to disturb the church when misconstrued. Initially appearing severe, certain conscientious individuals questioned the legitimacy of this epistle, though its apostolic essence is evident. Addressing those who accept it, I shall illustrate how these passages do not bolster their error.

Primarily, the apostle must be in harmony with his Master, who affirms that every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Spirit, unforgivable both in this age and the next (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10). Undoubtedly, the apostle adhered to this exception, as opposing Christ's grace would be inconceivable. Consequently, his words in these instances ought to be interpreted solely in relation to the sin against the Holy Spirit. If this elucidation proves inadequate, I shall further demonstrate how his words lead to this conclusion. To elucidate this, understanding the nature of the abominable, unforgivable sin becomes crucial. St. Augustine describes it as an unyielding, persistent obstinacy up until death, coupled with a lack of trust in obtaining grace. However, this interpretation does not align with Christ's assertion that it will not be forgiven in this age. This leaves us with two options: either Christ's statement was superfluous, or the

unpardonable sin can be committed in this present world. According to St. Augustine, it is only committed if one perseveres in it until death. Some propose that to harbor ill will towards the graces bestowed upon one's neighbor constitutes a sin against the Holy Spirit. Though the basis for this assertion is unclear, the genuine definition must be presented, supported by solid evidence, to dispel any misconceptions.

I posit that one sins against the Holy Spirit when, although touched by the light of God's truth and unable to claim ignorance, one obstinately resists for the sake of resistance itself. To clarify, the Lord Jesus elaborates that "anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:32). St. Matthew employs "spirit of blasphemy" instead of "blaspheme against the Spirit" (Matthew 12:31). Can one insult the Son of God without indirectly affronting His Spirit? When ignorance leads a person to contradict God's truth, speaking ill of Christ while inwardly possessing a conviction that they would not contest the veracity of God's truth once revealed, these individuals sin against the Father and the Son. Today, many reject and scorn the gospel's teachings, which they would hold in reverence and embrace wholeheartedly if they believed it to be the gospel. However, those who, in their conscience, recognize that the teaching they resist originates from God, yet continue to defy it and attempt to obliterate it, commit blasphemy against the Spirit. Among the Jews, such individuals existed—those who could not resist the Spirit's voice through Stephen, yet attempted to thwart it (Acts 7:55). Some acted out of zeal for the law, but others exhibited malice and impiety, raging against God and His teachings despite knowing their divine origin. These were the Pharisees, whom Jesus Christ chastised for denouncing the Holy Spirit's power as being from Beelzebub.

Hence, the spirit of blasphemy manifests when a deliberate malevolence endeavors to undermine God's glory. St. Paul underscores this concept when he testifies that he received mercy because his unbelief resulted from negligence and ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13). If ignorance and unbelief prompted by negligence received absolution, then deliberate unbelief stemming from knowledge and malevolence must logically be bereft of mercy. Upon closer inspection of the passage, it becomes apparent that the apostle speaks with this notion in mind. His words are directed at those who suppose they can easily return to Christianity after once denying it. Seeking to dispel this perilous notion, he asserts a simple truth: those who knowingly and willfully renounce Jesus Christ can never partake in Him again. He refers to those who not only flout His teachings through wayward living but, with deliberate intent, fully reject His word.

Regrettably, the Novatians and their adherents misconstrued the terms "fall" or "overturn." Their interpretation suggests that one stumbles by failing to adhere to God's law, which prohibits stealing, for instance. However, I contend that a comparison of contrasting notions is essential here. When the apostle speaks of those who "fall away after being enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away" (Hebrews 6:4-6), it must be understood that they have deliberately extinguished the light of the Spirit. They have cast aside God's word and the sweetness of His grace, distancing themselves from His Spirit. To emphasize further that he speaks of malevolent and deliberate impiety, he even inserts the word "voluntarily" at one point. In proclaiming that no further sacrifice remains for those who knowingly and intentionally sin after comprehending the truth, the apostle does not negate Christ's perpetual sacrifice for absolving the

faithful's sins. This concept has been addressed extensively throughout the epistle, elucidating Christ's priesthood. Rather, he signifies that when this sacrifice is rejected, no other recourse exists. To reject it involves trampling the gospel truth underfoot, driven by a purposeful intent.

Some may raise an objection, stating that it appears unduly cruel and incompatible with God's mercy to exclude any sinner from receiving forgiveness, especially when they are in dire need of it. The response is straightforward. The apostle does not assert that God withholds pardon from those who turn to Him. He explicitly states that they will never return to repentance because, due to their ingratitude, God justly afflicts them with eternal blindness. Some may argue that certain passages, such as the example of Esau attempting to regain his birthright through tears and cries but in vain (Hebrews 12:16-17), contradict this perspective. Similarly, the prophet's words that God will not heed their cries (Micah 3:4) could raise doubts. Yet, scripture employs such phrasing to signify neither genuine repentance nor earnest entreaty to God. Rather, it underscores the anguish that compels the wicked, when facing ultimate calamity, to recognize the truth they had previously derided as fanciful. They come to realize that their well-being depends on God's help, which they can no longer beseech sincerely. The prophet uses the term "cry," and the apostle employs "tears" to denote the anguish that afflicts the wicked in their desperation and affliction. They grasp that their only solace, God's benevolence, has slipped beyond their reach.

The resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Here lies the culmination and realization of our blessed destiny. Firstly, we must firmly establish our faith in the resurrection of the flesh, through which we attain the eternal life. This understanding

arises because our mortal bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable. Indeed, the resurrection of the flesh appears not only arduous to accept but entirely inconceivable, when viewed through the lens of human reasoning. Thus, even though numerous philosophers have grasped the concept of the soul's immortality, not a single one among them has ventured into the realm of believing in the resurrection of the flesh. For how could one fathom the notion that bodies, some decomposing in the earth, others devoured by worms, birds, or beasts, and some reduced to ashes by fire, could one day be restored to their original form? Yet, the Lord effectively addresses this apparent incredulity, bearing witness to the future resurrection with unwavering words and providing visible evidence through Jesus Christ. Thus, what might otherwise seem beyond belief is unveiled before our eyes in tangible form.

To comprehend this forthcoming resurrection, we must continually turn our gaze to Jesus Christ, who serves as both the exemplar and the essence of it. The apostle aptly urges us to consider this, as he speaks of the transformation of our bodies into "a body like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). Just as Christ was raised in the same body that bore His suffering, which, however, exhibited a transformed glory after resurrection, we too shall be raised in the same mortal flesh we currently possess, albeit transformed in essence following the resurrection. The apostle employs metaphors to convey the diversity of resurrection bodies, comparing human and animal flesh to substances of the same kind yet varying quality. Similarly, the stars share a common essence while differing in brilliance. Thus, we shall retain the essence of our earthly bodies, yet their quality will undergo transformation. This mortal body, though currently corruptible, shall not be eradicated in the resurrection. Rather, it will cast off its corruption, becoming incorruptible, and

discard its mortality, embracing immortality (1 Corinthians 15:41, 53). Hence, no hindrance exists to prevent the Lord from reclaiming all those who met death's embrace before the day of judgment, employing the same divine power showcased in the resurrection of His Son. Those who are alive at that appointed time will transition to immortality more by an abrupt transformation than by a natural process of dying.

As the prophecy foretells the complete fulfillment of "Death is swallowed up in victory," it is fitting to envision eternal life as simultaneous with the resurrection of the flesh (1 Corinthians 15:54). Regarding the surpassing nature of this eternal life, even if every human language were exhausted to convey its grandeur, only a fraction of its essence could be grasped. While scripture speaks of God's kingdom brimming with brilliance, joy, and bliss, such descriptions remain distant from our full comprehension, obscured by metaphorical language until the day when the Lord reveals Himself to us face to face. Therefore, recognizing the limitations of verbal expression for describing this spiritual blessedness, the prophets often resorted to employing earthly imagery. Nevertheless, as we strive to nurture a fervent longing and anticipation for this life, we should primarily reflect on this truth: if God, as our ever-flowing wellspring, encompasses the totality of goodness, then those seeking supreme good and complete happiness need not yearn for anything beyond Him. It is worth noting that St. Peter asserts that the faithful are destined to partake in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). How could this be? The Lord shall be glorified in His saints and magnified among those who have embraced His gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:10). Should the Lord bestow His glory, power, and righteousness upon His chosen ones and truly commune with them, it is prudent to recognize that every conceivable blessing is encapsulated within this divine grace. Even as we engage in profound contemplation, it

remains essential to acknowledge that we stand at the threshold of understanding, merely embarking on the initial stages of comprehending the enormity of this mystery within the confines of our present existence.

Within this confession, we find no mention of the resurrection of the wicked or the eternal death that awaits them. The creed is solely dedicated to offering solace to the faithful, nurturing their assurance of salvation. Yet, let us not entertain curiosity by supposing that the wicked shall remain unresurrected due to its omission. The fate of the wicked in the hereafter is revealed elsewhere, and the elements that ought to evoke trepidation are well communicated. Therefore, let us refrain from seeking these aspects within the creed, which is intended solely to affirm and fortify our faith. Does not the Lord Jesus amply attest to the universal resurrection, proclaiming that "He will gather all nations before Him, separating them as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31)? Similarly, He declares in another place: "those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29). Can we seek clearer affirmation than the confession made by the Apostle Paul before Felix, the governor of Judea, wherein he anticipated the future resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:15)? The plethora of testimonies overwhelmingly supports the certainty of the universal resurrection, dispelling all doubts for even the most impulsive skeptics. The destinies of the righteous and the wicked are so intertwined that affirming one implicitly assumes the other. The Lord alluded to this fact through the prophet, stating, "The day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come" (Isaiah 63:4, among other instances). Furthermore, He proclaims, "You shall see and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like grass; and the hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants,

and His indignation to His enemies" (Isaiah 66:14). This reality, veiled in obscurity during this world's transient span, finds ultimate fulfillment on the day of reckoning, when God's judgment and righteousness will be unveiled.

However, as we lack the apt vocabulary to adequately illustrate the horrifying suffering of the wicked, their torments are metaphorically depicted through physical images: darkness, tears, lamentations, gnashing of teeth, unending fire, and incessantly gnawing worms (Isaiah 66:24). Certainly, the Holy Spirit employed these metaphors to evoke an intense dread that resonates with every sense. When the Spirit describes Gehenna's abyss, an abyss prepared for all eternity, engulfed in raging fire perpetually fueled by ever-ready wood, and kindled by the breath of God (Isaiah 30:33), the aim is to provoke an understanding of the profound horror awaiting the wicked. While these figures guide our contemplation toward grasping the lamentable plight of the wicked, our primary focus should center on the excruciating consequence of being eternally severed from the fellowship of God. Moreover, we must grapple with the grim reality of encountering God's majestic presence, which opposes us unrelentingly and pursues us unceasingly. Initially, His wrath ignites as a raging fire, consuming and obliterating everything in its path. Subsequently, every element of creation seems enlisted to execute His judgment, so that those facing God's wrath perceive heaven, earth, sea, animals, and all other facets of existence aligned against them, poised for their utter destruction and downfall. This underscores the Apostle's assertion that the unbelieving shall endure eternal punishment, pursued by the presence of the Lord and the brilliance of His power (2 Thessalonians 1:9). If a tormented conscience, confronted by God's presence and the intensity of His wrath, experiences anguish, torment, and desolation akin to a thousand chasms, surpassing the unbearable in a single minute, how

immeasurably greater the suffering of one perpetually ensnared in the grip of God's wrath?

In contemplating theological errors, it is evident that the notion propagated by the Chiliasts, who correlate Christ's kingdom and the defeat of the devil and his followers with a thousand years, is devoid of substance and exhibits childishness. This misconception, requiring neither refutation nor acknowledgment, fails to merit attention. The entirety of scripture resounds with unequivocal declarations that neither the blessedness of the chosen nor the anguish of the wicked shall cease. We stand at a crossroads: we must embrace the certainties proclaimed within God's Word, encompassing realities imperceptible to the eye and unfathomable by human rationale, or we must surrender to disbelief entirely. Those attributing a thousand years of blessedness to God's children for their future existence inadvertently neglect the indignity directed towards Christ and His eternal dominion. If immortality is not bestowed upon the faithful, the inevitable conclusion is that Christ, in His glorified state, would remain devoid of immortal splendor. If the blessedness of the elect finds its culmination, it signifies that Christ's kingdom—wherein they partake—is fleeting. Ultimately, those advocating the thousand-year concept reveal either a profound ignorance of divine truths or a malevolent intent to challenge God's grace and Christ's omnipotence. The realization of divine grace and Christ's omnipotence necessitates the elimination of sin and the eradication of death, ushering in the restoration of eternal life. Concerning the allegation of ascribing great cruelty to God by proclaiming the wicked's punishment as eternal torment: even those bereft of sight comprehend the folly of this notion. The suggestion that the Lord perpetrates egregious harm by withholding His kingdom from those who, through ingratitude, rendered themselves undeserving of it, is but folly. "But," they counter, "sins are

temporal." While I concede this point, it must be acknowledged that God's eternal majesty, which they have affronted, renders the perpetuity of their sin's memory appropriate. "Yet," they protest, "the measure of correction surpasses the magnitude of sin." I counter that this is a blasphemous assertion, denoting a lamentable devaluation of God's majesty, when scorning His majesty seems less significant than the forfeiture of a soul. Let us distance ourselves from these imprudent voices, lest our engagement implies their ideas warrant valid refutation in light of our initial exposition.

Wherever genuine faith resides, it invariably ushers forth the unwavering hope of eternal salvation, or even catalyzes its formation. Should this hope remain absent, any eloquent rhetoric or refined expressions about faith are rendered futile. Faith, as we have elucidated, constitutes a steadfast conviction in God's veracity—an infallibility immune to falsehood, deception, or disappointment. Consequently, those firmly entrenched in this conviction naturally anticipate the fulfillment of the Lord's promises. This perspective regards divine pledges as reliable truths, thus granting substance to hope—an anticipation of the veracious blessings that faith has attested to. Herein, faith certifies God's truthfulness; hope anticipates its eventual manifestation. Faith affirms His paternal role; hope anticipates His paternal revelation to us. Faith affirms the conferral of eternal life; hope anticipates its forthcoming realization. Faith lays the groundwork upon which hope rests; hope, in turn, nourishes and supports faith. Just as no one can receive anything from God without initially believing in His promises, the fragility of our faith necessitates the support of hope, fostering endurance lest it falter. Thus, the Apostle Paul's assertion that hope firmly anchors our salvation assumes profound relevance. Hope, exercising patience as it awaits the Lord's timing in silence, reins in faith to prevent undue haste (Romans 8:24–25; Isaiah 36:21). Hope stabilizes faith

to preclude wavering regarding God's promises or harboring doubts concerning them. In its nurturing embrace, hope renews and consoles faith, preventing it from succumbing to weariness. Through its unwavering guidance, hope steers faith toward its ultimate destination, ensuring endurance that does not falter midway or on the initial stretch. Ultimately, hope perpetually revitalizes and fortifies faith, sustaining it through daily renewal.

Delving into this interplay between faith and hope highlights the manifold ways hope bolsters faith. This exploration exposes the challenges faced by those who have embraced God's Word. Initially, the Lord often suspends the fulfillment of His promises, keeping us in eager anticipation longer than desired. In such instances, hope is tasked with the prophet's admonition to persevere amidst delayed promises (Habakkuk 2:3). Occasionally, God not only permits our despondency but also seems to veil His favor. In such moments, hope serves as our stronghold, enabling us to wait upon the Lord, even when His countenance remains veiled from us (Isaiah 8:17). As St. Peter notes, skeptics emerge, derisively querying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). This sentiment is further reinforced by the flesh and the world. Here, faith, reinforced by hope, steadfastly gazes upon the eternal glory of God's kingdom, deeming a thousand years as a single day (Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8). The likeness and synergy between faith and hope are evident; Scripture sometimes interchanges these terms, as evidenced when St. Peter ascribes faith's preservation to God's power until the revelation of salvation (1 Peter 1:5), a sentiment more fittingly attributed to hope. This is not without cause, for we have affirmed that hope embodies the endurance and resilience intrinsic to faith.

Examining the teachings of the master of the Sentences, it becomes apparent how grievously he errs in proposing a dual foundation for hope—namely, God's grace and the merit of deeds. In truth, the essence of hope finds its singular purpose in faith. As demonstrated, faith's exclusive focus rests upon God's boundless mercy; it remains unwavering in its gaze upon this divine attribute, refraining from wandering elsewhere. Let us, however, explore the rationale put forth by the master of the Sentences: "If you dare," he contends, "to entertain hope without having merited or deserved it, it is not hope but presumption." Allow me to question: what manner of individuals would refrain from reproach when faced with such beliefs that deem certitude in God's trustworthiness to be audacious and presumptuous? These thinkers brandish the notion that tranquility grounded in the promise of God is nothing short of recklessness. Such proponents warrant the following admonishment: their company is fittingly found among those who have aligned themselves with sophists, specifically the Sorbonnists. As for us, the instruction from God is unequivocal: He commands sinners to anchor themselves in unwavering hope for salvation. Thus, with resolute confidence in His fidelity, we are bold to embrace His truth. Rejecting all reliance on our own accomplishments, we ardently place our trust in His mercy and hope with unshaken conviction for the promises He has graciously extended to us.

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