

Monergism

*On the
Christian
Life*

J O H N C A L V I N

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JOHN CALVIN

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by John Calvin

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Outline

"On the Christian Life" by John Calvin is a transformative journey that guides believers in living a truly Christian life. This book centers on two fundamental principles that shape our Christian identity.

First, it emphasizes that genuine faith is characterized by a deep love for righteousness. It is not merely a superficial profession, but a heartfelt devotion to living in accordance with God's will. This love for righteousness permeates every aspect of our lives and serves as the foundation of our Christian identity.

Secondly, the book expounds on the standard by which we should regulate our lives. The Christian life entails two essential duties. Firstly, it requires unwavering patience in the face of challenges and difficulties. In recognizing the arduous nature of the Christian journey, we must cultivate endurance and steadfastness. Chapter three delves into the significance of embracing the cross and its transformative power in our lives. Secondly, the Christian life necessitates a constant meditation on the future life. Chapter four invites us to contemplate the eternal rewards that await us, inspiring hope and perseverance in our earthly pilgrimage.

Finally, the book highlights the proper use of this present life and its comforts without falling into abuse or excess. It teaches us to

embrace the blessings of life while remaining vigilant against the allure of worldly indulgence. Chapter five provides valuable guidance on how to navigate the joys and challenges of this life, reminding us that our ultimate goal is to honor God in all we do.

In "On the Christian Life," Calvin's pastoral wisdom and devotionally rich insights inspire believers to embody the essence of Christianity. It encourages us to love righteousness, embrace the cross, set our minds on eternity, and use the blessings of this life for God's glory. Through the transformative power of God's grace, this book guides us on the path of true discipleship and helps us navigate the complexities of the Christian journey with steadfastness, hope, and joy.

CHAPTER I.

LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN MAN. SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENTS EXHORTING TO IT.

Chapter Summary:

Chapter 1: The Christian Life in Light of Regeneration and Repentance

I. The Connection: Exploring the profound link between this treatise and the transformative doctrines of Regeneration and

Repentance. Delving into the divine mysteries that bind them together. (Sections 1-3)

II. Navigating the Extremes: Discerning the delicate balance to be upheld in the Christian life.

- **Condemnation of False Christians:** Unmasking those who deny Christ through their actions. Shunning their ways and embracing the authenticity of true discipleship. (Section 4)
- **Hope Amid Imperfection:** Encouraging Christians to persevere with unwavering faith, even when perfection eludes them. Embracing daily progress in piety and righteousness as a source of hope and fulfillment

1. We have previously acknowledged that the purpose of regeneration is to harmonize the lives of believers with the righteousness of God, solidifying their status as adopted sons and daughters. While the law encompasses the new life within us, restoring the divine image, our inherent sluggishness often requires assistance and motivation. Thus, it is beneficial to gather from Scripture a genuine understanding of this transformation so that those who sincerely yearn for repentance do not veer off course in their zeal.

Furthermore, I am well aware that attempting to describe the Christian life leads me into a vast and expansive realm, one that, when fully explored, could fill countless volumes. Just look at the extensive exhortations of the Church Fathers when they discuss individual virtues. Their extensive treatment does not stem from mere verbosity; whenever you undertake the task of extolling a virtue, the abundance of material spontaneously guides your pen to amplify it, as if proper discussion necessitates a comprehensive approach. However, my purpose in presenting this plan for life is not to delve into each virtue separately or indulge in lengthy exhortations. Such endeavors can be found in the writings of others, particularly in the Homilies of the Church Fathers. My aim, rather, is

to outline the method by which a devout person can properly structure their life and to provide a concise, universal guideline for regulating conduct appropriately. Perhaps one day, I may find the time for more extensive discourse, or I may leave it to those who are better suited for such an undertaking. I naturally gravitate towards brevity, and perhaps my attempts at elaboration would not yield the desired outcome. Even if I could garner high praise by being more long-winded, I would scarcely be inclined to attempt it, especially considering that the nature of my present work demands a concise treatment of fundamental doctrine.

Just as philosophers offer definitions of rectitude and integrity, from which they derive specific duties and an array of virtues, so too Scripture is not devoid of order. In fact, it presents a most exquisite arrangement, far surpassing that of philosophers in its certainty. The only distinction lies in the fact that philosophers, driven by ambition, consistently pursue a pristine clarity of arrangement to showcase their genius. On the other hand, the Spirit of God, teaching without pretense, does not always adhere to a strict structure. Yet, on occasions when the Spirit does employ such order, it is evident that it ought not to be disregarded.

2. The sacred Scriptures, which we now contemplate, are divinely fashioned to fulfill two noble purposes. Firstly, they aim to infuse and implant within our hearts a profound love for righteousness, a disposition that does not come naturally to us. Secondly, they serve as a guiding light, preventing us from straying off the path of righteousness while we earnestly pursue it. Indeed, the Scriptures abound with marvelous methods of promoting righteousness, and throughout this work, we have already explored many of them. Let us briefly revisit some of these treasures.

What better foundation can be laid than the reminder that we are called to holiness because our God is holy? When we were scattered like wayward sheep, lost in the labyrinth of this world, He graciously gathered us back into His loving fold. Therefore, whenever our union

with God is mentioned, let us remember that holiness must be the binding force. It is not by the merit of our own holiness that we attain communion with Him; rather, we must first cleave to Him, allowing His holiness to permeate our being as we obediently follow His call. Yet, it is of utmost importance for His glory that He has no fellowship with wickedness and impurity. Thus, He proclaims to us that this is the very purpose of our divine calling—a purpose that we should continually hold in reverence if we truly wish to respond to God's call. For what purpose were we rescued from the darkness and defilement of the world in which we were once submerged, if we persist in indulging in them throughout our lives? Furthermore, we are reminded that if we desire to be recognized as the Lord's chosen people, we must dwell in the holy city of Jerusalem, a city consecrated to His name. It would be impious for its inhabitants to defile its sacred precincts with impurity. Therefore, the psalmist's words resound with wisdom and truth: "Who shall abide in your tabernacle? Who shall dwell in your holy hill? He who walks uprightly and works righteousness" (Psalm 15:1-2; Psalm 24:3-4). Surely, the sanctuary in which our God resides should never resemble an unclean stable; instead, it ought to reflect the splendor of purity and righteousness.

3. To awaken our hearts, the Scriptures graciously unveil the image of God the Father, who, in His Anointed, has reconciled us to Himself and imprinted His divine likeness upon us. He beckons us to conform to this image, for it is our true identity (Romans 5:4). Come, then, and show me a philosopher who can present a more exceptional system—one that rivals the moral philosophy of Scripture, beautifully arranged and harmonious. For when these philosophers strive to inspire virtue, their exhortations merely urge us to live in harmony with nature. But Scripture draws its exhortations from a far deeper wellspring of truth. It not only commands us to order our lives in relation to God, their rightful Author, but it also reveals our fallen state, estranged from our true origin—the law of our Creator. And yet, it graciously proclaims that Christ, through whom we have been reconciled to God, stands before

us as the model, the very image that our lives should reflect. What more efficacious guide could one desire? Indeed, what could surpass this? If the Lord has adopted us as His children, stipulating that our lives mirror the likeness of Christ—the bond of our adoption—then to neglect righteousness is not merely perfidious rebellion against our Creator but also a rejection of the Savior Himself.

Scripture draws from the rich tapestry of God's blessings and the manifold facets of our salvation to construct its exhortations. Since God has revealed Himself to us as a Father, we would be grievously ungrateful if we did not, in turn, reveal ourselves as His beloved children. Since Christ has cleansed us through the redeeming waters of His blood and the sacred act of baptism, it would be unbecoming for us to be defiled anew by sin. Since He has engrafted us into His body, we, as His cherished members, should vigilantly guard against any stain or contamination. Since our glorious Head ascended to heaven, it is fitting for us to detach our affections from earthly matters and, with our entire being, aspire to the heavenly realm. Since the Holy Spirit has consecrated us as temples of the Lord, our utmost endeavor should be to manifest the radiant glory of God and shield ourselves from the defilement of sin. Since our souls and bodies are destined for heavenly incorruptibility and an unfading crown, let us diligently strive to keep them pure and untainted, ready for the coming day of the Lord. These, my dear ones, are the surest foundations of a well-ordered life, and you will search in vain for anything comparable among philosophers. Their commendation of virtue never ascends beyond the natural dignity of humanity, while Scripture lifts our gaze to the celestial heights of divine transformation.

4. Now, let us turn our attention to those who, devoid of anything more than the name and outward symbol of Christ, still dare to call themselves Christians. How audacious it is for them to boast of this sacred name! True communion with Christ is reserved for those who have sincerely come to know Him through the Gospel. The Apostle emphatically declares that no one has truly learned Christ unless

they have learned to cast off the old, corrupt self, influenced by deceitful desires, and to put on Christ (Ephesians 4:22). Therefore, these individuals stand convicted of falsely and unjustly claiming knowledge of Christ, regardless of their fluency and eloquence when speaking about the Gospel. Let it be known that doctrine is not a matter of mere words, but of life itself. It is not grasped by the intellect and memory alone, like other branches of knowledge, but it is received only when it permeates the entire soul, finding its dwelling place within the innermost recesses of the heart.

Thus, let them either desist from insulting God by boasting about what they are not, or let them prove themselves to be worthy disciples of their divine Master. The doctrine in which our faith is encapsulated holds the foremost position, for through it our salvation is initiated. Yet, it must flow through our being, permeate our conduct, and effect a transformation within us, rendering us fruitful in righteousness. If philosophers rightly take offense and dismiss with disgrace those who, while professing an art that should govern their behavior, reduce it to empty rhetoric and sophistry, then with even greater reason shall we abhor those feeble sophists who content themselves with allowing the Gospel to dance upon their lips. For, from its powerful efficacy, the Gospel ought to penetrate the deepest affections of the heart, establish its abode within the soul, and permeate the entire being a hundredfold more than the cold discourses of philosophers ever could.

5. I do not insist that the life of a Christian should perfectly embody the Gospel in every aspect, although such a pursuit is commendable and should be earnestly pursued. I do not impose such rigid standards of evangelical perfection as to deny the title of Christian to anyone who has not attained it. Were this the case, the Church would be empty, for there is no person who is not far removed from such perfection. Moreover, many who have made only modest progress would be undeservedly rejected. What then shall we do? Let us keep our eyes fixed on this lofty ideal, constantly striving towards it. Let it be the goal towards which we fervently run. For we cannot pick and

choose among God's commandments, obeying some and disregarding others as we please. Above all, God consistently emphasizes integrity as the essence of true worship. By integrity, He means a genuine and wholehearted devotion to Him, devoid of pretense and falsehood. In contrast, a double mind stands in opposition to such integrity. In essence, God teaches us that a righteous life begins when our inward affections are sincerely dedicated to God, pursuing holiness and righteousness.

Yet, recognizing that in this earthly prison of our bodies, none of us possess the strength to hasten with unwavering swiftness, and that many are burdened with weaknesses that cause them to hesitate, stumble, and even crawl upon the ground, let each of us progress according to the humble measure of our own ability and continue the journey once begun. No one will travel so poorly that they do not make some degree of daily progress. Therefore, let us never cease to advance in the way of the Lord, even if our successes fall short of our desires. Our efforts are not in vain when today surpasses yesterday, as long as we maintain true singleness of mind, directing our aspirations towards the goal. Let us refrain from self-deception and indulgence in vices. Instead, let us constantly strive to become better, until we attain the very essence of goodness itself. If throughout our entire lives we seek and follow this path, we will ultimately reach our destination when, freed from the limitations of our mortal bodies, we are welcomed into full communion with God.

CHAPTER II.

A SUMMARY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. OF SELF-DENIAL. 5

Chapter Summary:

Chapter 1: The Rule and Description of the Christian Life

I. The Rule for Righteousness: Embracing the divine guidance that keeps us on the path of righteousness. It necessitates abandoning our own will and wholeheartedly dedicating ourselves to the service of God. By seeking the things of God rather than our own desires, we discover the true essence of righteousness. (Sections 1-2)

II. A Descriptive Journey: Drawing inspiration from the Epistle to Titus, we embark on a profound exploration of the renovation or Christian life. Through careful examination, we uncover its transformative power under various special considerations. Each aspect is meticulously elucidated, providing a comprehensive understanding of this sacred journey. (Sections 3 to end)

1. Although the Law of God contains a perfect and beautifully arranged rule of conduct, our divine Master, in His wisdom, has chosen to train His people through a more precise method—a method that surpasses the mere observance of the Law. The guiding principle of this method is that believers are called to present their

bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, for this is their reasonable act of worship (Romans 12:1). From this principle emerges the exhortation: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). The crux of the matter lies in our consecration and dedication to God. Therefore, our thoughts, words, intentions, and actions should all be driven by the pursuit of His glory. What God has sanctified cannot, without grave offense to Him, be applied to profane purposes. Since we do not belong to ourselves but to the Lord, it becomes clear what errors we must avoid and what purpose should guide every aspect of our lives. We are not our own; hence, our reason and will should not dictate our decisions and plans. We are not our own; therefore, let us not seek to gratify our carnal nature. We are not our own; thus, as much as possible, let us forget ourselves and our possessions. On the contrary, we belong to God; therefore, let us live and die for Him (Romans 14:8). We are God's; therefore, His wisdom and will should govern all our actions. We are God's; therefore, every aspect of our life should be directed toward Him as the rightful and ultimate goal. Oh, the tremendous progress of the one who learns that they are not their own and willingly surrenders self-rule and self-governance to God! For as obeying one's own desires leads to certain ruin, the only place of safety is to have no other will or wisdom than to follow the Lord wherever He leads. Therefore, let the first step on this journey be the abandonment of self and the wholehearted devotion of our minds to the service of God. By service, I do not mean merely outward obedience, but a state of mind where we strip away our carnal inclinations and humbly submit to the call of the Holy Spirit. This transformation, which Paul refers to as the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23), marks the entrance into true life—a transformation unknown to all the philosophers. They ascribe the governance of man solely to reason, believing that reason alone is to be heeded, granting it complete authority over conduct. However, Christian philosophy commands reason to yield and submit fully to

the Holy Spirit, so that the individual no longer lives for themselves but Christ lives and reigns within them (Galatians 2:20).

2. Therefore, we derive another profound principle from the aforementioned: we are not to seek our own desires, but rather, the will of the Lord, acting with the aim of promoting His glory. Tremendous is our progress when, almost forgetting ourselves and setting aside our own reasoning, we faithfully devote ourselves to obeying God and His commandments. For when Scripture instructs us to cast aside self-centeredness, it not only frees our minds from excessive yearnings for wealth, power, or human favor but also uproots all ambition and thirst for worldly recognition, along with other hidden perils. The Christian, indeed, ought to be so trained and inclined as to recognize that their entire life is in constant connection with God. Therefore, just as they bring all things under God's authority and assessment, they will devoutly direct their entire minds toward Him. For the one who has learned to look to God in everything they do is simultaneously shielded from all empty thoughts. This is the essence of self-denial that Christ powerfully instills in His disciples from the very beginning (Matthew 16:24). Once it takes hold of the mind, there is no room left for pride, pretense, or ostentation. Nor does it provide any space for avarice, lust, luxury, effeminacy, or other vices that are nurtured by self-love. On the contrary, where self-denial reigns not, the most loathsome vices are indulged in shamelessly. And even if there is some semblance of virtue, it is corrupted by a depraved longing for applause. Show me, if you can, an individual who, unless they have renounced themselves in obedience to the Lord's command, is genuinely inclined to do good solely for the sake of goodness itself. Those who have not renounced themselves have pursued virtue, at least to be praised. Even the philosophers who vehemently argued that virtue should be desired for its own sake were so consumed by arrogance that it became evident they sought virtue for no other reason than to indulge in pride. Far from delighting in these seekers of popular acclaim with their inflated chests, God declares that they have received their reward in this world (Matthew 6:2) and that

prostitutes and tax collectors are closer to the kingdom of heaven than they are (Matthew 21:31). We have not yet fully explained the extent and multitude of the obstacles that hinder a person in the pursuit of righteousness as long as they have not renounced themselves. The old saying holds true: there is a world of iniquity stored up in the human soul. And there is no remedy for this except to deny oneself, renounce one's own reasoning, and wholeheartedly pursue the things that the Lord requires and desires from us, seeking them solely because they are pleasing to Him.

3. In another passage, the apostle Paul provides us with a concise, yet distinct account of the various components that constitute a well-ordered life. He proclaims, "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14). With the grace of God as our guiding force, Paul not only inspires us to genuine worship but also removes the two formidable barriers that obstruct our path: ungodliness, encompassing all that opposes the true fear of God, and worldly passions, which encompass the lusts of the flesh. He urges us to renounce our own thoughts and desires in relation to both the first and second commandments. Then, he distills the manifold actions of our lives into three essential facets: sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. Sobriety encompasses not only purity, self-control, and temperance but also the wise and modest use of temporal blessings and patient endurance of lack. Righteousness encompasses the fulfillment of all our obligations in equity and fairness to one another. And finally, godliness sets us apart from the defilements of the world, uniting us with God in genuine sanctity. When these three virtues are inseparably linked, they form the essence of complete perfection. However, recognizing the immense difficulty in bidding farewell to the desires of the flesh, in suppressing and renouncing

our lusts, in wholeheartedly devoting ourselves to God and our fellow human beings, and in leading an angelic life amidst the corruptions of the world, Paul, in order to free our minds from all entanglements, redirects our attention to the hope of a blessed eternal life. He urges us to persevere in the struggle, for just as Christ appeared once as our Redeemer, so too will He manifest Himself fully at His final advent, bringing to fruition the salvation He has accomplished. In this manner, Paul dispels the alluring distractions that obscure our path and hinder us from aspiring to heavenly glory. Moreover, he reminds us that we are but pilgrims in this world, journeying towards the heavenly inheritance that awaits us, that we may not falter in our pursuit.

4. Furthermore, we perceive from these words that self-denial has a twofold aspect: one pertaining to our fellow human beings and the other, more notably, to God (sections 8-10). When Scripture instructs us to honor others above ourselves and earnestly strive for their well-being (Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3), it commands us to suppress the innate inclinations of our minds. We all, in our blindness, rush towards self-love, each one convinced of their own righteousness and tempted to despise others in comparison. Should God bless us with something commendable, we immediately become prideful, swelling with a sense of self-importance. The multitude of our vices, we diligently conceal from others, while soothingly convincing ourselves that they are insignificant and trivial, sometimes even mistaking them for virtues. When we witness the same qualities in others, even if they surpass our own, we maliciously seek to lower and find fault with them so as not to acknowledge their superiority. Conversely, when it comes to vices, we not only harshly and keenly criticize them but also deliberately magnify them. This breeds an arrogance that compels each person, as if exempt from the common fate, to exalt themselves above their neighbors, proudly and confidently looking down on others or at least regarding them as inferiors. The poor yield to the rich, the plebeian to the noble, the servant to the master, the unlearned to the learned, and yet deep down, everyone clings to their notion of personal superiority. Thus,

each individual constructs a kingdom within their own heart. The arrogant pass judgment on the minds and manners of others to satisfy themselves, and when strife arises, their venomous nature is laid bare. Many may exhibit a semblance of gentleness as long as everything goes smoothly and harmoniously, but how few are capable of maintaining the same demeanor of moderation when provoked and agitated? There is no other remedy for this ailment than to uproot the pernicious weeds of self-love and the desire for victory. This is precisely what the teachings of Scripture accomplish. They remind us that the endowments we possess are not our own but rather gifts freely bestowed by God, and those who boast in them betray ingratitude. As Paul asks, "Who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Therefore, through diligent self-examination, let us remain humble. By doing so, our pride will find no nourishment, while there will be much to tame and subdue it. Moreover, we are instructed to regard with reverence and respect the gifts of God present in others, honoring those in whom they reside. Since God has chosen to bestow honor upon them, it would be inappropriate for us to deprive them of it. Likewise, we are encouraged to overlook their faults, not by flattery but by refusing to insult those whom we ought to regard with honor and goodwill. By adhering to these principles in all our interactions, our conduct will not only be characterized by moderation and humility but also by kindness and friendship. The path to true meekness lies in cultivating a humble opinion of ourselves and a genuine respect for others within our hearts.

5. How arduous is the task of seeking the good of our neighbor! Unless we cast aside all thoughts of ourselves and, in a sense, cease to be ourselves, we will never fulfill it. How can we manifest those works of charity that Paul describes unless we renounce ourselves and wholly dedicate ourselves to others? Charity, as Paul says, is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast; it is not proud or rude. It does not seek its own interests, nor is it easily provoked (1

Corinthians 13:4-5). If seeking not our own were the only requirement, nature would have no power to comply. It inclines us so strongly to love ourselves alone that it is unwilling to allow us to pass by ourselves and our own concerns, so that we may attend to the interests of others and selflessly yield our rights to another. But Scripture, in leading us to this, reminds us that everything we receive from the Lord is granted on the condition that we employ it for the common good of the Church. Therefore, the rightful use of all our gifts is to generously and kindly share them with others. There can be no surer rule or stronger exhortation to observe it than when we are taught that all the endowments we possess are divine deposits entrusted to us for the very purpose of being distributed for the benefit of our neighbor. Scripture goes even further, likening these endowments to the various members of the body. Just as no member functions for itself or seeks its own private use, but transfers its function to fellow members, deriving its benefit in common with the entire body, so too should the godly individual act. Whatever a pious person can do, they are bound to do for their brethren, not seeking their own interests apart from earnestly striving for the collective edification of the Church. Let this, then, be our approach to showing goodwill and kindness, recognizing that in all that God has bestowed upon us and by which we can assist our neighbor, we are His stewards and accountable for our stewardship. Moreover, the only proper mode of administration is that which is governed by love. In doing so, we will not only unite the pursuit of our neighbor's advantage with regard to our own but also subordinate the latter to the former. Lest we overlook this as the law for faithfully administering every gift we receive from God, He Himself applied this law to the smallest expressions of His own kindness. He commanded the first fruits to be offered to Him as a testimony by the people that it was impious to reap any benefit from goods not previously consecrated to Him (Exodus 22:29; Exodus 23:19). If the gifts of God are not sanctified to us until we personally dedicate them to the Giver, it would be a gross misuse to show no signs of such dedication. It is futile to argue that our offerings cannot enrich the Lord. Although, as the Psalmist declares, "You are my Lord; apart

from you I have no good thing," we can extend our goodness "to the saints who are in the earth" (Psalm 16:2-3). Thus, there is a parallel drawn between sacred offerings and alms, which now correspond to the offerings under the Law.

6. Moreover, to ensure that we do not grow weary in doing good (which would otherwise be inevitable), we must embrace another quality mentioned by the Apostle: "Charity suffers long, and is kind, is not easily provoked" (1 Corinthians 13:4). The Lord commands us to do good to all without exception, even though many, if judged by their own merit, are unworthy of it. However, Scripture provides an excellent reason for this when it reminds us not to consider what people deserve in themselves, but to focus on the image of God that exists in all individuals. It is to this image that we owe honor and love. Within the household of faith, this principle is to be even more diligently observed, for in them, the image of God is renewed and restored by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, whoever is presented to you as someone in need of your assistance, you have no grounds to refuse to give it. Suppose they are a stranger; the Lord has given them a mark that should be familiar to you. For this reason, He forbids you to despise your own flesh. Suppose they are lowly and insignificant; the Lord designates them as one whom He has distinguished with the radiance of His own image. Suppose you have no obligations or duties towards them; the Lord has positioned them in such a way that you may recognize the many great obligations He has placed upon you. Suppose they are unworthy of even your slightest effort on their behalf; yet the image of God, by which they are recommended to you, is worthy of yourself and all your efforts. Even if they have not only failed to merit any good but have also provoked you with injury and mischief, it is still not a valid reason to withhold love and acts of kindness towards them. You might argue that they have treated you differently. However, what has the Lord deserved? Whatever harm they may have caused you, when the Lord commands you to forgive them, He surely intends for you to attribute it to Himself. It is only in this way that we can achieve what is not merely difficult but entirely contrary to our nature—to love those

who hate us, to repay evil with good, and to bless those who curse us. We must remember not to focus on the wickedness of individuals but to look instead at the image of God within them. This image, which covers and erases their faults, should entice us through its beauty and dignity to love and embrace them.

7. Through the fulfillment of charitable duties, we can truly mortify ourselves. However, it is not enough to merely perform these acts, even if we manage to carry them out without omission. True fulfillment requires a pure and genuine love behind our actions. We must be cautious not to fall into the trap of those who appear generous outwardly but accompany their giving with insults, arrogance, or harsh words. Sadly, in our troubled age, it has become all too common for many to offer alms with contempt and disdain. Such behavior should never be tolerated, not even among the pagans. As Christians, we are called to a higher standard. It is not sufficient to wear a smile on our faces or speak kind words while carrying out our duties. Rather, we must first empathize with those in need, placing ourselves in their position and feeling their misfortune as if it were our own. This deep sense of compassion and humanity should motivate us to help them just as we would help ourselves. A person with this mindset will go to their brethren and offer assistance without tainting their acts with arrogance or reproach. They will neither look down upon the one they help as someone in need, nor make them feel indebted or subservient. Just as we do not insult an ailing limb when the rest of the body labors for its healing, nor do we consider it under special obligation to the other members because it has required more effort than it has contributed, a true act of charity should not be seen as a gratuitous gesture but as the fulfillment of a natural obligation. Therefore, let those who have performed one act of kindness not consider themselves absolved, as is often the case when a wealthy person contributes a portion of their possessions and delegates the remaining burdens to others as if they have no further responsibility. Instead, each one should recognize that regardless of their station or wealth, they owe themselves to their neighbors. The

only limit to their benevolence should be the limit of their means. Let the extent of their resources guide the extent of their charity.

8. Let us delve deeper into the principal aspect of self-denial, the part that pertains to our relationship with God. We have already touched upon this subject before, but it is worth revisiting to gain a fuller understanding. When it comes to seeking convenience or tranquility in this present life, the Scriptures call us to surrender ourselves and all that we possess to the sovereign disposal of the Lord. We are called to offer Him the affections of our hearts, allowing Him to tame and subdue them. Often, we find ourselves consumed by an insatiable desire and boundless eagerness to pursue wealth and honor, to scheme for power, accumulate riches, and gather all the trappings that promise luxury and splendor. Conversely, we harbor an intense dread and abhorrence of poverty, lowly birth, and a humble station, striving to avoid them at all costs. As we observe those who shape their lives according to their own whims, we witness their restless minds, their countless schemes, and the weariness they endure in their quest to obtain what avarice or ambition desires or to escape the clutches of poverty and insignificance. To avoid falling into the same entanglements, Christian men and women must tread a different path. First and foremost, they must not yearn for, hope for, or fix their thoughts on any form of prosperity that is detached from the blessing of God. Instead, they must cast themselves upon His providence and rest securely and confidently in it. For no matter how much the carnal mind may appear self-sufficient in its pursuit of honor or wealth, relying on its own industry, zeal, or the favor of others, it is certain that all such efforts are in vain. Neither intellect nor labor will bear fruit unless the Lord grants success. On the contrary, it is His blessing alone that clears the way through all obstacles and brings everything to a joyful and favorable conclusion. Secondly, even if, without His blessing, we manage to acquire a measure of fame and riches (as we often see the wicked adorned with honors and wealth), we must recognize that those under God's curse do not partake in the slightest degree of true happiness. Anything we

obtain without His blessing is destined for ill fortune. Surely, we should not desire that which only adds to our misery.

9. Therefore, let us firmly believe that all prosperity and desirable success come solely from the blessing of God, while recognizing that without it, we are destined for various forms of misery and calamity. This understanding should reshape our perspective on wealth and honors. Instead of eagerly striving for them through our own cunning and efforts, relying on the favor of others or trusting in the fickle whims of fortune, we ought to always have our eyes fixed on the Lord. It is under His guidance that we should be led to the path He has prepared for us. The first consequence of this perspective is that we will no longer pursue wealth and honors with reckless disregard for what is right and wrong. We will forsake deceitful schemes, wicked strategies, and actions that harm our neighbors. For how can we hope for the divine blessing while engaging in fraud, theft, and other iniquitous practices? This blessing is bestowed upon those who think with purity and act with uprightness, and it turns us away from sinister designs and evil deeds. Secondly, this perspective will temper our desire for wealth and curb our ambition for honor. How can we audaciously expect God's aid in fulfilling desires that contradict His Word? What God Himself has pronounced as cursed can never be pursued with His blessing. Lastly, if our achievements do not align with our hopes and aspirations, we will be shielded from impatience and despising our lot, whatever it may be. We will understand that to feel such discontent is to murmur against God, who, according to His will, dispenses riches and poverty, contempt and honors. In essence, the one who leans on the divine blessing, as described, will not employ wicked arts in the pursuit of what others most eagerly desire, knowing that such tactics are ultimately futile. Moreover, when prosperity comes their way, they will not attribute it to their own diligence, industry, or fortune, but rather recognize God as the true author. If, while others flourish, their own progress is limited or even regresses, they will bear their humble circumstances with greater equanimity and moderation than irreligious individuals do when their moderate success falls short of their desires. This

person finds solace in resting more tranquilly than those at the pinnacle of wealth or power, for they believe that the Lord orders their affairs in the manner most conducive to their salvation. We witness this mindset in David, who, as he follows God and surrenders himself to His guidance, proclaims, "I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother" (Psalm 131:1-2).

10. In every aspect of life, pious souls should display this same tranquility and endurance, extending it to all the contingencies and accidents that befall us in this present existence. True self-denial lies in surrendering ourselves entirely to the Lord, entrusting the entire course of our lives into His sovereign hands. No matter what may happen, those whose hearts are thus composed will not consider themselves wretched, nor will they grumble against God because of their circumstances. The necessity of this disposition becomes apparent when we contemplate the many misfortunes to which we are vulnerable. Various diseases assail us, at times pestilence ravages the land, and we find ourselves entangled in the calamities of war. Frost and hail destroy the promise of a bountiful harvest, leading to scarcity and poverty. Beloved ones, our dear companions on this earthly pilgrimage, are snatched away by the cruel hand of death, and our homes may be ravaged by fire. These are the events that drive some to curse their existence, loathe the day of their birth, and even blaspheme against God, accusing Him of cruelty and injustice. However, the believer must perceive, even in these trials, the mercy and paternal indulgence of God. Even if he sees his dwelling reduced to emptiness by the departure of loved ones, he will not cease to bless the Lord. His thoughts will be focused on the abiding grace of the Lord, which will not abandon his household. If his crops are blighted, mildewed, or destroyed by frost or hail, if famine looms before him, he will not succumb to despair or complain against God. Instead, he will maintain his confidence in the Lord, declaring, "We, your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give you thanks forever" (Psalm 79:13). He knows that even in the depths of sterility, God will

provide sustenance. When afflicted with disease, the sharpness of pain will not overpower him to the point of impatience and reproach toward God. Rather, recognizing justice and mercy in the rod of affliction, he will patiently endure. In all circumstances, aware that everything is ordered by the Lord, he will receive each trial with a serene and grateful heart. He will not obstinately resist the divine governance, for he has willingly placed himself and all that he possesses in God's hands. Above all, let the Christian soul reject the foolish and pitiable consolation of the pagans, who, to fortify themselves against adversity, attributed it to blind fortune, considering it absurd to feel anger toward an aimless and capricious force that inflicted harm on the good and the wicked alike. On the contrary, the rule of piety teaches us that the hand of God governs and arbitrates the destinies of all. Instead of recklessly striking out against the world, He dispenses good and evil with perfect order and purpose.

CHAPTER III.

OF BEARING THE CROSS—ONE BRANCH OF SELF-DENIAL.

Chapter Summary: I. The Nature of the Cross: Its Necessity and Dignity

- Section 1: Understanding the essence of the cross
- Section 2: Recognizing the importance and honor of the cross

II. The Advantages of the Cross: Its Many Benefits

- Sections 3-6: Exploring the manifold advantages of embracing the cross

III. The Excellency of the Cross: A Paradoxical Journey

- Sections 7-8: Discovering the unparalleled beauty of the cross while acknowledging the presence of pain

IV. Warfare and Patience: Embracing the Cross in True Resilience

- Sections 9-11: Understanding the spiritual battle fought under the cross and embracing genuine patience, following the example of Christ

1. The pious soul is called to ascend higher, following the path to which Christ beckons His disciples: to take up their cross (Matthew 16:24). Those who have been chosen and honored with the intimate fellowship of the Lord must prepare themselves for a life marked by

hardship, toil, and various forms of affliction. Our heavenly Father, in His wisdom, deems it necessary to refine and test His people through this challenging journey. Just as Christ, the firstborn Son, embarked on this course, enduring a perpetual cross throughout His earthly sojourn, so too must His children follow in His footsteps. Although the Son held a special place in the Father's heart, being the beloved one in whom He delighted, He was not exempt from a life of trials. In fact, His very existence was permeated with the essence of the cross. The Apostle offers insight into the purpose behind this divine arrangement, affirming that even the Son, in His role as obedient servant, learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8). Therefore, why should we exempt ourselves from the conditions that our Head, Christ, willingly embraced on our behalf? He endured the cross to provide us with a model of steadfast patience. It is for this reason that the Apostle declares that all children of God are destined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Thus, in the midst of arduous and challenging circumstances, which the world perceives as evil and adverse, we find solace in the knowledge that we are partaking in the sufferings of Christ. Just as He traversed the path of manifold afflictions on His way to heavenly glory, so too are we led through diverse tribulations toward the same destination. The Apostle Paul echoes this truth when he declares, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). He further desires to "know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Romans 8:29). How profoundly does the bitterness of the cross diminish when we contemplate that our afflictions and adversities draw us closer to Christ, deepening our fellowship with Him! In this communion, our sufferings are not only blessed, but they also serve to advance our salvation.

2. Let us consider that while it was solely to demonstrate His obedience to the Father that our Lord took upon Himself the burden of the cross, we, on the other hand, have numerous reasons to continually live under its weight. By nature, we are feeble and inclined to attribute all excellence to our flesh. Unless we have a

tangible display of our weakness, we easily overestimate our own virtue and believe that it will remain unscathed and invincible in the face of any challenge. This leads us to indulge in foolish and empty confidence in our own abilities, becoming proud even against the Lord Himself, as if we could rely on our own faculties without His grace. There is no better remedy for this arrogance than when God, through various means, reveals to us not only our weakness but also our frailty. He may send us disgrace, poverty, bereavement, illness, or other afflictions that we feel utterly incapable of enduring. It is in these moments that we are humbled and learn to call upon His strength, the only power that can sustain us under the weight of suffering. Even the most righteous individuals, who are fully aware that they do not stand in their own strength but in the grace of God, would grow too confident in their own fortitude and constancy if they were not brought to a deeper self-awareness through the trials of the cross. This realization even dawned upon David, for he confesses, "In my prosperity I said, 'I shall never be moved.' Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong; You hid Your face, and I was troubled" (Psalm 30:6-7). He acknowledges that in times of prosperity, his senses became dull and he neglected to rely on the grace of God, instead leaning on his own strength and expecting perpetuity. If such a great prophet could fall into this trap, how much more should we fear and exercise caution? Although we may flatter ourselves with thoughts of greater constancy and patience during times of tranquility, it is through the humbling experiences of adversity that we learn the truth. In the face of such trials, believers progress in humility, casting off their misguided confidence in the flesh and turning to the grace of God. And when they do so, they come to experience the presence of divine power, which provides ample protection.

3.

This truth is beautifully expounded by the apostle Paul when he declares that tribulation produces patience, and patience produces experience (Romans 5:3-4). When believers find themselves in the midst of tribulation, they come to experience the reality of God's

promise to be with them. It is through His sustaining hand that they are able to endure with patience, a strength they could never muster on their own. In this way, patience becomes a living proof to the saints that God faithfully provides the aid He has promised whenever it is needed. Such experiences serve to deepen and strengthen their faith, for it would be ungrateful to doubt that God's truth will continue to be firm and unwavering in the future, just as they have found it to be in the past. We can clearly see the manifold benefits that the cross brings. It shatters the inflated sense of our own virtue and exposes the hypocrisy in which we take delight. It strips away our harmful reliance on our own strength, teaching us to lean solely on God. Thus, when we are humbled in this manner, we neither succumb to oppression nor despair. Furthermore, victory over tribulation engenders hope, as the Lord, in fulfilling His promises, establishes His faithfulness for what lies ahead. These reasons alone demonstrate the crucial necessity of bearing the cross. It is of immense importance to be liberated from self-love and to become acutely aware of our weakness. This awareness should instill in us a deep sense of distrust in ourselves, leading us to transfer our complete confidence to God alone. With heartfelt reliance, we lean on Him, trusting in His aid and remaining invincible until the end. We stand firm by His grace, recognizing that He is true to His promises. And with unwavering assurance in the certainty of His promises, we are fortified in hope, empowered to persevere.

4. Another purpose for the Lord's affliction of His people is to test their patience and cultivate their obedience. Although believers can only yield obedience to God through His enabling grace, He is pleased to provide visible and remarkable demonstrations of the graces He has bestowed upon His saints. He does this so that these graces may not remain hidden and unused. Thus, by openly showcasing the strength and constancy of endurance that He has endowed His servants with, He is said to test their patience. This is why we read of God testing Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice his only son (Genesis 21:1, 12). It is also why Peter tells us that our faith is proven through tribulation, just as gold is tested in the

furnace of fire. Is it not fitting that the excellent gift of patience, bestowed upon believers by their God, be put to use and made evident? Otherwise, it would never be valued according to its true worth. Therefore, when God supplies the means to bring forth these virtues, preventing them from lurking in obscurity or being wasted and lost, there is sound reason for the afflictions endured by His saints, for without such trials, their patience would not exist. Moreover, I say that through the cross, believers are also trained in obedience. They learn to live not according to their own desires, but at the disposal of God. If everything proceeded as they wished, they would never truly understand what it means to follow God. Seneca mentioned an old proverb that when someone was encouraged to endure adversity, they would say, "Follow God." This implies that individuals only submit to the yoke of God when they willingly endure His discipline and correction. Therefore, since it is right for us to demonstrate obedience to our heavenly Father in all things, we should not shy away from any method by which He trains us in obedience.

5. Yet, if we truly comprehend the necessity of obedience, we must also recognize the inherent inclination of our carnal nature to cast off the yoke of God whenever it is treated with even a hint of gentleness and indulgence. It is akin to the behavior of unruly horses that, when left idle for a few days in pasture and stable, become untamable and fail to recognize the rider whom they once obediently obeyed. Invariably, we fall into the very state that God laments in the people of Israel – growing fat and stubborn, kicking against the very One who has nurtured and cared for us (Deuteronomy 32:15). Though the kindness of God should attract us to reflect upon and love His goodness, our inherent wickedness is such that we are easily corrupted by His leniency. Thus, it is not only necessary, but essential, for us to be restrained by discipline, lest we give in to petulance and rebellion. In His wisdom, the Lord intervenes through the cross to subdue and control the arrogance of our flesh. He does so in various ways, tailored to the specific needs of each individual. Just as not all of us suffer from the same ailment, our cures do not

come in a uniform prescription. We observe, then, that while the heavenly Physician may treat some with gentleness, He employs more rigorous remedies for others, all with the purpose of providing healing for every soul. No one is left untouched or unaffected, for He knows that every single one of us, without exception, is afflicted with the disease of sin.

6. We must acknowledge that our merciful Father not only seeks to prevent our weakness but often corrects our past faults as well, in order to keep us in obedience. Therefore, when afflictions befall us, we ought to immediately reflect upon our past lives. In doing so, we will recognize that the chastisement we receive is just and deserved for the transgressions we have committed. Yet, the call to patience should not primarily rest on the acknowledgement of our sins. Scripture provides us with a far better perspective, teaching us that in adversity we are chastened by the Lord so that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32). Therefore, even in the bitterness of tribulation, we ought to perceive the kindness and mercy of our Father, who continues to work for our salvation. He afflicts us not to ruin or destroy us, but to deliver us from the condemnation of the world. Let this understanding lead us to heed the teachings of Scripture: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:11-12). When we experience our Father's discipline, should we not respond as obedient and teachable children, rather than imitating the rebellious behavior of desperate individuals hardened in wickedness? God would be condemning us to destruction if He did not, through correction, call us back when we stray from Him. Truly, it is said, "If you are without chastening...then you are illegitimate and not sons" (Hebrews 12:8). We display utmost perversity if we cannot endure His loving care and the attention He gives to our salvation. Scripture draws a distinction between believers and unbelievers, stating that the latter, enslaved to deep-rooted iniquity, only grow worse and more obstinate under the lash, whereas the former, as free-born sons, turn to repentance. Now,

therefore, choose your stance. Although I have touched upon this matter briefly here, as I have previously discussed it, it is sufficient to remind us of its importance.

7. There is a profound consolation when we endure persecution for the sake of righteousness. In those moments, our hearts should be filled with awe at the honor bestowed upon us by God, as He marks us with the special emblem of His soldiers. When we suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, it encompasses not only our unwavering defense of the Gospel but also our steadfast defense of righteousness in any situation. Whether we find ourselves contending for the truth of God against the deceptive lies of Satan or defending the good and innocent against the injustices of the wicked, we may face the offense and hatred of the world, placing our very lives, fortunes, and reputations at risk. Yet, let us not grieve or shrink back from giving ourselves wholeheartedly to God in such circumstances. Let us not consider ourselves as wretched in the very things that Christ Himself pronounced us blessed (Matthew 5:10). Indeed, poverty in itself is accompanied by a sense of misery, as are exile, contempt, imprisonment, and shame. Ultimately, death itself is the ultimate calamity. However, when the favor of God breathes upon us, there is nothing in this world that cannot turn into a source of happiness for us. Let us find contentment in the testimony of Christ rather than the false evaluations of the flesh. Following the example of the Apostles, we will rejoice in being deemed "worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). Why? If, while aware of our innocence, we are stripped of our possessions due to the wickedness of others, we may be impoverished from a human standpoint. Yet, in truth, our riches in heaven are multiplied. If we are driven from our homes, we are embraced more warmly within the family of God. If we are vexed and despised, our roots in Christ grow deeper. If we bear the stigma of disgrace and shame, our position in the kingdom of God is elevated. And if we are martyred, the gateway to eternal life is opened before us. Since the Lord has placed such a high value upon us, let us be ashamed to consider ourselves as anything less

than what we truly are, rather than clinging to the fleeting allurements of this present life.

8. Scripture abundantly consoles us with these profound reflections, assuring us that the ignominy and hardships we endure in the defense of righteousness are not in vain. It would be an act of ingratitude if we did not willingly and joyfully accept these trials from the hand of the Lord. We must remember that this form of the cross is most fitting for believers, as it is the very means by which Christ desires to be glorified in us, as affirmed by the apostle Peter (1 Peter 4:11, 14). However, for those with noble hearts, suffering disgrace is often more bitter than facing death itself. Paul explicitly reminds us that not only persecution but also disgrace awaits us because of our trust in the living God (1 Timothy 4:10). He also encourages us, following his example, to walk in the face of both evil reports and good reports (2 Corinthians 6:8). Yet, the cheerfulness required does not imply a total insensitivity to pain. The saints would not display patience under the cross if they were not tormented by pain and grievously afflicted. Poverty brings hardship, disease brings pain, ignominy brings shame, and death brings fear. Each of these naturally vexes the mind due to its inherent bitterness. However, the believer reveals their fortitude by being fully aware of the bitterness and enduring the struggles with boldness. They exhibit patience by restraining themselves from excesses, fearfully mindful of God's commandments. They demonstrate alacrity by finding satisfaction and solace in the spiritual consolation offered by God, even in the midst of sorrow and sadness.

9. This spiritual conflict waged by believers against the natural feeling of pain, while they strive for moderation and patience, is beautifully depicted by the apostle Paul: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). Here we see that bearing the cross patiently does not require the complete numbing of our emotions or an absolute insensitivity to pain, as the Stoics of old falsely proclaimed. Their

ideal of an unfeeling hero, untouched by adversity or joy, was but a shadow of true patience, an unattainable concept for humanity. Likewise, we encounter in our midst a new breed of Stoics among Christians who deem it sinful not only to groan and weep, but even to experience sadness and anxiety. Such paradoxical notions are often espoused by idle philosophers who dwell in speculation rather than action, and their teachings do not serve us well. We must distance ourselves from that rigid and cold philosophy. Our Lord and Master Himself condemned it not only in words, but also through His own example. He grieved and shed tears for the sorrows of Himself and others. His teachings to His disciples were not contrary to this either, for He said, "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice" (John 16:20). And lest anyone should consider mourning as a vice, He expressly declared, "Blessed are they that mourn" (Matthew 5:4). It is no wonder, then, that if all tears were to be condemned, we must question the tears shed by our Lord Himself, whose sweat fell like drops of blood to the ground (Luke 22:44; Matthew 26:38). If every form of fear were a sign of unbelief, what shall we make of the dread that overwhelmed Him? And if all sadness were deemed sinful, how could we justify His confession, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:38)? Let us therefore embrace the full range of human emotions, understanding that our Lord experienced them as well, and let us find solace in His understanding and compassion.

10. I wanted to share these thoughts to encourage pious hearts and prevent them from falling into despair. Let us not abandon the pursuit of patience simply because it seems impossible to rid ourselves of natural grief. We must avoid turning patience into a state of numbness or transforming a courageous and steadfast person into an unfeeling block. Scripture commends the endurance of saints when, despite the hardships they face, they are not crushed; when bitterness fills their hearts, yet spiritual joy fills their souls; when anxiety weighs them down, yet they are uplifted by the consolation of God. However, there remains a certain resistance within their hearts because human nature instinctively recoils from

and dreads what is adverse to it. Nevertheless, the devout soul seeks to obey the divine will even in the face of these difficulties. Our Lord alluded to this resistance when He spoke to Peter, saying, "When you were young, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18). While it is unlikely that Peter was forced into martyrdom against his will, for that would have diminished the honor of his sacrifice, it is evident that he experienced a duality of wills. When he contemplated the brutal death he was to face, he felt horror and a desire to avoid it. Yet, when he considered that it was God who called him to this sacrifice, his fear was subdued and he embraced his fate with courage. Therefore, if we truly desire to be disciples of Christ, we must strive to cultivate deep reverence and obedience towards God, taming and subduing any affections that contradict His sovereign will. In doing so, regardless of the type of cross we bear, we will maintain unwavering patience even in the most trying circumstances. Adversity will still carry its bitterness and sting us deeply. In times of illness, we may groan and feel restless, longing for health. When poverty weighs upon us, anxiety and sadness may pierce our hearts. The pain of ignominy, contempt, and injury may wound us, and the tears of grief may flow when we lose loved ones. Yet, through it all, our conviction will remain: The Lord has ordained it, and so we shall follow His will. Even in the midst of anguish, amid our sighs and tears, this thought will naturally arise within us and inspire us to endure cheerfully for the sake of that which afflicts us.

11. But the primary reason for embracing the cross is rooted in the divine will, and we must elucidate the distinction between philosophical and Christian patience in a concise manner. Indeed, only a handful of philosophers ventured to comprehend that affliction is a means by which the hand of God tests us, and that we ought to obediently submit to God in this regard. Their only rationale is that it must be so. But is this not akin to acknowledging that we must yield to God simply because it is futile to contend against Him? For if our obedience to God is contingent upon necessity, and we

would abandon it as soon as we can escape its demands, then it lacks sincerity. However, the considerations Scripture prompts us to reflect upon concerning the will of God are vastly different. It directs our attention to justice, equity, and our own salvation. Therefore, Christian exhortations to patience are grounded in these principles. Whether poverty, exile, imprisonment, contempt, disease, bereavement, or any other evil befalls us, we must recognize that none of these circumstances occur apart from the will and providence of God, and that everything He does is executed with perfect order. Moreover, do not our countless daily transgressions deserve to be chastised more severely and with a heavier rod than His mercy employs? Is it not right that our flesh be subdued and brought under the yoke, so that it may no longer rage and indulge itself wantonly? Are not the justice and truth of God worthy of our endurance for their sake? Therefore, if equity is unquestionably displayed in affliction, we cannot murmur or struggle against it without committing iniquity. We no longer hear the cold exhortation, "Yield because it is necessary," but rather a living and dynamic commandment, "Obey because it is unlawful to resist; bear patiently, for impatience is rebellion against the justice of God." Furthermore, as we are naturally drawn to that which we perceive as conducive to our own safety and benefit, our heavenly Father comforts us by assuring us that even in the very cross with which He afflicts us, He provides for our salvation. If it is evident that tribulations are salutary for us, why should we not receive them with tranquil and grateful hearts? By enduring them patiently, we are not succumbing to necessity, but rather contenting ourselves with our own good. Consequently, these reflections expand our contracted minds, which are naturally embittered by the weight of the cross, and fill them with spiritual joy. From this springs forth the offering of thanksgiving, which can only arise from a heart that is cheerful and gladdened. As nothing ought to hinder these sentiments within us, it becomes evident how imperative it is to temper the bitterness of the cross with spiritual joy.

CHAPTER IV.

OF MEDITATING ON THE FUTURE LIFE.

Chapter Summary

I. The Primary Purpose of the Cross

- The cross serves as a means to cultivate contempt for the present and ignite our aspirations towards the future life. (Section 1, 2)

II. Embracing the Future Life

- While withdrawing from the present life, we should neither avoid nor despise it. Instead, we should eagerly desire the future life and willingly depart from the present at the command of our sovereign Master. (Section 3, 4)

III. Overcoming the Fear of Death

- Our natural inclination to fear death is discussed, along with the correction and remedy to alleviate this fear. (Section 6)

1. WHATEVER be the kind of tribulation with which we are afflicted, we should always consider the end of it to be, that we may be trained to despise the present, and thereby stimulated to aspire to the future life. For in the wisdom of God, He knows the strong inclination of our hearts to cling to this world with a slavish love. To prevent us from being ensnared and attached to it, He graciously employs the most fitting means to awaken us from our spiritual slumber. Although we may claim to have a desire for heavenly immortality, our thoughts, desires, and actions often reveal our earthly preoccupations. Our minds are captivated by the allure of wealth,

power, and honors, blinding us to the true purpose of our existence. Our hearts become entangled in the snares of avarice, ambition, and lust, preventing us from soaring above these worldly enticements. Our souls, captivated by the pleasures of the flesh, seek fulfillment and happiness solely on this earth. To cure us of this malady, the Lord, in His wisdom, exposes the vanity of this present life through the constant reminder of its miseries. He allows us to be assailed by conflicts, turmoil, and injustice, revealing the fleeting nature of worldly peace. He strips us of excessive wealth or restricts us to modest means, reminding us that earthly riches are transient and unsatisfying. He brings about periods of exile, scarcity, or calamity, teaching us the fragility of temporal blessings. He permits us to experience marital difficulties, the misconduct of our loved ones, or the anguish of loss, humbling us and redirecting our focus to eternal realities. And if in His mercy, He withholds these afflictions, He reminds us of our mortality and the brevity of earthly joys through diseases and dangers. It is through the discipline of the cross that we find true wisdom when we acknowledge that this life, when examined in itself, is restless, troubled, and filled with countless sorrows, devoid of genuine happiness. Its supposed blessings are but fleeting illusions, tainted by a mixture of evanescent joys and persistent evils. Hence, we understand that our purpose here is not to seek comfort or security but to engage in a spiritual contest, fixating our gaze upon the heavenly crown. Only when we have learned to despise the fleeting pleasures of this world can our hearts sincerely desire and aspire to the eternal joys of the future.

2. For there is no middle ground between these two choices: either we must consider the earth as worthless, or we will remain enslaved by an intemperate love for it. Therefore, if our gaze is fixed on eternity, we must diligently strive to free ourselves from the chains that bind us. Furthermore, since the present life entices us with its allurements and presents an illusion of delight, grace, and sweetness, it is of utmost importance that we are occasionally awakened from its seductive embrace. What would become of us if we were to enjoy an uninterrupted flow of honor and felicity in this earthly existence?

Even the constant prodding of affliction often fails to stir us to a proper awareness of our own wretchedness. The transitory nature of human life, like smoke or a passing shadow, is not a hidden truth known only to the learned; it is a proverb deeply rooted in the common consciousness. Though we acknowledge this fact, we rarely contemplate it or keep it in our memory. Instead, we make our plans as if our immortality were firmly grounded on this earth. It is true that when we encounter a funeral or walk among graves, the image of death confronts us, and we may philosophize eloquently about the vanity of life. However, such moments of reflection are often fleeting and hold little lasting impact. They vanish as soon as we turn away, leaving no trace of remembrance. In essence, they pass by like the applause in a theater after a pleasant spectacle. Forgetful not only of death itself but also of our own mortality, as if we have never heard a whisper of it, we indulge in complacent security, expecting an earthly immortality. Even if someone interjects with the proverb that "man is a creature of a day," we may acknowledge its truth, but it fails to truly penetrate our consciousness, for the concept of perpetuity still clings to our minds. Who can deny, then, the profound significance of being not merely reminded through words but thoroughly convinced through firsthand experience of the wretched condition of our earthly existence? Even when we are convinced, we often continue to gaze upon it with vicious and foolish admiration, as if it contained the sum of all that is good. But if God deems it necessary to train us in this manner, it is our solemn duty to heed His call and allow Him to shake us from our slumber, so that we may hasten to despise the world and wholeheartedly aspire to the life that is to come.

3. Yet the contempt that believers should cultivate towards the present life must not give rise to hatred or ingratitude towards God. Despite its abundance of wretchedness, this life is counted among the divine blessings that are not to be disregarded. Therefore, if we fail to recognize the kindness of God in it, we are guilty of ingratitude towards Him. To believers, in particular, it should serve as evidence of divine benevolence, as it is wholly intended to promote their

salvation. Before openly revealing the inheritance of eternal glory, God graciously reveals Himself to us as a Father through lesser proofs, namely, the daily blessings He bestows upon us. Therefore, while this life acquaints us with the goodness of God, shall we disdain it as if it contained no goodness at all? We ought to feel and regard it in such a way that we place it among those gifts of divine goodness that are not to be despised. Even without the abundance of clear evidence in Scripture—which indeed exists—nature itself urges us to offer thanks to God for bringing us into existence, granting us the use of life, and providing us with all the means necessary for its preservation. Moreover, there is an even higher reason when we consider that here on earth we are being prepared for the glory of the heavenly kingdom. For the Lord has ordained that those who will ultimately be crowned in heaven must first engage in a battle on earth, overcoming its challenges and obtaining victory before they can triumph. Another reason is that here, in various ways, we begin to taste the divine goodness, arousing our hope and desire for its complete manifestation. Once we recognize that our earthly life is a gift of divine mercy, for which we are duty-bound to be grateful, we can then properly reflect on its most wretched condition and escape the excessive attachment to it that we naturally tend towards.

4. As our improper love for this earthly life diminishes, our longing for a better and eternal life should increase. I must admit that there is wisdom in the opinion of those who believed that it was better not to be born, and the next best thing was to die early. For those who lacked the light of God and true faith, what could they see in this world but dire omens and evil? It was not unreasonable for them to mourn and shed tears at birth and rejoice at death. However, they did so without profit because, lacking the true doctrine of faith, they failed to see how this life, in itself neither happy nor desirable, can turn to the advantage of the righteous. Their opinion led them into despair. But as believers, when we assess this mortal life and recognize its inherent misery, let us strive with greater zeal and less hindrance to reach for the future and eternal life. When we compare the two, the former not only becomes insignificant, but in

comparison to the latter, it is to be despised and scorned. If heaven is our true homeland, what can the earth be but a place of exile? If departing from this world is entering into life, then the world is but a tomb, and residing in it is being immersed in death. If being freed from the body is gaining true freedom, then the body itself is a prison. If the ultimate happiness lies in the presence of God, then how miserable is life without it? Yet, while we are still in this earthly body, we are absent from the Lord. Therefore, when we compare the earthly life to the heavenly life, it can be truly despised and trampled underfoot. However, we should never hate it except insofar as it keeps us enslaved to sin. And even in this hatred, we should not direct it towards life itself. Nevertheless, we should approach it with weariness or disdain, longing for its end and being ready to continue in it according to the will of the Lord, keeping far from murmuring and impatience. It is as if the Lord has assigned us a post, which we must faithfully maintain until He calls us back. Paul, in his lament, acknowledges his condition of still being bound to the body and earnestly yearns for redemption. Yet, he declared his readiness to obey God's command, prepared for either life or death, recognizing it as his duty to glorify God's name whether through life or through death, while leaving it to God to determine what is most conducive to His glory. Therefore, if it is our purpose to live and die for the Lord, let us surrender the length of our life and the timing of our death to His disposal. Let us eagerly long for death, meditate upon it constantly, and despise this life in comparison to the future immortality. Let us long to renounce it because of the bondage of sin, whenever it pleases the Lord to do so.

5. But it is truly remarkable that many who claim to be Christians, instead of longing for death, are filled with fear and dread at the mere mention of it. It is not surprising that our natural inclinations are somewhat unsettled by the thought of our own dissolution. However, it is utterly unacceptable that the light of piety should not shine so brightly in the hearts of Christians as to overcome and suppress that fear with greater consolation. When we reflect upon the transient, defective, corruptible, fading, withering, and decaying

nature of our earthly bodies, knowing that they will be dissolved only to be renewed in a sure, perfect, incorruptible, and heavenly glory, shouldn't our faith compel us to eagerly desire what nature fears? When we contemplate that death is our return from exile to our true homeland, a heavenly country, shouldn't this bring us comfort? After all, everything yearns for lasting existence. I acknowledge this, and therefore argue that we ought to fix our gaze on future immortality, where we may attain the permanence that eludes us in this earthly realm. The apostle Paul rightly urges believers to eagerly embrace death, not because they wish to be unclothed, but because they long to be clothed with the heavenly garments of resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:2). Shall the lower animals, and even inanimate creatures like wood and stone, who are conscious of their present vanity, eagerly anticipate the final resurrection and liberation from vanity alongside the sons of God (Romans 8:19)? And shall we, endowed with the light of intellect, and more than intellect, enlightened by the Spirit of God, when our very essence is at stake, fail to rise above the corruption of this earth? However, this is not the time or place for me to argue against this great perversity. From the outset, I declared that I did not intend to engage in an extensive discussion of common topics. My advice to those whose hearts are filled with such timidity is to read the short treatise of Cyprian, "On Mortality," unless they are more deserving of being sent to the philosophers, that by examining their teachings on the contempt of death, they may begin to blush. Let us firmly hold this truth, however, that no one has truly advanced in the school of Christ unless they look forward with joy to the day of death and the final resurrection (2 Timothy 4:18; Titus 2:13). For Paul distinguishes all believers by this mark, and the consistent message of Scripture directs us to that glorious hope whenever it seeks to stir us up to genuine and abounding joy. "Look up," says our Lord, "and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28). Is it reasonable, I ask, that what He intended to have a powerful effect in stirring us up to alacrity and exultation should only produce sadness and consternation? If that were the case, why do we still boast of Him as our Master? Therefore, let us regain a sound mind, and no

matter how much the blind and foolish longings of the flesh may resist, let us not hesitate to earnestly desire the advent of the Lord, not only in wish but also with fervent sighs, as the most favorable and blessed of all events. He will come as our Redeemer, delivering us from the immense abyss of evil and misery, and leading us to the blessed inheritance of His eternal life and glory.

6. Indeed, it is true. The entire body of believers, as long as they dwell on this earth, must be like sheep led to the slaughter, conforming themselves to Christ, their head (Romans 8:36). Their situation would be most lamentable if they did not, by lifting their hearts to heaven, rise above all that is of this world and transcend the current state of affairs (1 Corinthians 15:19). On the other hand, once they have lifted their gaze above earthly matters, even if they witness the wicked flourishing in wealth and honor, enjoying deep peace, indulging in luxury and splendor, and reveling in all sorts of pleasures, even if they themselves are wickedly attacked, insulted by pride, robbed by greed, or assailed by any other passion, they will bear these afflictions with ease. Their eyes will turn to that day (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17) when the Lord will welcome His faithful servants, wiping away all tears from their eyes, clothing them in garments of glory and joy, satisfying them with the ineffable sweetness of His pleasures, exalting them to share in His greatness, and ultimately granting them a share in His eternal happiness. As for the wicked who may have prospered on earth, they will be cast out in extreme ignominy. Their delights will be transformed into torments, their laughter and joy into wailing and gnashing of teeth, their peace into the torment of conscience, and their luxury into unquenchable fire. The Lord will humble them beneath the feet of the godly, whom they had mistreated and tested. As Paul declares, "it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven" (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7). This, indeed, is our only consolation. Without it, we would either succumb to despair or seek our ruin in the empty solace of the world. The Psalmist confesses, "My feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly

slipped. For I was envious of the boastful when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3-4). He found no refuge until he entered the sanctuary and considered the ultimate fate of the righteous and the wicked. In summary, the triumph of the cross of Christ over the devil, the flesh, sin, and sinners occurs in the hearts of believers only when their eyes are fixed on the power of His resurrection.

CHAPTER V.

HOW TO USE THE PRESENT LIFE, AND THE COMFORTS OF IT.

Chapter Summary:

1: The Necessity and Usefulness of This Doctrine

- Section 1: Understanding the importance of the doctrine
- Section 2: Avoiding extremes to use the present life and its comforts wisely

2: Avoiding the Intemperance of the Flesh

- Section 3: First method for avoiding intemperance
- Section 4: Second method for avoiding intemperance
- Section 5: Third method for avoiding intemperance
- Section 6: Fourth method for avoiding intemperance

1. Through the teachings of Scripture, we are not only instructed in the fundamental principles of faith but also guided in the proper use of earthly blessings, a vital aspect that should not be overlooked in shaping our lives. As we navigate this journey of life, we cannot avoid using the necessary provisions for our existence, nor should we completely abstain from those things that bring delight. Instead, we must strike a balance and employ them with a pure conscience, whether for our essential needs or for the enjoyment they bring. The Lord, in His wisdom, reveals to His people that this present life is but a pilgrimage towards the heavenly kingdom. Therefore, it is evident that we should utilize the blessings of this world in a manner that aids our progress rather than hinder it. In light of this, the apostle Paul aptly exhorts us to use the world without abusing it, and to

possess material things as though we were not possessed by them (1 Corinthians 7:30-31). However, as we tread this path, we must be cautious, for it is treacherous ground, and the peril of falling on either extreme side is great. Let us then plant our feet firmly on solid ground, where we can stand securely. In the pursuit of rectifying the rampant excesses of intemperance and luxury, there have been virtuous and godly individuals who, out of a desire to correct this pernicious evil, advocated for a severe approach, allowing mankind to only use material goods to the extent of their necessity. Although their counsel was well-intentioned, it was unnecessarily austere, binding consciences with stricter restraints than what the Word of God prescribes. According to their perspective, necessity entailed abstaining from anything that could be deemed unnecessary, to the point where they considered it scarcely lawful to supplement one's diet beyond bread and water. Others adopted even more stringent measures, as exemplified by Cratetes the Theban, who cast his riches into the sea, believing that unless he destroyed them, they would destroy him. In the present day, there are also those who, seeking an excuse for carnal excess in their use of external things, would pave the way for licentiousness. They assume, albeit erroneously, that this liberty should not be subject to any regulation, but rather left to individual conscience to determine what is permissible. While I acknowledge that consciences cannot and should not be bound by rigid and inflexible laws in this matter, it is crucial to recognize that Scripture provides general principles to guide us in legitimate use. Therefore, we must adhere to the boundaries it sets forth, mindful of its instructions and exercising discernment in our choices.

2. Let us firmly establish within ourselves this fundamental principle, so that we do not falter in our stewardship of the gifts bestowed upon us by Divine Providence. May we always direct these gifts towards the purpose for which their Creator fashioned and destined them, for He formed them with our well-being in mind, not for our ruin. There is no better guide than the one who keeps this purpose diligently before their eyes. Therefore, as we contemplate the reason behind the creation of food, we will discover that it was

designed not only to fulfill our basic needs but also to bring us joy and delight. Likewise, in the realm of clothing, its purpose extends beyond necessity to encompass beauty and honor. Even in the realm of plants, fruits, and trees, their manifold uses are accompanied by the gracefulness of their appearance and the sweetness of their fragrance. Would the psalmist enumerate wine that gladdens the heart of humanity and oil that makes their faces shine among God's mercies if they were not meant to be enjoyed? Would the Scriptures repeatedly extol His benevolence in providing such things for humankind? The very nature of these gifts indicates their lawful enjoyment and reveals the extent to which they can be appreciated. Did the Lord not adorn flowers with captivating beauty that pleases the eye and fill the air with fragrances that delight the senses? Should we then consider it unlawful to relish in the sight of their beauty and the aroma they emit? Moreover, has He not distinguished certain colors as more pleasing than others? Has He not imbued gold, silver, ivory, and marble with unique qualities, rendering them precious above other metals and stones? In short, has He not endowed countless things with value, even when they lack any inherent necessity?

3. Let us cast aside that cold-hearted philosophy which, in its inhumanity, restricts the use of God's creation to mere necessity. This philosophy not only maliciously robs us of the lawful fruits of His abundant goodness, but also seeks to strip humanity of its senses, reducing us to lifeless objects. However, let us also guard ourselves diligently against the temptations of the flesh, for if left unchecked, they will burst through all boundaries. These temptations are advocated by those who, under the guise of liberty, indulge in every kind of excess. Let us first acknowledge that the purpose of all things is to teach us about their Creator and inspire gratitude for His benevolence. Where is the gratitude if we indulge so excessively in feasting and wine that we are rendered unfit for acts of piety or the responsibilities of our vocation? Where is the recognition of God if our flesh, inflamed with lust due to excessive indulgence, contaminates our minds and robs us of the ability to discern honor

and righteousness? Where is our thankfulness to God for clothing if we, because of luxurious garments, become conceited and look down upon others? If our love for ostentation and splendor paves the way for immodesty? Where is our acknowledgment of God if our minds are captivated by the allure of these things? Many are so devoted to sensory pleasures that their minds lie buried, and others are so enamored with marble, gold, and paintings that their hearts become cold as stone and they resemble mere painted figures. The aromas of the kitchen seduce them to the point that they lose their spiritual discernment. Similar examples can be found in various aspects of life. Therefore, it is evident that there is a great need to restrain and control these licentious abuses, adhering to the guidance of the apostle Paul: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:14). When excessive liberty is granted to these desires, they burst forth without measure or restraint.

4. There is no surer or swifter path to this than by embracing a disdain for the present life and setting our hearts on celestial immortality. From this foundation, two guiding principles emerge: First, it remains imperative for those who have wives to live as if they had none, and for those who engage with the world to do so without abusing it. (1 Corinthians 7:29, 31) Secondly, we must cultivate a spirit of tranquility and patience, whether we endure poverty or experience abundance. The one who adheres to the principle of using this world as if not consumed by it not only eradicates all gluttony in relation to food and drink, and all excesses of indulgence, ambition, pride, lavish displays, and unnecessary frugality in matters of sustenance, dwelling, and attire, but also eliminates every care and affection that might divert or impede their pursuit of the heavenly life and the nurturing of their soul's welfare. Cato wisely observed that luxury begets great anxiety and fosters a profound disregard for virtue. There is an ancient proverb which states, "Those who are overly preoccupied with caring for the body tend to neglect the soul." Therefore, while a Christian's liberty in external matters is not strictly bound by rigid regulations, it is nevertheless subject to this

law: to indulge as little as possible. Conversely, it is our constant duty not only to restrain extravagance but also to eliminate any unnecessary display of abundance. We must diligently guard against turning what should be a means of support into an obstacle in our spiritual journey.

5. Another guiding principle is for those in humble and narrow circumstances to cultivate patience in bearing their wants, so as not to become immoderately desirous of things whose moderate use signifies significant progress in the school of Christ. For in addition to the various vices that accompany an excessive longing for earthly goods, one who is impatient in poverty often reveals the contrary ailment in abundance. By this, I mean that the person who is ashamed of a simple garment will boast vainly of a splendid one; the one who is dissatisfied with a modest meal and yearns for a more luxurious supper will recklessly abuse luxury once obtained; the one who struggles and is discontented in embracing a humble and private station will be unable to refrain from pride upon attaining honor. Let it be the aspiration of all who sincerely desire piety to learn, following the Apostle's example, "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." (Philippians 4:12) Moreover, Scripture provides a third guideline for moderating the use of earthly blessings. We have touched upon it when discussing the duties of charity. It teaches us that all these gifts have been graciously bestowed upon us by God and entrusted to our care, with the understanding that we will one day give an account of how we have managed them. Thus, we ought to administer them as if we continually hear the words echoing in our ears, "Give an account of your stewardship." Simultaneously, let us bear in mind that it is the Lord Himself who will evaluate our stewardship. He highly esteems abstinence, sobriety, frugality, and moderation, while despising luxury, pride, ostentation, and vanity. He approves of no administration that is not accompanied by charity. It is He who, with His own words, has already condemned all those pleasures that divert the heart from chastity and purity or cloud the intellect.

6. The final consideration we must bear in mind is that the Lord commands each one of us to conduct ourselves according to our own calling in every aspect of life. He understands the restless nature of the human mind, its tendency to be easily swayed, its inclination to hold contradictory desires, and its ambition. To prevent chaos and folly from prevailing, He has assigned specific duties to individuals based on their distinct stations in life. By defining these various roles as callings, He sets boundaries that prevent us from wandering aimlessly. This distinction is so essential that all our actions are evaluated by Him through this lens, often in a manner that differs from human reason or philosophy. Philosophers consider nothing more noble than liberating one's country from tyranny, yet the private individual who assassinates the tyrant is openly condemned by the divine judgment. However, I shall not dwell on specific examples. It is enough to understand that the foundation and starting point of right action in every circumstance is the call of the Lord. Without acting in accordance with it, one will never fulfill their duties properly. Although someone may occasionally be able to present something seemingly praiseworthy, whatever it may be in the eyes of humanity, it will be rejected before the throne of God. Moreover, there will be disharmony in the different aspects of their life. Hence, only those who direct their lives toward this purpose will have them properly ordered. Free from the impulse of recklessness, they will not venture beyond the bounds of their calling, recognizing that it is unlawful to exceed the prescribed limits. The obscure individual will not shy away from cultivating a private life, for they understand the importance of remaining steadfast in the position assigned to them by God. Likewise, in all our concerns, labors, troubles, and burdens, it will bring great solace to know that these are under the watchful care of God. The magistrate will fulfill their duty with greater willingness, and the head of a household will remain content in their rightful sphere. Each person, in their unique vocation, will bear the inconveniences, worries, restlessness, and anxieties that accompany it without complaint, knowing that God has placed these burdens upon them. This realization will also provide exquisite comfort, for in faithfully pursuing your own calling,

no task will be so lowly and insignificant that it lacks splendor and worth in the eyes of God.

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