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THE PLAIN MAN'S

Pathway
TO
Heaven

UPDATED TO MODERN ENGLISH

ARTHUR DENT



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The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven

by Arthur Dent

Where everyone can clearly determine whether they will be saved or damned.

Presented in the form of a dialogue, to aid the understanding of those who are not learned: By ARTHUR DENT, Preacher of the word of God in South-Shoobery, Essex.

The ninth Edition.

Corrected and revised, including a Table of the main topics and three Prayers that should be used in private households, added hereto.

ZEPH. 3. 5. Each morning, the Lord reveals His judgment; He never fails to do so. However, the wicked refuse to learn humility.

LONDON Printed for EDWARD BISHOP, and can be purchased at Paul's Churchyard, at the sign of the Bronze Serpent. 1607.

Updated to Modern English

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The Contents of this Dialogue.

- First, it reveals humanity's wretchedness in its natural state, along with the means of redemption.
- Secondly, it strongly condemns the wickedness of the present time and the widespread corruption of the world.

- Thirdly, it highlights the distinguishing characteristics of God's children and the Reprobates, along with the evident signs of salvation and damnation.
- Fourthly, it declares the difficulty of attaining eternal life and the scarcity of those who shall attain it.
- Fifthly, it exposes the ignorance prevalent in the world, along with addressing the objections raised by the same.
- Lastly, it proclaims and announces the comforting promises of the Gospel, along with the abundant mercies of God, available to all who repent, believe, and genuinely turn to Him.

To the esteemed Sir Julius Caesar, Knight, one of the Masters of Requests to the King's Majesty, Judge of the High Court of Admiralty, and Master of S. Catherine's: A.D., I wish all good things in Christ Jesus.

Having completed (Right Honourable) and prepared for publication this small Dialogue, I pondered (since it is the common practice of all who write books in this era to dedicate them to someone of high status) to whom I should dedicate my humble efforts. Finally, I decided that no one could be more suitable than your honour, both due to our familial connection and the numerous commendable qualities bestowed upon you by the Almighty. Therefore, as a token of gratitude for the kindness you have shown me, I present to your honour this third fruit of my labour, now published. I humbly beseech you to accept it graciously, not considering its material value, which is of no consequence, but rather the sincere and noble intentions of the giver.

This work sharply reproves and convicts the sinful world and is likely to gain many fierce adversaries who will vehemently oppose it to the point of death. I know that Zoilus and his associates will bitterly criticize it. Therefore, it seeks refuge under your honour's protection and humbly desires sanctuary under your wings. Hence, I earnestly

implore you to undertake its patronage and defense so that, through your efforts, it may be safeguarded from the slanderous attacks of malicious individuals and the malevolence of the world, ensuring it remains unharmed.

As for this little volume, you will find a summary of its contents in the Epistle to the Reader. Regarding its style, it does not boast great erudition, wit, artistry, eloquence, or imaginative invention (for I have particularly considered the unlearned and ordinary folk, whose spiritual growth I primarily aim to foster). However, it does contain elements that may pique the interest of the learned and provide them with some satisfaction. Whatever it may be, I entrust it to your honour's judgement, imploring you to receive it kindly.

And now, I take my leave, bidding farewell with utmost humility. I commend both yourself, your esteemed wife, and your entire household to the merciful protection of the eternal God. From South-Shoobery in Essex. April 10, in the Year of Our Lord 1601.

Yours faithfully, at your service in the Lord, ARTHUR DENT.

The Epistle to the Reader.

Dear Reader, since my little Sermon on Repentance, which was published a few years ago, was well received, I have now published this Dialogue for your further benefit. It is the third product of my labor, and I hope it achieves similar success, bringing glory to God and providing comfort to you as the Reader. In a section of this Dialogue, I have cited some ancient writers and even wise Heathens, who, under oath and in their own language, testify to the ugliness of certain vices that we, in this age, tend to overlook. I hope this does not offend anyone. In other parts of this work, I have mostly set aside

such references. However, in this particular case, I deemed them to be somewhat useful in illustrating this point: if we do not repent in time, forsake our sins, and seek after God, both the ancient Christian fathers (who did not see what we see or hear what we hear) and even the Heathens themselves will rise up to judge us. Therefore, let no one stumble because of this. But if anyone does, let them remember that I am in a Dialogue, not a Sermon. I write for everyone of all kinds, not just a few individuals of one group. Moreover, what I have done here is not much different from what the Apostle did when he said, "As some of your own poets have said" (Acts 17). It is permissible.

One thing, dear Christian, I beseech you to do: I ask that you do not read just two or three pages of this book and then cast it aside. Instead, read it all the way through to the very end. I assure you, if there is anything worth reading, it is found in the latter part, particularly towards the conclusion. Therefore, do not be discouraged by the harshness of the beginning; expect smoother content in the middle, and the smoothest in the conclusion and wrap-up. This Dialogue does not possess the nature of a Tragedy, which begins with joy and ends with sorrow, but rather that of a Comedy, which begins with sorrow and ends with joy.

This book does not concern itself with controversies in the Church or matters of the Ecclesiastical establishment. Its sole focus is engaging in a dispute with Satan and sin. It is organized into six main sections. First, it reveals the wretchedness of humanity in its natural state and presents the means of redemption. Secondly, it strongly denounces the wickedness of the present time and the prevalent corruptions of the world. Thirdly, it outlines the distinguishing characteristics of God's children and the Reprobates, along with the evident signs of salvation and damnation. Fourthly, it declares the difficulty of attaining eternal life and the rarity of those who will achieve it. Fifthly, it exposes the ignorance prevalent in the world, addressing the objections raised by the same. Lastly, it proclaims the sweet

promises of the Gospel and the abundant mercy of God available to all who repent, believe, and genuinely turn to Him.

May the Author of all blessings bestow His blessing upon this work. May the God of peace, who brought our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, back from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant, perfect us in all good works, sanctify us completely, correct all our imperfections, and keep us blameless until the day of His most glorious appearing. Amen.

Yours in the Lord, A.D.

The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven

Interlocutors:

Theologus: a theologian.

Philagathus: an upright individual.

Asunetus, an uninformed person.

Antilegon, a skeptic.

Philagathus:

Well met, good Master Theologus:
gus.

Theologus::

Ah, my old friend Philagathus
athus! I'm glad to see you in good health.

Philagathus:

Are you walking alone here in this pleasant meadow, sir?

Theologus::

Yes, I am. I find pleasure in walking in the fields for recreation,
especially during this time of the year. It allows me to breathe in the
fresh air and listen to the delightful singing of birds.

Philagathus:

Indeed, sir, it is very enjoyable, especially now in this lovely month of
May. Thanks be to God, we have had a promising spring thus far, one
of the best in the past seven years.

Theologus::

God truly showers us with His mercies. Oh, if only we could reciprocate by overflowing with gratitude towards Him.

Philagathus:

May I ask, sir, what time do you think it is?

Theologus::

I believe it's a little past one o'clock. I just finished my lunch not long ago.

Philagathus:

Look, over there, two men are approaching us. Can you tell me who they are?

Theologus::

They are two neighbors from the nearby Parish. One of them is named Asunetus.

us, who is truly ignorant when it comes to matters concerning God. The other is called Antile.

on, a notorious atheist and a constant critic of all things good.

Philagathus:

If they are indeed like that, it would be good for us to find an opportunity to discuss matters of religion with them. Perhaps we can be of some help to them.

Theologus::

You have made a good suggestion, and I agree with it. If you bring up some topics and ask some questions, I will be ready to provide the best answers I can.

Philagathus:

But wait, sir, they are approaching us now.

Theologus::

Welcome, neighbors, welcome! How are you, Asunetus.

us and Antile.
on?

Asunetus:

We are well, thank God. We are glad to see you in good health, sir.

Theologus::

What brings both of you here at this time of day? I'm sure there is some reason that has led you this way.

Asunetus:

Indeed, sir, we have a small matter to attend to. We came to talk to one of your parishioners about buying a cow from him.

Theologus::

Does my neighbor have a cow to sell?

Antilegon:

We've heard that he has a very good one for sale. However, I'm concerned that at this time of the year, we might find her quite expensive.

Theologus::

How expensive? What do you think a very good cow might be worth?

Antilegon:

A truly good cow at this time of year is worth nearly four pounds, which is quite a high price.

Theologus::

Indeed, that is a considerable price.

Philagathus:

I urge you, Mr. Theologus:

gus, to stop discussing cattle and worldly matters, and let us engage in a conversation about religious matters. In doing so, we can do good and learn from one another.

Theologus::

You make a valid point. However, it's possible that these men have urgent matters to attend to and cannot stay.

Asunetus:

No, sir, we are not in a great hurry. We can stay for two or three hours since the days are long. If we finish our business by nightfall, it will suffice.

Theologus::

In that case, if you please, let's walk over to that oak tree. There's a splendid arbour with comfortable seats where we can all sit in the shade and discuss heavenly matters.

Asunetus:

Certainly, sir.

Philagathus:

Come, then, let us go.

Asunetus:

This is indeed a splendid arbour, and the seats are comfortable.

Theologus::

Please, everyone, have a seat. Now, friend Philagathus
athus, if you have any questions regarding religious matters, we are all ready to listen.

Philagathus:

It's possible that these men are somewhat ignorant about the fundamental principles of religion. Therefore, I believe it's appropriate to start there and pave the way for further discussions.

Theologus::

Please go ahead, then.

Philagathus:

Firstly, I ask you, in what state are all people born by nature?

Theologus::

In the state of condemnation, as it is evident in Ephesians 2:3. By nature, we are children of wrath just like everyone else. Furthermore, it is written, "Behold, I was born in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Philagathus:

Is this the case for every person? Are Dukes and Nobles, Lords and Ladies, and the great rulers of the earth exempt from it?

Theologus::

No, certainly not. It is the common condition of all individuals, regardless of their status. Both the high and the low, the rich and the poor share this state. As it is written, "What is man that he should be pure, and he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?"

Philagathus:

Why is it that all people are born into such a woeful state?

Theologus::

It is due to the fall of Adam. Through his disobedience, he not only brought extreme and indescribable misery upon himself but also upon all his descendants. As the Apostle said, "By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners," and "by the offense of one, the condemnation came upon all people."

Philagathus:

What is the reason for us all being punished for the offense of another person?

Theologus::

It is because we were all in Adam at that time, and we are now all from him. In other words, we have descended from him in such a way that we have not only inherited our natural and corrupted

bodies from him but also through propagation have acquired his corrupt nature, as if it were by hereditary right.

Philagathus:

However, since some have claimed that Adam's fall only harmed himself and not his descendants, and that we have acquired his corruption through imitation rather than propagation, I kindly ask you to explain this more clearly.

Theologus::

Just as great individuals, by committing treason, not only harm themselves but also tarnish their lineage and bring disgrace upon their descendants, for the children of such nobles are disinherited when their bloodline is tainted, until they are restored by an act of Parliament. Similarly, our bloodline, tainted by Adam's transgression, cannot rightfully inherit anything until we are restored by Christ.

Philagathus:

Does this hereditary infection and contamination affect our entire nature?

Theologus::

Yes, indeed. It is universal, spreading throughout the entire person, encompassing the soul and body, reason, understanding, will, and affections. The Scriptures declare that we are dead in sins and trespasses.

Philagathus:

How do you interpret that?

Theologus::

Not in terms of physical death or the natural faculties of the soul, but rather in terms of the spiritual faculties.

Philagathus:

Did Adam, then, lose his nature and destroy it through his fall? Or is

our nature taken away because of his fall?

Theologus::

No, that is not the case. Our nature was corrupted by it, but not destroyed. Reason, understanding, will, and affections still remain within our nature. We are not like a lifeless block or a mere object. However, through Adam's disobedience, we are blemished, impaired, and deprived of all ability to understand rightly or to will and do what is right. As it is written, "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God." Furthermore, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do, according to His good pleasure." As for the other point, Saint James says that all humans are made in the likeness of God, indicating that even in the most wicked individuals, there remain remnants and elements of God's image, such as reason and understanding. Therefore, our nature was not entirely destroyed.

Philagathus:

So, you believe that there are still sparks and remnants within us of that excellent image of God that existed in our initial creation.

Theologus::

Indeed, I do believe so. It becomes evident in the wise words and writings of pagan poets and philosophers. By examining them, we can catch glimpses, like certain remnants, of the magnificent design and structure of human creation.

Philagathus:

Can a person please God in anything they do, as long as they remain in their natural state?

Theologus::

No, not in anything. Until we are in a state of grace, even our best actions are sinful. This includes preaching, prayer, acts of charity, and more. As it is written, "Who can bring a clean thing out of that which is unclean?" (Job 14:4). The Apostle also states, "Those who

are in the flesh cannot please God," meaning those who are still in their natural corruption. Furthermore, our Lord Jesus Himself asks, "Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?" This means that mere natural individuals cannot produce fruits that are acceptable to God.

Philagathus:

This is a very harsh and difficult statement. I ask you, for further understanding, to explain it more clearly.

Theologus::

People in their natural state may do things that are inherently good, but they fail completely in the manner of doing them. They do not do them as they should be done, which is with faith, love, zeal, and a conscience of obedience. They also lack any sense of cheerfulness, delight, or genuine feeling, but rather force themselves to perform the outward actions. This is how Cain offered his sacrifice, the Pharisees prayed, Ananias and Sapphira gave alms, and the Jews presented their offerings and burnt offerings.

Philagathus:

Do people have any true perception or a vivid and profound awareness of this miserable and woeful state as long as they are solely natural?

Theologus::

No, certainly not. They are completely blinded and hardened in it, having no desire to come out of it. They take great pleasure in it and can hardly be convinced that they are in such a woeful condition. This is evident in the example of the ruler who, when commanded or rather requested by our Savior Christ to keep the commandments, replied, "All these I have kept from my youth." Similarly, the Church of Laodicea, though wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, considered themselves rich, prosperous, and in need of nothing. Therefore, as long as people are in their natural state, they lack true perception and awareness of their misery.

Philagathus:

Do you not think that all people, being solely natural, are under the curse of the Law?

Theologus::

Yes, certainly. Not only that, but they are also under the very tyranny and dominion of Satan, even if they are unaware of it, cannot see it, do not feel it, or perceive it. For all who are not in Christ are under the curse of the law and the power of darkness and the devil. This is evident in Ephesians 2:2, where the devil is referred to as the prince who rules in the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. In another passage, he is called the god of this world, who blinds the eyes of all unbelievers. It is also stated that all people, by nature, are ensnared by him and taken captive at his will.

Philagathus:

Few will be convinced of that. They will say that they defy the devil and thank God they have never been troubled by him.

Theologus::

Their strong words do not change the reality. The devil is not driven away by mere words any more than by holy water. In fact, he resides in their tongues and mouths, and even possesses the very hearts and innermost being of thousands who claim to defy him and be unaffected by him. This is evident from their specific actions and the overall course of their lives.

Philagathus:

I believe that if the devil so inwardly possesses the hearts and consciences of people, they should have some awareness and feeling of it.

Theologus::

The devil's workings in people's souls, being an invisible spirit, are carried out with such inconceivable cunning and craftiness that those

in the state of nature cannot possibly feel or perceive it. How can a blind man see or a dead man feel?

Philagathus:

Please explain this more clearly.

Theologus::

Just as a clever illusionist deceives and blinds people's external senses with the tricks of Satan, causing them to think they see what they do not see and feel what they do not feel, the devil also deceives and bewitches our internal senses and the natural faculties of our souls. He casts a fog before our eyes, making us think we are what we are not, see what we do not see, and feel what we do not feel. The cunning of Satan lies in his ability to inflict a mortal wound upon us without us ever knowing who harmed us.

Philagathus:

Few will believe this to be true.

Theologus::

Indeed, it is true. Few believe the Scriptures, and few believe this because few feel it. Where it is not felt, it can hardly be believed. Only the elect feel it, and therefore only the elect believe it. As for all others, they are the apprentices and bondslaves of the devil, which is a thousand times worse than being a galley slave.

Philagathus:

How long do people remain in this woeful state of nature, under the curse of the law and the slavery of Satan and sin?

Theologus::

They remain in this state until they are regenerated and born again, brought into the state of grace. As our Lord Jesus said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Philagathus:

Do not many die and pass away from this life before being born

again, and consequently before entering the state of grace?

Theologus::

Yes, undoubtedly, thousands do. Many live for forty or sixty years in this world and eventually die, departing from this life without knowing why they came into it. As it is written, "My people perish for lack of knowledge."

Philagathus:

What can we think of such people?

Theologus::

I tremble to speak what I think, for I truly do not see how such individuals can be saved. I am not referring to infants and children, as some of them are undoubtedly saved by virtue of the promise and covenant, through the election of grace.

Philagathus:

It seems then that you believe only those who are born again can be saved.

Theologus::

Indeed, that is what I believe.

Philagathus:

Please tell me what exactly this regeneration and new birth is that you speak of.

Theologus::

It is a renewal and restoration of the corrupted and decayed state of our souls. As it is written, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind," and again, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

Philagathus:

Please explain this more thoroughly.

Theologus::

Just as a wild olive tree retains its old nature until it is grafted into a cultivated olive tree and then becomes partaker of a new nature, similarly, we, until we are grafted into Christ, retain our old nature, but afterward are transformed into a new nature. As it is written, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

Philagathus:

I do not understand what you're saying.

Theologus::

You must understand that just as there is a natural birth of the whole person, there is also a spiritual birth of the whole person.

Philagathus:

How does that happen?

Theologus::

It happens when the natural faculties of the soul, such as reason, understanding, will, and affections, as well as the physical members of the body, are sanctified, purified, and rectified by grace, so that we understand, will, and desire what is good.

Philagathus:

Can't a person will and desire what is good before being born again?

Theologus::

No more than a dead person can desire the good things of this life. A person's will is not free to consent to good until it is enlarged by grace. An unregenerate person sins necessarily, though not by constraint. The will of a person is free from constraint (as it sins of its own accord), but not from bondage to sin.

Philagathus:

You speak as if a person can do nothing but sin until the new work is accomplished in them.

Theologus::

That is indeed my opinion. For a person and their flesh are one until they are regenerated. They agree together like husband and wife, joining together in all evil. They live and die together, for when the flesh perishes, the person perishes.

Philagathus:

Is not this regeneration a change or rather a destruction of human nature?

Theologus::

Far from it. It neither abolishes nor changes the substance of the body or soul, or any of their faculties. It is only a rectifying and repairing of them by removing the corruption.

Philagathus:

Does the power of grace purge and completely remove our natural corruption, so that it no longer remains in us and we are completely freed from it?

Theologus::

Not so. The remnants and vestiges of our old nature, which the Scripture calls the "old man," still cling to us and dwell within us, even until our dying day. This is clearly demonstrated in the last ten verses of Romans 7.

Philagathus:

So, you affirm that this new man or the new work of grace and regeneration is imperfect in this life.

Theologus::

Yes, the new creature or the new work of grace can never be fully formed in this life. It is always in the process of being formed. Just as our faith and knowledge in this life are imperfect, so is our regeneration and sanctification.

Philagathus:

You mentioned earlier that regeneration or the new birth pertains to the whole person, which implies that the new work of grace is complete and perfect.

Theologus::

You misunderstand the matter. Although the new birth is universal and pertains to the whole person, it is not entirely perfect, pure, and without the mixture of corruption. For it is written: "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." The Apostle also prays that the Thessalonians may be sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body.

Philagathus:

This seems quite obscure. I request you to clarify it further.

Theologus::

You must understand that the new work and the old, flesh and spirit, grace and corruption, are so intertwined and joined together in all the faculties of the soul and body that they are constantly at odds with each other.

Philagathus:

But tell me, how do you understand this mingling of grace and corruption in the soul? Do you mean that grace is located in one part of the soul and corruption in another, as if they are separated in place?

Theologus::

No, that is not my meaning. Rather, they are joined and mixed together (as I said) in and throughout the entire person. The mind or understanding is not partially flesh and partially spirit, but the entire mind is both flesh and spirit, with each aspect present in different ways. The same can be said for the will and affections.

Philagathus:

Please explain it more clearly.

Theologus::

Just as the air at dawn is neither completely light nor completely dark, unlike midnight or midday, and it is not one part light and another part dark, but rather the whole air is partly light and partly dark throughout; or like lukewarm water in a vessel, where the water itself is neither purely hot nor purely cold, but heat and cold are mixed together in every part of the water. Similarly, the flesh and the spirit are mingled together in the soul of a person. This is the reason why these two opposing qualities constantly struggle against each other.

Philagathus:

Undoubtedly, this doctrine of regeneration is a profound mystery.

Theologus::

Yes, indeed. It is a secret among secrets that the wise of this world cannot comprehend.

Philagathus:

Some people believe that courtesy, kindness, good upbringing, good nature, and good education are synonymous with regeneration, and that those who possess these qualities must be saved.

Theologus::

They are greatly mistaken. These attributes do not necessarily guarantee salvation and can be found in individuals who are entirely profane and irreligious. However, we should still appreciate and love these outward virtues and the people who possess them.

Philagathus:

What is your opinion then on learning, intelligence, and worldly wisdom? Are these aspects essential to religion and indicative of regeneration?

Theologus::

No, no. These are external gifts that can be found in even the most wicked individuals, such as Papists, heathen poets, and philosophers.

Nevertheless, we should still hold great respect for learned and wise individuals, even if the inward work of regeneration has not yet taken place. True regeneration is solely from God and comes from above.

Philagathus:

The common folk often attribute much importance to learning and worldly wisdom. They may say that a person is learned and wise, and knows the Scriptures as well as anyone, yet their actions do not align with their knowledge.

Theologus::

It is one thing to possess knowledge of the history and literal meaning of the Scriptures, and another thing to believe in and experience the transformative power of the Scriptures in one's heart. This can only come from the sanctifying Spirit, which the wise of this world cannot attain.

Philagathus:

It is a common belief that if a person holds correct beliefs, avoids being a Papist or heretic, and leads an upright and moral life, then they must necessarily be saved.

Theologus::

That is not necessarily true. Many individuals may reach that point, but still lack the inward experience of true faith.

Philagathus:

That seems perplexing. Many would argue that as long as they are not involved in gross sins like prostitution or theft, they trust in God that they will be saved.

Theologus::

They are mistaken because they do not understand the Scriptures. Many thousands of people are in great danger of losing their souls forever, even if they are free from such notorious and grave vices. This includes individuals who are considered good, honest people,

upright in their dealings, good neighbours, and respectable members of society.

Asunetus:

I kindly ask for your permission, sir. I have listened to your speech thus far, and I mostly agree with it. However, I cannot remain silent any longer. My conscience urges me to speak. It seems to me that you go too far, surpassing your knowledge, by condemning good neighbours and townsmen. You claim that many such men are in danger of losing their souls, but I will never believe it as long as I live. If these men are not saved, I do not know who will be.

Theologus::

But you must learn from the Scriptures that outward honesty and righteousness, without true knowledge and an inward experience of God, does not lead to eternal life. As our Saviour Christ said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." It is also written that when Paul preached at Berea, many honest men and women believed. By "honest," it means those who were outwardly honest or honest in the world's eyes. They could not be truly and inwardly honest until they believed. Therefore, you can see that this outward honesty and civility, without the inward regeneration of the spirit, does not lead to eternal life. Consequently, all your honest worldly men are in great danger of losing their souls forever.

Asunetus:

What valid reason can you provide for condemning such honest men?

Theologus::

Because many of them lack true knowledge of God and His word. Moreover, many of them despise the word of God and hate those who zealously profess it. They regard preachers as mere babblers, and sermons as mere tales. They consider a preacher no more significant than a shoemaker and value the Scriptures no more than

their old shoes. What hope is there, then, that such men will be saved? Does not the Holy Ghost say, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

Asunetus:

You go too far; you judge them too harshly.

Theologus::

Not at all. All experience shows that their minds are consumed with nothing but this world—lands, properties, livestock—and how to amass wealth. Their thoughts, words, and actions revolve around these worldly matters. It is evident that they are of the earth and speak of the earth. There is nothing in them but worldly pursuits. As for sermons, they care little about hearing them. And as for the Scriptures, they do not value or read them. They find them tedious and would rather do anything else than hear, read, or discuss the Scriptures. As the Prophet said, "The word of the Lord is a reproach to those who have no delight in it."

Philagathus:

I am amazed that such men can live so honourably in the eyes of the world.

Theologus::

No wonder at all, for many wicked men, whose hearts are rotten within, still refrain from committing obvious sins for outward and worldly reasons. Some do so for reputation, some out of shame, some out of fear of the law, and some out of fear of punishment. But none do so out of love for God, zeal, or a conscience of obedience. It is certain that the wicked may have a spirit that restrains, but not one that renews.

Philagathus:

It seems, then, according to your words, that some who are not regenerated excel the children of God in certain aspects.

Theologus::

Indeed, it is very true that some of them surpass some of the elect in outward gifts and their outward conduct.

Philagathus:

Please show me in what gifts.

Theologus::

In learning, discretion, justice, temperance, prudence, patience, generosity, friendliness, kindness, courtesy, good nature, and similar qualities.

Philagathus:

It seems impossible to me.

Theologus::

Yes, truly. For some of God's beloved children, in whom the inward work is undoubtedly genuine and sound, are troubled and burdened with a difficult and flawed nature. They are entangled in a master sin, whether it be anger, pride, covetousness, lust, or some other. All these sins that manifest in their lives tarnish their reputation and their profession. They cannot shine forth as brightly before others as they undoubtedly would if not for these sins. This is their wound, their sorrow, and their heartache, which brings many tears and prayers. Yet they cannot completely overcome these sins; they remain in them like a thorn in the flesh, humbling them.

Philagathus:

However, love should cover a multitude of such weaknesses in God's children.

Theologus::

Indeed, it should. But there is a great lack of love, even among the best. And the less righteous ones, upon seeing these weaknesses in the godly, eagerly attack them, condemning them completely and presuming to judge their hearts. They call them hypocrites and deceivers, claiming that there is no one worse than them.

Philagathus:

But don't you think that there are some impostors, even among the greatest professors?

Theologus:

Yes, undoubtedly, there are and always have been some hypocrites in the Church. But we must be careful not to judge and condemn all based on the actions of a few. It would be very unfair to condemn Christ and his eleven Disciples because of one Judas, or to condemn the entire Early Church because of Ananias and Sapphira.

Philagathus:

But I hope you agree that some truly regenerated men, even in their outward gifts and behavior, can be compared with anyone else.

Theologus:

Certainly, many such individuals exist. Guided by the Spirit of God and supported by his grace, they live upright and blameless lives in the eyes of others.

Philagathus:

Yet, I still have one concern: it seems very strange to me that men with such discreet behavior as you describe, and possessing many good qualities, should not be saved. It's a great pity if such men are damned.

Theologus:

Indeed, it may seem that way to us. But God is infinitely wise, and you must understand that just as God corrects the weaknesses of his children through temporal discipline and rewards their faith, love, and inward service and obedience with eternal life, there are also some good things in the wicked and those outside of Christ that God rewards with temporal blessings, yet punishes them eternally for their unbelief and hardness of heart.

Philagathus:

Now you have reasonably satisfied me regarding the doctrine of

regeneration and the various errors and deceptions associated with it. I pray you, let us now proceed. First of all, tell me, by what means is the new birth accomplished?

Theologus:

Through the preaching of the word as the outward means, and the secret work of the Spirit as the inward means.

Philagathus:

Many hear the word preached and are not at all improved, but rather worsened. I pray you, what is the cause of that?

Theologus:

It is due to people's own disbelief and hardness of heart. Because of God's wrath, he leaves them to themselves and deprives them of his Spirit. Without the Spirit, all preaching is in vain. For unless the Spirit accompanies the word into our hearts, we can find no joy, taste, or comfort in it.

Philagathus:

Can a person attain regeneration and the new birth without the word and the Spirit?

Theologus:

No, indeed. They are the instruments and means by which God works it.

Asunetus:

Why can't a person have just as strong a faith in God without hearing any sermons as someone who listens to all the sermons in the world?

Theologus:

Why can't a person who doesn't eat any food be as well-nourished and healthy as someone who eats all the food in the world? For isn't the preaching of the word the nourishment for our souls?

Asunetus:

I don't particularly enjoy listening to sermons and reading the Scriptures, unless people could live them out better.

Theologus:

Faithful and honest listeners do so in order to be more able to observe and do. A person cannot do the will of God before knowing it, and one cannot know it without hearing and reading.

Antilegon.

I wonder what good people gain from attending sermons and immersing themselves in the Scriptures. Are they any better than others? They are often full of envy and malice. They are just as likely to harm their neighbor as anyone else. In my opinion, they are nothing but hypocrites and foolishly rigid individuals.

Theologus:

You judge uncharitably. You have little understanding of what they experience or the good that God's people receive from hearing his word. The work of the Spirit in the hearts of the chosen is very secret and hidden from the world, as it is written: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." And again: "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

Asunetus:

Oh, come now. What is all this fuss about? If a person says their Lord's Prayer, follows the Ten Commandments, believes in God, does no harm to others, treats others as they would like to be treated, and has faith in God, surely they will be saved without all this running to sermons and talking about the Scriptures.

Theologus:

Now you truly express yourself. You think you have spoken wisely.

But alas, you have revealed your great ignorance. For you believe that a person can be saved without the word, which is a gross error.

Asunetus:

It doesn't matter. Say what you will, along with all the preachers in the world. As long as I serve God, and say my prayers duly and truly, morning and evening, and have faith in God, and put my whole trust in Him, and have sincere intentions and a good mindset towards God, even though I am not learned, I hope it will be enough for the salvation of my soul. For the God who created me must save me. You cannot save me with all your learning and all your Scriptures.

Theologus:

You can aptly be compared to a sick man whose mind is disturbed by heat, raving and speaking idly without knowing what he says. For the Holy Spirit says: "He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." And again: "He who despises the word will be destroyed." So as long as you despise God's word and turn away your ear from hearing His Gospel preached, all your prayers, your fanciful serving of God, your good intentions, and your good meanings are of no use. In fact, they are most repulsive and detestable in the sight of God. As it is written: "My soul hates your new moons and your appointed feasts; they are a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood." And again, the Lord says through the same Prophet: "He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a sheep is as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers an offering is as if he offers swine's blood; he who remembers incense is as if he blesses an idol." Here you see, the Lord tells you His mind regarding these matters: namely, that all your prayers, services, good intentions, etc., are abominable to Him as long as you walk in ignorance, profanity, disobedience, and contempt for the Gospel. For He says in the words immediately preceding: "To him who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word, I will look."

Asunetus:

I agree that for those who are idle and have little to do, it is not a bad idea to occasionally hear a sermon and read the Scriptures. But we have no leisure; we must focus on our work. We cannot sustain ourselves by the Scriptures. They are not for ordinary people; they are too complex for us. We will not meddle with them. They belong to preachers and ministers.

Theologus:

Christ says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I give them eternal life." If you refuse to hear the voice of Christ, then you are not one of His sheep, and you cannot have eternal life. In another place, our Lord Jesus says, "He who is of God hears God's word. You do not hear it because you are not of God." Saint Paul, in his writings to people of all kinds, both rich and poor, high and low, men and women, young and old, encourages that the word of Christ may dwell abundantly in all of them, in all wisdom. You see, therefore, that the Apostle wants people of all kinds who have souls to save to be well acquainted with the Scriptures. Hence, you might as well say that you will not have anything to do with God, with Christ, or with everlasting life, as to say that you will not meddle with the Scriptures.

Asunetus:

Well, I cannot read, and therefore I cannot know what Christ or Saint Paul may say. But I am sure that God is a good man (may he be worshipped). He is merciful, and we must be saved by our good prayers and good service to God.

Theologus:

You speak foolishly and ignorantly in everything you say. You have no basis for your words other than your own imagination and presumption. Yet you choose to believe your own fantasies over the words of preachers and everything that can be spoken from the Word. But please allow me to clarify. If a person dreams that they will become a king and, upon waking in the morning, persuades themselves that it will happen, would they not be rightly laughed at

for having no foundation for such belief? In the same way, all those who believe their own dreams and fantasies about salvation can be considered. However, it is true what Solomon says: "A fool believes everything, that copper is gold, and a counterfeit is an angel." And surely there is good reason for someone who refuses to believe in God to be led to believe the devil, their dreams, and their fantasies.

Asunetus:

I ask you, then, to instruct me better.

Theologus:

You are indeed in great need of better instruction, for the devil has cunningly deceived your soul and cast a veil over your eyes, making you believe that the crow is white and that your spiritual condition is good before God, when in reality it is most woeful and miserable.

Asunetus:

No, I defy the devil with all my heart. But please tell me how I have been deceived.

Theologus:

One thing that deceives you, as well as many others, is that you measure yourselves by yourselves and by others, which is a false measure. You may appear straight when measured against yourselves and others, but if you measure yourself against the rule of God's word, you will find that you are entirely crooked.

Asunetus:

What else deceives me?

Theologus:

Another thing that deceives you is your own heart. You do not know your own heart and are completely deceived by it. For the heart is deceitful above all things. A person is truly wise and greatly enlightened if they know their own heart. But you are blind and unaware of what is within you. You dimly imagine that you will be saved and hope for eternal life, but you do not truly understand it.

And because your blindness makes you bold, you confidently declare that it is a pity for anyone to doubt their salvation. And indeed, you speak as you think and as you know. Based on what you know, it may seem so. However, in truth, it is not so, for you are deceived by a false light. And undoubtedly, you sometimes experience pricks, gripes, terrors, and inward accusations of conscience, despite your bold and resolute words.

Asunetus:

Truly, I have never heard so much before.

Theologus:

That is because you close your eyes and stop your ears against God and all that is good. You are like a deaf adder that does not hear the voice of the charmer, even though the charmer is highly skilled.

Asunetus:

Well then, if that is the case, I would be glad to learn now if you are willing to teach me. Just as you have shown me the means by which the new birth is accomplished, please now show me the certain signs and indicators of it, so that all people may truly know that they are sanctified, regenerated, and will be saved.

There are eight unmistakable signs and indicators of a transformed mind, which can rightfully be called the eight signs of salvation. They are as follows:

- Genuine love for the children of God.
- A deep appreciation for God's word.
- Regular and fervent prayer.
- Passionate devotion to the glory of God.
- Self-denial and self-sacrifice.
- Enduring the challenges of life with patience, deriving profit and finding comfort.
- Remaining faithful to one's calling.

- Engaging in honest, fair, and morally upright conduct in all interactions with others.

Philagathus:

Now that you have presented us with the clear signs of a person's salvation, please also reveal the signs of condemnation.

Theologus:

The opposites of these signs are evident indicators of damnation:

- Lack of love for the children of God.
- Disinterest in God's word.
- Rare and lukewarm prayers.
- Indifference towards matters concerning God.
- Relying solely on ourselves.
- Impatience when faced with the Cross.
- Unfaithfulness in our calling.
- Dishonest and unethical behaviour.

Philagathus:

Undoubtedly, if a person is plagued by these traits, they are strong indications that one's soul is severely sick and in a perilous state. However, are there even more apparent and evident signs of condemnation?

Theologus:

Yes, indeed. There are nine very clear and unmistakable signs of a person's condemnation.

Philagathus:

I implore you to share what they are.

Theologus:

- Pride
- Immorality
- Greed

- Disregard for the Gospel
- Profanity
- Deceitfulness
- Intemperance
- Laziness
- Oppression

Philagathus:

Indeed, these are grave matters.

Theologus:

They can rightfully be called the nine Beelzebubs of the world, and anyone who possesses these signs is in a woeful state.

Philagathus:

What if a person is infected with two or three of these?

Theologus:

Whoever is infected with three of them is in great danger of losing their soul. For all of these are deadly venom and poisonous to the soul. Whether it be the first three, the last three, or the middle three, any combination is enough to poison the soul and bring about its death. In truth, it would be as good as grasping a toad or handling a snake to engage with any one of them.

Philagathus:

Are they all equally dangerous?

Theologus:

Without a doubt. They are the very Plague-sores of the soul. If someone has a Plague-sore on their body, we would say that God's signs are upon them, and we would pray, "Lord, have mercy on them." Likewise, if someone is thoroughly and completely infected in their heart with any one of these sins, we can truly say that God's signs are upon their soul, and we pray, "Lord, have mercy on them."

Philagathus:

Many people do not consider these matters as dangerous as you portray them, and there are many who make light of them.

Theologus:

That is true indeed. The majority of people are entirely blinded and hardened in their hearts, lacking any sight or awareness of their sins. Therefore, they make light of them and think there is no such danger.

Philagathus:

It is certain that people are inclined to downplay and diminish their sins, or even hide and cover them up with cunning excuses and vain justifications. Men are always ready to find cover and will twist and turn (like snakes) to conceal their sins. If possible, they would make sin appear as no sin, and vice versa. Therefore, I ask you to reveal from the scriptures the seriousness and repulsiveness of these sins.

Philagathus:

The foulness and repulsiveness of these sins are so great and terrible that no human tongue or pen is sufficient to fully manifest and reveal their true nature and essence. However, I will make an effort to expose them to some extent, so that everyone may despise them more.

Philagathus:

Then please begin with Pride, first of all.

Theologus:

You are right in saying so. Indeed, pride may rightly take the forefront, as it is a chief devil and the main disease of the soul.

Philagathus:

Show me from the Scriptures that pride is so grievous and detestable.

Theologus:

Solomon says: "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord." This clearly shows that God detests and abhors proud

individuals. Isn't it a fearful thing to be abhorred by God? In the same chapter, verse 18, he says: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." This reveals that pride is the precursor to some form of deadly downfall, either through disgrace or removal from position. For it is an old and true proverb: "Pride comes before a fall." Often, when people are most elevated, they are closest to their downfall, as demonstrated by the examples of Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod. Just as when the spleen swells, the rest of the body wastes away, similarly, when the heart is inflated with pride, the entire person is in danger of destruction. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit says: "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud." Job speaks of such individuals: "The light in his tent becomes dark, and sulfur is scattered over his dwelling." In another place, he says: "The fire that is not kindled shall consume him." It seems to me that if there were any spark of grace within us, these stern words of the Holy Spirit should serve to humble us and bring down our pride, especially since the Scriptures affirm that God resists the proud and explicitly opposes them. Therefore, woe to them, for if God is against a person, who can reconcile them? He does as he pleases.

Philagathus:

But tell me, I beg you, when you speak against pride, what pride do you mean?

Theologus:

I mean all forms of pride, both the inward pride of the heart and the outward display of pride on people's faces. I mean the pride that clearly manifests itself in people's words and actions.

Philagathus:

Do you also mean pride in people's talents and abilities?

Theologus:

Yes, certainly. There is no pride worse or more dangerous than that. Beware, as someone says, of spiritual pride, such as being proud of our learning, intelligence, knowledge, reading, writings, sermons,

prayers, godliness, shrewdness, courage, strength, wealth, honor, birth, beauty, authority. For God has not given such gifts to people so that they may boast about them and proudly showcase them to seek only their own interests, the vain praise of the crowd, and the applause of the people. In doing so, they rob God of His glory and arrogantly claim for themselves what rightly belongs to God, which is the praise for His gifts. Instead, God has given these gifts for another purpose: namely, that we should use them for His glory and the benefit of others, especially those who are most in need.

Philagathus:

Yet we commonly see that people with the greatest gifts are often the most proud.

Theologus:

That is true indeed. The finest cloth is easily stained. Just as worms breed more easily in soft and tender wood than in hard and knotty wood, and moths breed more readily in fine wool than in coarse wool, similarly, pride and vanity more readily attack an excellent and exceptional person in all kinds of knowledge and virtue than someone with lesser gifts. Therefore, pride is said to spring from the ashes of all virtues. People become proud because they are wise, learned, godly, patient, humble, etc. Pride can be compared to the crabapple tree shoots that grow from the root of the very best apple tree. In truth, this is one of the last strategies and weapons that the devil uses to overthrow God's own children—to inflate them with pride as if with gunpowder. Just as we see in the siege of fortresses, when no artillery or forceful attack succeeds, the final remedy and tactic is to undermine it and blow it up with gunpowder. Similarly, when Satan cannot prevail against some excellent servants of God, his last scheme is to inflate them with pride as if with gunpowder.

Philagathus:

I understand that it is a special grace of God for people with great gifts to be humble-minded. Truly, an exceptional individual is one who excels not only in gifts but also in humility. The more gifts one

possesses, the more humbly they should walk, not looking down on others but esteeming them as better than themselves. Often, we are worse off because of God's gifts, either due to our improper use of them or because they generate so much pride within us that we need constant correction. Therefore, when God humbles a person and brings them low through afflictions or weaknesses, it is a great display of His favour and mercy. Otherwise, our pride would completely overrun us.

Theologus:

You have spoken the truth. Even the Apostle himself confessed that he was tempted and troubled in this way. He was in danger of being excessively proud due to the abundance of revelations he received. But in His great mercy, God sent him a means of cooling down and restraining his pride—a thorn in the flesh (which he referred to as a messenger of Satan)—by which the Lord cured him of his pride. In a similar manner, God humbles many of us by allowing us to face trials, leaving us to ourselves, and even permitting us to commit gross sins or suffer falls that could harm us. All of this is done to humble us, tame us, and bring down our pride, which God sees has plagued our hearts. Thus, it is beneficial for us to remain humble in the midst of abundant graces, not becoming proud of what we have or what we have accomplished. For humility in sin is better than pride in doing well.

Philagathus:

Indeed, it is evident in this how great the wisdom and mercy of God is, as He graciously brings forth good from evil and turns our afflictions, weaknesses, and falls into opportunities for His glory and our own benefit.

Theologus:

That is absolutely true. Just as the flesh of a viper is used to create a potent medicine for those who have been bitten by a viper, and as physicians expel poison with poison, God, in His marvelous wisdom, uses the remaining weaknesses in us after regeneration to cure other

more dangerous diseases such as pride, vanity, and presumption. Oh, blessed be His name forever for His merciful orchestration of all things for the good of His own people, to whom these things are particularly applicable!

Philagathus:

Is there no reason why people with great gifts should boast in their gifts?

Theologus:

No, certainly, not at all. For the Apostle says, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" Here, the Apostle clearly shows that no one should be proud of their gifts because they are not their own; they have merely received them to use. We would consider someone a fool if they borrowed fine clothing from others, such as a silk gown, a satin doublet, a gold chain, velvet breeches, and proudly strutted in the streets as if they were their own. Similarly, those who are proud of gifts that are not their own are worthy of being laughed at as fools. Therefore, the prophet Jeremiah says, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man boast in his strength, nor the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me." The heathen poet also wisely says, "No one can escape the punishment of pride, so in the greatest prosperity, do not be puffed up."

Philagathus:

Yet it is astonishing to see how proud, arrogant, haughty, pompous, insolent, and swaggering some people are because of their gifts. They believe they touch the clouds with their heads and that the earth cannot bear them. They consider themselves as petty angels or extraordinary beings. They disdain and look down upon all others who do not possess similar gifts. They contemptuously overlook them as a lion would a mouse, a king a beggar, or as the proverb says, "As the devil overlooked Lincoln."

Theologus:

Oh, proud dust! Oh, arrogant worm's meat! If they were to bring their hearts before God and have their consciences, thoughts, and affections judged by this standard, it would quickly humble and bring them down. They would see their wants and imperfections to be so great that they would have no more reason to boast of their gifts than a blackamoor has to boast of whiteness because his teeth are white. The Holy Spirit cuts off all our pride and brings down all fleshly arrogance when he says, "How little does man understand about God!"

Philagathus:

I pray you, let us now discuss the outward and obvious pride of the world. First of all, tell me your thoughts on pride in apparel.

Theologus:

I believe it to be the ultimate vanity and the utmost folly. For one to be proud of their apparel is like a thief being proud of his noose, a beggar of his rags, a child of their toys, or a fool of their trinket.

Philagathus:

Yet we see how many people, especially women, are proud of such trinkets. After spending a good part of their day adorning themselves, pricking and pinning, preening and prancing, cinching and lacing, they come out into the streets with their peddler's shop displayed on their backs, carrying their heads high, considering themselves to be little angels or at least somewhat superior to other women. As a result, they become so swollen with pride that it is feared they might burst as they walk in the streets. Truly, one might think that the stones in the street and the beams in the houses tremble and marvel at their monstrous, unbearable, and excessive pride. It seems as though they are entirely made up of pride, a mass of pride, wholly composed of pride, and nothing else but pride, pride.

Theologus:

You seem to be very passionate about this matter.

Asunetus:

Indeed, sir, I am, and I prefer it that way because the world has never been so full of pride as it is nowadays.

Theologus:

Alas, alas! Indeed, who can remain silent in the face of the pride of this age! What a thing it is that mere flesh and blood, worms' meat, dust and ashes, dirt and dung, should proudly flaunt their fancy clothes in the sight of God, angels, and men? For the time will come when they and all their fashionable attire will be buried in a grave. As Job says, the grave shall be their house, and they shall make their bed in the dark. Then they will say to corruption, "You are my father," and to the worm, "You are my mother and my sister." What use will it be for them to have paraded in all their splendor when they suddenly descend into destruction? What profit did it bring to the rich man to be extravagantly clothed and enjoy delicious feasts every day when his body was buried in the dust and his soul in hellfire?

Asunetus:

I beg you, sir, what is your opinion on those large ruffs that are supported by frames and rebatoes, almost like a fence?

Theologus:

What should I say, except, "God have mercy on us"? For such things draw down the wrath and vengeance of God upon all of us. As the Apostle says, "Because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." Truly, we should fear that God will punish us for our abominable pride.

Asunetus:

What is your view on these oversized and layered ruffs, the current trend of wide farthingales, long locks, foretufts, shaggy hair, and all these new fashions that are constantly being invented and embraced?

Theologus:

I say that they are far from the plainness, simplicity, and modesty that existed in previous ages. Our forefathers never knew such things. It is recorded that William Rufus, a former King of this Land, once asked his Chamberlain the cost of a new pair of hose, and when he was told it was three shillings, he was somewhat upset and ordered a pair worth a mark. If it was considered excessive for a king to spend a mark on a pair of hose, what should we think of many ordinary people in our days (even those without much wealth or a good occupation) who spend as much on one pair as the King did on two when he was seen as extravagant? But alas, we have exceeded all bounds of modesty and measure. There is no limit to our extravagance. Our land is burdened by this sin. We bear the pride of all nations and the follies of all countries. How can we endure them? As for these new fashions, the newer they are, the more foolish and ridiculous they become. With our new fashions, we have completely lost all sense of fashion. If we had as many variations in our bodies as we have in our attire, we would have as many different styles as fingers and toes. But vain men and women clearly reveal their vain minds by eagerly following such frivolous trends and fashions.

Asunetus:

It has never been a good world since the practices of starching and stiffening, corsets and whalebones, frames and ruffs, excessive makeup and hair dyeing, and the selling of beauty and complexion came into use. Because of these practices, covetousness, oppression, and deceit have increased. How else could pride be sustained? I am sure that thirty years ago, these things were not known or heard of. What do you say then about the act of painting faces, revealing bare breasts, dying hair, wearing wigs, and other extravagant hairstyles and adornments? And what do you say about our artificial women who try to improve upon God's creation? They are dissatisfied with His handiwork and want to alter their complexion, faces, hair, bones, breasts, and bellies.

Theologus:

This is what I say: you and I, along with all of God's people, have every reason to mourn, weep, and lament because such abominations are committed in our midst. David's eyes poured out rivers of tears because people did not keep God's laws, and he was filled with dread because people abandoned the law of God. Jeremiah sighed in secret, wishing that his head were a spring of water and his eyes a fountain of tears because of the sins of the people. Nehemiah mourned over the transgressions of God's people. Lot's righteous soul was tormented by the immoral behavior of the people of Sodom. Should we not mourn at all for these things? Should we not be grieved by the pride in our land? Should we not shed tears for such abominable and intolerable practices? They are detestable in the sight of God and humans. The air is polluted by them. It is only God's extraordinary patience that the devil does not snatch them away and rid the earth of them, or that fire and brimstone do not rain down from heaven and consume them.

Antilegon:

You are too passionate about matters of attire. You make more of them than there is a reason to.

Asunetus:

I thank him; God bless his heart. I shall appreciate him more as I know him because he is so fervent against such shameful and detestable pride. Isn't it a shame that women, professing true religion, make themselves such pictures, puppets, and peacocks as they do? And yet I hear few preachers in the pulpit speak against it.

Antilegon:

I wonder why you are so earnest about matters of apparel. You know well enough that clothing is a neutral thing, and that religion and the kingdom of God do not depend on these things.

Theologus:

I know very well that clothing, in its nature, is a neutral thing.

However, lewd, provocative, immodest, and offensive clothing is not neutral. Such abuses remove their neutrality and make them sinful and wrong in their circumstances. Why else would the Lord, through his prophet, threaten to visit the princes, the king's children, and all those clothed in foreign apparel, meaning the fashions of other countries? (Zephaniah 1:8) Furthermore, why would the Lord punish the proud ladies and haughty women of Jerusalem for their pride and vanity in attire if there were no evil in such abuses? The Lord says this in Isaiah 3, against those elegant and showy ladies: "Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and seductive eyes, walking and mincing as they go, tinkling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. Instead of perfume there will be rottenness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty." (Isaiah 3:16-24) Then her gates shall lament and mourn, and she, being desolate, shall sit upon the ground.

Thus, we can see how severe the Lord's threats are against the fashionable ladies of Jerusalem due to their excessive and abominable pride. This can serve as a reflection for the proud individuals of our time, who should indeed fear that the Lord may bring a similar judgment upon them as He did upon the daughters of Jerusalem. Their sin in this regard is as great as that of the daughters of Zion, and God remains the same God now as He was then, ready to punish it.

Antilegon:

Oh, don't speak so much about these matters of apparel. We must do

as others do and follow the fashion, or else we won't be respected.

Theologus:

If you do not follow them, you will be esteemed more by God, His angels, saints, and all good people. As for others, if you value their opinion more than these, it reveals who you are.

Antilegon:

Well, despite all that, pride is in the heart, not in the apparel. One can be proud of plain attire just as much as costly clothing. Some are as proud of their simple collars and small ruffles as others are of their large ruffs.

Theologus:

You speak foolishly. How can you know that? Can you judge people's hearts and inner affections? Can you say that when men and women are modestly and Christianly attired, they have proud hearts and are proud of their clothing? You go too far in judging the heart. You should judge charitably those who dress soberly and modestly, believing that their heart corresponds to their attire. As for you, we may think that your heart is vain, frivolous, and foolish because your clothing strongly suggests it. And as the prophet says: "The expression on your faces testifies against you; you flaunt your sins like Sodom; you do not hide them."

Antilegon:

Then please provide some guidelines for attire from the Scriptures.

Theologus:

I can certainly provide guidelines, but most men and women will do as they please. It may be thought that many in this age have forsaken God, His word, and all goodness. They have reached a point where they will do as they please, regardless of what God says. As the prophet says, they have made a covenant with Hell and Death, and they have reached an agreement (Isaiah 28:15). I truly believe that even if God Himself were to come down from Heaven and dissuade

men and women from this vanity of apparel, they would still indulge in it, almost defying God and provoking Him further. They are so infatuated and excessively delighted by it, continuously and obsessively pursuing it, that they will have it even if the whole world, including men and angels, disapprove. They would even go to the devil for it. Therefore, it is pointless to speak against it, preach against it, or write against it. It is like ploughing the sea or knocking on a deaf person's door, as there is no hope for any reformation. The only thing we achieve is that the world is reprovved and convicted of sin. These things will stand as evidence against them on the last day, so they cannot claim they were not warned and that there was no prophet among them.

Philagathus:

Despite all this, I request that you provide us with some directions and rules from God's holy book regarding attire. Although some people are very bad and outrageous in these matters, there are others who are well-disposed and will undoubtedly make an effort to conform to the rules of God's word.

Theologus:

Very well, for the sake of those who are well-disposed, I will give a few directions. In 1 Timothy 2:9, Saint Paul advises women to adorn themselves in modest apparel with decency and propriety, as befits women who profess the fear of God. They should not focus on external adornments like braided hair, gold, pearls, or costly clothing. The Apostle Saint Peter also provides similar rules. Speaking of Christian women who are married or devoted to holy religion, he states that their adorning should not be external, consisting mainly of outward adornments such as braided hair or gold jewelry. Instead, it should be internal, clothing the hidden person of the heart with a gentle and quiet spirit, which is highly valued by God. As he says, in the past, holy women who trusted in God adorned themselves in this manner, following the examples of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and other ancient and respectable women.

Philagathus:

What does this inward clothing specifically entail?

Theologus:

In four aspects, which are mentioned in the aforementioned passages: namely, shamefastness (modesty), a quiet spirit, and a meek spirit.

Philagathus:

These are excellent garments indeed. I wish all women would put them on and never take them off, but wear them continuously. For they only improve with wear, while all other apparel diminishes.

Theologus:

If women would adorn themselves inwardly with these mentioned virtues, they would be like gold ornaments and pearl jewels to them. For the woman who fears the Lord shall be praised.

Philagathus:

Now, I ask you, sir, to provide your judgment on outward attire.

Theologus:

Regarding that matter, all I can say is that it should be as the Apostle says: comely, decent, handsome, neat, and seemly. It should not be light, wanton, lascivious, immodest, or offensive.

Philagathus:

But who shall judge what is comely, sober, handsome, and modest? For every man and woman will claim that their apparel is decent and clean, no matter how extravagant, flashy, and flaunting it may be.

Theologus:

In this case, we should follow the examples of the most godly, wise, grave, and modest men and women. For who can better judge what is comely, sober, and modest than they?

Philagathus:

But we see that even some of the better individuals are slightly infected in this matter, they go too far and exceed their limits.

Theologus:

It is a great pity. Unfortunately, we witness the influence of the current time and the force of the prevailing trend, which carries away anything that is not firmly rooted. Even some godly and well-intentioned people, whose hearts are not aligned with these things but with God, are swept away by the strong wind and tide against their will. Although their actions cannot be defended or excused, their situation is worthy of pity and lamentation.

Philagathus:

Do you have any further guidance on this matter?

Theologus:

There is one more thing to be mentioned: attire should be appropriate to one's position, occupation, and social status. What is suitable for one may not be suitable for another. What befits one person's role may not be fitting for someone else. What is appropriate for the wealthy may not be appropriate for the poor, and what is fitting for the average person may not be suitable for those of high status and prominence.

Philagathus:

So, you believe it is permissible for kings, princes, and important individuals to wear pearls, gold, silver, velvet, etc.?

Theologus:

Undoubtedly, it is lawful for such individuals, in a modest and measured manner, to wear the most costly and precious things that the earth can provide. This is done to display the magnificence, grandeur, and glory of their positions. Therefore, such things are most fitting and appropriate for them.

Philagathus:

But nowadays, few people stay within their limits, few acknowledge their positions. Instead, the majority exceed their boundaries and go completely beyond what is appropriate.

Theologus:

Indeed, it is true. Nowadays, even ordinary gentlewomen, and some who have made themselves into gentlewomen, dress extravagantly and proudly, resembling countesses and ladies of high status. Even plain folks in the countryside try to imitate courtiers and act like gentlemen and gentlewomen. They seem to say in their hearts, "We reject plainness, we no longer accept it as we used to." Thus, the old proverb is proven true: "Every Jack will be a gentleman, and Joan is as good as my lady." Now, by their attire, we can no longer distinguish the maid from the mistress, nor the waiting gentlewoman from her lady. In this matter of apparel, everything is disordered and chaotic.

Philagathus:

Is there anything more to be said on this matter?

Theologus:

There is yet another aspect to consider in this matter of attire.

Philagathus:

What is that?

Theologus:

It is important that attire be in accordance with one's means and abilities. It is lamentable to see how poor men and women, hired servants, milkmaids, and others, go beyond their financial capabilities. It is even more lamentable to witness the desperate and unattractive measures they take to afford these things. They are so eager and determined to obtain them.

Philagathus:

Well, sir, you have thoroughly addressed the issue of pride and

provided us with ample discussion on the matter. Pride is the first sign of condemnation. Now, please proceed to the second sign, which is redemption, and explain to us the dangers associated with it based on the Scriptures.

Theologus:

Solomon, in his Proverbs, says that the mouth of a strange woman or a harlot is like a deep pit; whoever is detested by the Lord will fall into it. This clearly indicates that those whom God detests and is extremely angry with are given over to this vice. In another passage, he says that a whore is like a deep ditch and a narrow pit, implying that once a man is entangled with a harlot, it is as difficult for him to escape as a person trapped in a deep and narrow pit, where movement is restricted. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon provides the reason for this: it is because she is like nets, snares, and bonds. If a man is caught in them, it is very hard for him to break free. He says, "I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands. The one who is pleasing to God will escape her, but the sinner will be captured by her." We clearly see the dangerous and perplexing situation of those who have forsaken God and given themselves over to whoredom and harlots. Thus, it is said, "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her eyelids capture you. For by a whore, a man is brought to a morsel of bread, and the adulteress hunts for precious life." Moreover, Solomon states, "Although the lips of a harlot drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil, her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword." These wise words of the Holy Spirit clearly demonstrate the fearful consequences of committing whoredom and falling into the hands of whores and harlots. Job also says of the wicked, "Their soul dies in youth, and their life among the whore-mongers."

Philagathus:

You have effectively shown from God's book the great danger of whoredom and adultery. It is deeply lamentable that in this age, people treat it so lightly and that it has become such a common vice.

Moreover, it is distressing to acknowledge that some individuals, alas, live by it, openly profess it, and wholly devote themselves to it.

Theologus:

Such men and women may rightly fear the punishing hand of God. The Lord says through his Prophet, "Though I provided them with an abundance, they committed adultery and gathered in harlots' houses. They rose up in the morning like well-fed horses, each neighing after his neighbor's wife. Should I not punish them for these things? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Philagathus

It seems to me that if people were not completely hardened in this sin, and if they had not become so callous and devoid of grace, this warning and thundering from God himself would terrify them.

Theologus:

One would think so indeed. But now we can echo the old lament of the Prophet: "I listened and heard, but no one spoke rightly; no one repented of their evil, saying, 'What have I done?' Each one turned to their own course, like a horse rushing into battle."

Antilegon.

Oh, sir, you must bear with youth. You know that youth is frail, and youth will be youthful no matter what you say.

Theologus:

Yes, but God allows no more liberty to youth than to age. He binds everyone, under the penalty of death, to obey his commandments. The Apostle says, "Let young men be sober-minded." David says, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word." The wise man says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." And he further adds that if they insist on following their lusts, pleasures, and their own desires, in the end, God will bring them to judgment, prosecute them, condemn them, and torment them in hellfire.

Philagathus

Yet we see that men are so violently driven by their lusts and so desperately inclined that they seek the immediate sweetness and pleasure of sin, regardless of the consequences. Whether it be sickness, death, hell, or damnation, they are determined. They are willing to pay the highest price for their lusts. They will trade their souls for their pleasures. Oh, what a woeful transaction! Oh, damnable pleasures.

Theologus:

Sweet meat will have sour sauce, and a moment of pleasure will cost a pound of sorrow. Such cursed wretches will eventually pay a high price for their pleasures. Such desperate individuals will one day know (to their eternal misery) what it means to provoke God and sin so boldly against Him. They will come to know, despite their denial, that vengeance is prepared for the wicked and that there is a God who judges the earth. Let everyone therefore take heed in time, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. The Apostle plainly states that fornicators and adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. So, let there be no fornicator or unclean person found among us, like Esau. Instead, let us abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. Let each person know how to possess their own vessel in holiness and honour, not in the lust of passion like those who do not know God. (1 Thessalonians 4:5)

Let us consider the wise words of an ancient Father: Sin, while it is being committed, may offer some pleasure, but once it is done, the fleeting pleasure disappears, replaced by long-lasting sorrow. And let us not dismiss the saying of a wise pagan: Avoid pleasure, for fear of pain. Sorrow follows joy, and joy follows grief.

Antilegon:

Yet, despite all this, you will not convince me that whoredom is such a grave matter. You exaggerate its significance.

Theologus:

Indeed, it is true. You, and those like you, will not believe anything that goes against your lusts and carnal desires. That is why you are deaf to this message. Therefore, I will add a few more words (from the oracles of God) to what has already been said. The wise king says, "He who commits adultery with a woman destroys his own soul and is complicit in his own death," which is no trivial matter. We often say that if a person hangs themselves, drowns themselves, or ends their own life in any way, it is a curse from God, a heavy hand upon them, and the devil claiming his due shame. The entire community is shocked by such a tragic event, wherever and whenever it occurs, and the Coroner holds an inquest. How much more should the world be amazed that a person would destroy their own soul, knowingly and willingly casting themselves away forever! Now, the Holy Spirit says that the adulterer commits such an act, takes such a risk, and willingly murders themselves. Oh, woe to them, that they were ever born. For it is certain that the great Coroner of heaven, who crowns whom He will, will one day hold an inquest and pass judgment. Furthermore, just as the adulterer sins against their soul, they also sin against their body in a unique manner, as the Apostle attests. They also sin against their possessions and outward estate, as the righteous man Job testifies, saying, "Adultery is a fire that consumes to destruction and wipes out all our increase." Moreover, they sin against their reputation, for the adulterer will bear a wound and dishonour, and their reproach will never be removed.

Item, he sins against his wife, who is his companion and the wife of his covenant. God says in the same place, "Let none trespass against the wife of his youth; keep yourselves in your spirit and do not transgress." Lastly, he sins against his children and descendants, as the Lord said to David, "Because you have despised me and done this, the sword shall never depart from your house. I will raise up evil against you out of your own house." Now, to conclude this point, we can see how many deadly wounds men inflict upon themselves by committing adultery. They wound themselves in their souls, bodies, goods, names, wives, and children. What sane person would thrust

themselves into so many places at once? The adulterer, with their own sin of adultery, inflicts all these deadly wounds upon themselves. It is highly unlikely that they will ever be healed, but rather they will die and bleed to death from them. Behold, thus you see the dangerous nature and condition of this sin. Shall we now make light of it? Shall we say it is merely a youthful indiscretion? Shall we smooth over the matter with sweet words when the Holy Spirit deems it so grave and serious? Shall we disregard that which brings God's wrath upon the soul, body, goods, name, wife, and children? That would be intolerable blindness and extreme hardness of heart. An ancient writer long ago passed judgment upon us who make light of this sin, for he said, "Adultery is the very hook of the devil whereby he draws us to destruction." And another godly Father said that adultery is like a furnace, with gluttony as its mouth, pride as the flame, filthy words as the sparks, an evil name as the smoke, poverty as the ashes, and shame as the end. Thus, we can plainly see that even though we may not regard this sin, those whose eyes the Lord has opened have condemned it as most wicked and horrible in all ages. Even the pagans will rise up in judgment against us, for they have spoken and written many things against this filthy and beastly vice.

Philagathus

Now, indeed, you have sufficiently exposed the vice of adultery and displayed its repulsiveness so that all may see it in its naked and abhorrent form. If anyone, despite all this, dares to venture into it, they may be considered a most desperate monster. For what else do they do but put their finger into the lion's mouth or take the bear by the tooth? They should well know what will follow and what they can expect. Therefore, let everyone take heed to themselves and their own souls in time, as they will be held accountable at their utmost peril on the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed. But now, one thing remains: that you should show us the specific roots and causes of adultery.

Theologus:

There are five specific causes of it. The first is our natural corruption, for the very seed and origin of all sin is within our corrupt nature. Among all sins, this is one that is most inherent, as James, the Apostle, testifies, saying: "When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is perfected, brings forth death."

The second cause is gluttony and overeating. When men have filled their bellies and stuffed themselves with abundant food, wine, and strong drink to the point of satisfaction, what else are they fit for or have in mind but adultery and impurity? Thus it is well said: "Great nourishment and excessive eating is the breeding ground of lust." The pagan poet knew how to say: "Without meat, beans, and wine, Venus grows cold." Lust cools down without indulgence in food and drink. In line with this, the wise king says that their eyes will behold strange women when their hearts are set upon wine and feasting. He advises all men not to look at wine when it appears red, when it shows its color in the cup or stirs very invitingly, for fear of the consequences. An ancient writer conveys a similar sentiment, saying: "He who luxuriously pampers his belly but wishes to overcome the spirit of fornication is like one who tries to extinguish a flame with oil."

To conclude this point, it is certain that even if men pray, listen, and read extensively, and are otherwise well-disposed, unless they practice abstinence in their diet, they will struggle greatly with lust.

The third cause of adultery is idleness. When men are lazy, sluggish, and idle, having nothing to do, they become vulnerable to adultery, and lust creeps into them. Some historians write that the crab is very eager to eat oysters, but because it cannot open them, it waits for the opportune moment when they open themselves to the sun after the tide, and then it extends its claw and pulls out the oyster. Similarly, Satan waits for an opportunity against us, to infect and inspire us with all sorts of impure desires and adulterous longings when we are vulnerable through idleness. Hence, wisely the Greek poet said:

"Much rest nourishes lust." Another poet says: "One asks why someone became an adulterer. The cause is evident: they were idle."

Slothful laziness is the cause of adultery. Therefore, another advises: "Avoid idleness and cut the sinews of lust."

The fourth cause of adultery is provocative clothing, which is like a minstrel playing a tune for the dance of whoredom. But enough has been said about this before.

The fifth and final aspect of adultery is the hope of impunity or escaping punishment. Many, blinded and hardened by Satan, believe they will never be held accountable for their actions. They think that by deceiving the eyes of others and concealing their sin so that it never comes to light, they are safe and that God does not see them. Job says, "The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight and says, 'No eye will see me.'" And in another place he asks, "How can God know? Can He judge through the dark cloud?" However, even though the adulterer may cleverly hide his sin under a canopy, the time will come when it will be exposed, bringing eternal shame. God will bring every work to judgment, including every secret thought, whether good or evil. He has illuminated our most hidden sins with the light of His countenance, and He will bring to light the things that are concealed in darkness and reveal the secret intentions of the heart. For this reason, Job says, "When I sin, you watch me and will not cleanse me from my sin."

Philagathus

Now that you have explained the causes of adultery, please enlighten us with the remedies.

Theologus:

There are six remedies for adultery, which will undoubtedly be effective if they are well-practiced.

Philagathus

What are they?

Theologus:

- Hard work.
- Abstinence.
- Moderation.
- Prayer.
- Control of the senses.
- Avoidance of women's company and all possible occasions.

Philagathus

Well, sir, now that you have delved deep enough into the second sign of condemnation, I ask that we proceed to the third, which is covetousness. And just as you have exposed the previous two, I implore you to strip this one bare as well, so that everyone may see what a repulsive monster it is and therefore detest and abhor it.

Theologus:

I would gladly satisfy your curiosity, but in this matter, I can never do it justice. No heart can fully comprehend, nor tongue adequately express the repulsiveness of this vice. Covetousness is the most foul fiend and darkest devil of all. It is none other than great Beelzebub himself. Therefore, I will never be able to fully describe it to you. Nevertheless, I will do my best to expose it and whip it stark naked. Although the people of this earthly realm and blinded worldlings perceive it as sweet, beautiful, and desirable, and therefore embrace it, entertain it, and welcome it as if there were happiness in it, I hope that when I show them its true face in a mirror (even the true mirror of God's word), they will no longer be enamoured with it but utterly disgusted. So, I will present this mirror to them.

Saint Paul brands this sin on the forehead and rings it in the ears of Timothy so that all may know it and avoid it, when he says, "Covetousness is the root of all evil." Our Lord Jesus also gives us a warning to beware of it, saying, "Take heed and beware of covetousness." It is as if He is saying, "Do not touch it, do not go near it, for it is the very breath of the devil. It is immediate death and the

very poison of the soul." The Apostle highlights the great danger of this sin and greatly tarnishes its image when he states that the destiny of all those who set their minds on earthly things is damnation. Let all worldly-minded people and those obsessed with wealth take this to heart and ponder it carefully, lest they say one day, "If only I had known."

Philagathus

Good sir, please reveal to us the true nature of covetousness and what it truly is, so that we may have a clearer understanding.

Theologus:

Covetousness is an excessive desire for possession.

Philagathus

I hope you don't consider frugality, thriftiness, and good management to be covetousness.

Theologus:

Not at all. Those are things commanded, to be done in the fear of God and with a clear conscience.

Philagathus

Don't you also believe it to be lawful for people to conduct their worldly affairs and to work diligently in their professions, so they can provide for themselves and their families?

Theologus:

Certainly, yes. Especially if they do these things while seeking God's blessing upon their work and offering prayers and thanksgiving before and after their labour. They should remain vigilant throughout the day, guarding against the corrupting influences of the world, such as swearing, cursing, lying, pretending, deceiving, and greed.

Philagathus

In what specifically does covetousness reside?

Theologus:

It resides in the greedy desire of the heart. We may legitimately perform our occupational duties and exhibit good stewardship, but we must be cautious that distrust and inward greed for worldly possessions do not take hold of our hearts. When that happens, we are set ablaze and utterly ruined.

Philagathus

Since covetousness primarily resides in the heart, how can we be certain when the heart is infected?

Theologus:

There are four distinct signs indicating the infection of the heart.

Philagathus

What are they?

Theologus:

The first is an eager and intense desire for acquiring wealth. Hence, the Holy Spirit says, "He who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished." And again, "An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed in the end." Even a pagan man said, "No one can become justly and hastily rich at the same time."

The second is a stingy and miserly approach to our possessions, where individuals, even when capable of giving, are reluctant to part with anything, even for a good and holy purpose. And when they do give something, it comes with great difficulty and reluctantly.

The third is the neglect of sacred duties, when people's minds are so consumed by their love for worldly things that they become lax and indifferent in matters of worshiping God.

The fourth and final sign is relying on wealth and depending on it as if our lives were sustained by it alone, which our Lord Jesus outright denies, saying, "Even if someone has an abundance, their life does not consist of the things they possess" (Luke 12:15).

These are the four clear signs and indications that allow us to discern with certainty whether our hearts and inner beings are infected with covetousness.

Philagathus

You have provided a satisfactory explanation on this matter. Now, let us understand the root causes of covetousness.

Theologus:

There are two main causes of covetousness. One is ignorance and a lack of trust in God's providence.

Theologus:

The other cause is the lack of experiencing and feeling heavenly things. Until people taste something better, they will value these earthly things greatly; until they feel heaven, they will love the world; until they embrace religion, they will be covetous.

Therefore, the cause is easily seen why people are so keen on external things and admire riches, worldly splendor, pleasures, and treasures. It is because they know no better, they have never tasted or felt those things that are eternal.

Philagathus

Now that you have explained the causes of covetousness, let us also hear about its effects.

Theologus:

If I delve into this topic, I will become entangled and lost in a maze, unsure of how to find my way out. The evil effects of this vice are so numerous and significant that I hardly know where to begin or end. Nevertheless, I will attempt to address it, no matter how I may struggle.

Philagathus

Even if you just give us a glimpse of them, it will suffice.

Theologus:

Then I will quickly address things in order. First of all, I reason from the words of the Apostle previously mentioned that if covetousness and the love of money are the root of all evil, then it is the root of idolatry, the root of murder, the root of theft, the root of lying, the root of swearing, the root of simony, the root of bribery, the root of usury, the root of lawsuits, the root of all disputes in the Church, and the root of all quarrelling and brawling in society. Moreover, it spreads far and wide, it dwells in every house, in every town, in every city; it probes into every corner, it creeps into every heart; it annoys our physicians, it infects our divines, it stifles our lawyers, it wounds our farmers, it corrupts our gentlemen, it destroys our tradesmen, it bewitches our merchants, it stings our mariners. Oh, covetousness, covetousness, it is the poison of all things, the scourge of Christianity, the ruin of all goodness! For covetousness ruins everything: it ruins everything, everywhere, in all places, among all people. It ruins marriages, for it joins the young to the old and the old to the young. It ruins hospitality, it ruins good housekeeping, it ruins acts of charity, it ruins religion, it ruins professors, it ruins ministers, it ruins magistrates, it ruins everything. And therefore, what sin is so grievous, what evil is so odious, what vice is so enormous as this? For this reason, it was wittily said by someone that all other vices are but henchmen to covetousness, serving as porters to fetch and bring in its livelihood. It makes simony its servant, bribery its servant, usury its servant, deceit its servant, swearing its servant, lying its servant. Oh, what a devil incarnate is this, that sets so many vices to work and has so many henchmen and underlings to serve its purpose! Are those who are infected with this sin not in a sorry state? Oh, they are in the most miserable state. It would have been better if they had never been born. For though they are alive, they are dead: dead in their souls. For covetousness is poison to the soul, the bane of the soul. Covetousness is the most potent poison to the soul. It is a concoction of all the spiders, toads, snakes, adders, scorpions, basilisks, and all other venomous creatures in the world. If the devil can get us to ingest even a small amount of it, it is enough; he desires no more. For we immediately fall down

completely dead. Therefore, the Apostle says: "Those who desire to be rich" (meaning in any way, by any means necessary) "fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." For just as covetousness is deadly poison to the soul, the Apostle compares it to a deep abyss in which thousands are drowned. And thus, he adds in the same passage: "But you, O man of God, flee from these things." With these words, he gravely advises all the ministers of God's word to beware of it. For as it is dangerous for all people, it is most dangerous and offensive for the preachers of the Gospel.

Philagathus

Indeed, it must be acknowledged that covetousness is a very grave sin, even a monstrous sin with seven heads. Yet, despite that, we see in this current age how many people of all kinds are infected with it and how few are willing to give anything for holy purposes. Nowadays, most people have nothing to spare for Christ, nothing for His Gospel, nothing for His Church, nothing for the poor children of God and the needy members of Christ. Christ owes them very little, for they will do nothing for Him, not even speak a good word in His cause or the cause of His poor saints. Every little thing is too much for them when it comes to giving for holy and necessary purposes. They hesitate at a penny and balk at a larger sum, considering everything to be too much. But when it comes to spending on themselves, nothing is too much. Nothing is too much for lust, pleasure, indulgence, drinking, gluttony, and extravagant living; for gambling, fornication, rioting, and partying; for taverns and brothels. Hundreds and thousands are not enough for their expenses in these ways. It is lamentable to think about the massive amounts of money spent on these things. But, alas, how heavy a reckoning they will have to give on the Day of the Lord for squandering their lands, incomes, and resources! I tremble to consider what will become of them in the end. It would be well for them if they were in no worse state than a crocodile or a stray dog.

Theologus:

It is absolutely true what you say, and we all have ample reason to lament it and take up the old complaint of the prophet Jeremiah, who said: "From the least to the greatest, everyone is given to covetousness, and from the prophet to the priest, they all deal falsely." And another prophet says: "They build up Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its leaders judge for bribes, its priests teach for a fee, and its prophets prophesy for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come to us.'" These holy prophets and men of God fully describe the state of our time, wherein, though all are corrupted, we still carry ourselves boldly towards God. We presume His favor because of our outward profession and say in our hearts, "No harm can come to us."

Asunetus:

You speak the truth, sir. The world has never been so obsessed with covetousness, and people have never been so greedily attached to worldly possessions as they are nowadays. Yet, in truth, there is no reason for people to be so strongly attached to this world. For this world is nothing but vanity, and everything in it is mere worthless and insignificant. Fie on this worthless stuff!

Philagathus

Many people like you know how to speak good words and say, "Fie on this world, it is all vanity." But despite all that, in your daily lives, you are still consumed by worldly desires and do not seek after God any more than before. You do not listen to the word of God any more, you do not read any more, you do not pray any more. This clearly shows that all your fine speeches and protestations are nothing but hypocrisy and deceit. Your heart is not with God, despite all this. It is all just empty words, there is no genuine feeling in your heart. Therefore, I may rightly say to you, as God Himself said to His people, "This people have spoken well, everything they have said is good. Oh, if only they had a heart to fear Me and keep My commandments!"

Theologus:

His words are indeed good if his heart matched them. Considering everything, there is no reason for people to be so attached to this world, for they must leave it behind when they have done all they can. As the saying goes, "Today a man, tomorrow none." And as the Apostle said, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." We all must die, and we do not know how soon. So why should people set their hearts on such uncertain and deceptive things? Everything in this world is lighter than a feather, more fragile than glass, more fleeting than a shadow, more transient than smoke, more fickle than the wind. As the Prophet David said, "Man walks in a shadow and troubles himself in vain; he accumulates riches but does not know who will gather them." I wonder, therefore, why these earthworms and miserly creatures of the earth are so attached to these shadowy things and become so infatuated with them. If they were not completely hardened and blinded by the devil, they would not be so tightly bound to earthly possessions and money, thinking and always imagining that there is no happiness except in these things, which are nothing more than filth and worthless material. And in the end, they will slip away from us when we think we are most secure in them.

The wise king, who had the greatest experience of these things that any person ever had (for he enjoyed everything that this world could offer, in all directions), yet found nothing in them except emptiness and frustration. Moreover, he clearly affirms that all these things—riches, wealth, honor, pleasures, and treasures—will ultimately deceive us, slip away, and disappear. He compares them to an eagle or hawk that a man holds on his fist, strokes, takes great delight and pleasure in, and says he wouldn't take ten pounds for it. Yet suddenly, it takes flight, soaring into the air, and he never sees it again, nor does it see him. The words of the Holy Spirit are as follows: "Will you cause your eyes to fly after them?" (referring to riches) "You may, but they will not be found. For they will grow wings like an eagle, which flies up to heaven." From this, we can learn that no matter how much we set our hearts on something in

this world, in the end, it will be taken from us or we will be taken from it.

Therefore, all worldly people are like spiders weaving their webs and can aptly be compared to the simple spider that toils and labors all week to complete its web, thinking it is its own house and property. But alas, at the end of the week, a maid with a single sweep of a broom dispossesses it of its inheritance, which it had acquired with great effort and struggle. Similarly, when the people of this world, with much care and effort, acquire great lands and wealth and gather all they can, suddenly death (with one strike of its dreadful dart) will cause them to breathe their last breath. And then, where are they? It was cleverly said by a man in the light of nature: "No one has ever lived so happily in this life that, during their lifetime, many things have occurred for which they would rather die than live." And surely, I believe there was never a person who lived even a single day on this earth without some grief or another either happening or justifiably invading their mind before nightfall—whether in the temptations of the world, the flesh, or the devil, or regarding the soul, body, possessions, or reputation; concerning spouse, children, friends, or neighbors; in relation to dangers to the ruler, state, church, or commonwealth; or in regard to accidents and losses by water, fire, sea, or land. What a life, then, that has not a single good day in it? Who would desire to dwell in it for long? For it is exposed every day to numerous miseries, dangers, losses, accidents, reproaches, shame, infamy, poverty, sickness, diseases, colic, fevers, toothaches, headaches, backaches, bone aches, and countless calamities.

Philagathus

You have aptly described the vanity of this life and how every day brings its own sorrow or grief. Our Lord Jesus also confirms this when He gives the reason why we should not worry anxiously about tomorrow. He says, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Or, as some read it, "The day has enough with its own grief." This clearly shows that every day carries its own sorrow, evil, grief, and trouble. But please continue on this topic.

Theologus:

I further say this: that even though men toil and sweat, worry and care, labor and struggle day and night, on sea and on land, with much anxiety and sorrow, with great effort and grief, to accumulate worldly possessions, in the end, it will all fade away, and we must return to where we started. As Job said, "Naked we came into the world, and naked we must go out." For just as a windmill whirls and makes a great noise, spinning and spinning throughout the year, yet at the year's end, it stands still where it began, not moving an inch backward or forward, so when men have exhausted themselves, blowing and puffing to gather the commodities of the earth, in the end, they must (despite their efforts) return to where they began: end with nothing, just as they started with nothing; end with a burial shroud, just as they began with swaddling cloths. What has become of the greatest monarchs, kings, princes, potentates, and magnificoes that the world has ever seen? Where are Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Alexander, Caesar, Pompey, Scipio, and Hannibal? Where are the valiant Henries and noble Edwards of England? Have they not all descended into the realm of oblivion? Have they not all returned to dust, with all their thoughts perishing? Though they were like gods, they have died like men, fallen like any other.

Who now cares for them? Who speaks of them? Who fears them? Who regards them? Do not beggars walk over their tombs? Yet in their lifetime, they were the lords of the world, fearsome as lions, dreaded by all, filled with pomp and glory, dignity and majesty. They plowed through everything, conquering all in their path, and who but they? But now they have passed away and, as Job says, gone down to the appointed place for all the living. Their pomp has gone down with them, and all their glory is buried in ashes. They are now covered under a cloth, cast into a vault, made companions to toads, and worms consume them. And what has become of their souls is most to be feared.

Thus, we see how all flesh merely puts on a fleeting show on this stage of misery, goes in a circle, and is soon gone. As the poet says,

"Sooner or later, we all hasten to one abode: the grave."

Asunetus:

You have delivered an excellent speech. It brings me joy to hear it. Considering all these things, I wonder why men are so completely devoted to this world as they are. I think the devil has bewitched them. When they die, they shall not take anything with them except their good and bad deeds.

Theologus:

The toilers and drudgers of this world can be aptly compared to a king's packhorse, which carries a load of gold and treasure all day long. But at night, his treasure is taken from him, he is put in a sorry dirty stable, and all he has left is his sore back. Similarly, the rich hoarders and parasites of the earth, who have stored up great heaps of gold and silver here (with which they travel burdened through this world), will ultimately be stripped of everything, lowered into their grave, and have nothing left but their guilty consciences, with which they will be cast into the dungeon of eternal darkness.

Philagathus

What is the particular sting and allure of the world?

Theologus:

Just as the great strength of Samson lay in his hair, the great strength of the world lies in her two breasts: pleasure and profit. Like a notorious prostitute, she bewitches the sons of men and entices thousands by revealing these breasts. If she cannot win them with one breast, she entices them with the other: if not with pleasure, then with profit; if not with profit, then with pleasure. It is rare to find a person who does not suckle from one breast or the other. But whichever they suckle, they shall be poisoned. For she gives no other milk but rank poison. The world is like an enticing Jael, sitting at her door, luring us to come in and taste the milk of her pleasures. But once she has us inside, even while we are indulging, she is ready with her hammer and nail to pierce through our brains.

Philagathus

I clearly see that this world is a harlot, a strong bait, and a snaring net in which thousands are ensnared. It is like birdlime that traps our affections, preventing them from ascending upwards. It is like the weights of a clock, hanging on our souls, pulling them down to the earth, fastening us firmly to the ground. It turns us into clay, making us abominable to God. I remember God made a law that anything moving with its breast on the ground should be abominable to us. How much more are these carnal worldlings, who are firmly attached to the earth!

Theologus:

The Apostle S. James, having a deep understanding of the wickedness prevalent in this world and knowing how detestable it makes us in the sight of God, denounces it as adultery, and all those who chase after worldly desires as adulterers. They forsake Christ, their true spouse, and unfaithfully give their hearts to this world. "O you adulterers and adulteresses," he says, "do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Who dares to say, 'I will be an enemy of God'? Who dares to be a worldling? For every worldling is an enemy of God. So what will become of you, you wicked worldlings?"

Philagathus

It is clear, then, from the Scriptures, that the excessive love for this world and the insatiable desire for possessions is a most dangerous thing, and men do not know what they are doing when they seek after it so eagerly.

Theologus:

Even the pagans will condemn us, for they say, "Unsatiableness is the foulest evil among mortal men." But many of our voracious and insatiable individuals have no qualms about it. They do not consider it a sin; they devour and swallow up everything, yet they are never satisfied. They want to have it all, and even more than all, and

everything else imaginable. The whole world cannot satisfy their minds; they require new worlds to be created to content them. These people are afflicted with the Golden dropsy: the more they have, the more they desire. The love of money increases as money itself increases. But the Scripture says, "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver." Oh, if only we would strive earnestly to escape from this abyss of hell and trample the world, represented by the moon, under our feet, as spoken of the Church. If only we would set our affections on the things that are above, not on the things that are below, and soar to great heights like the eagles, looking down on this world and all its possessions, despising it and treading its glory under our feet, so that it may never have power over us again!

Philagathus

Oh, how happy and doubly blessed are those who can do so! I beseech Almighty God to grant us His Holy Spirit, so that we may transcend this world and ascend to the mountains of Myrrh and the mountains of Spices. For what a joyful thing it is to have our conversation in heaven, that is, to have an inward communion with God through abundant prayer, reading, meditation, and heavenly affections! This is truly to rise above the world and dwell in chambers of peace. Oh, if only we could deeply and seriously comprehend this world as it truly is, weigh its vanity and the excellence of what is to come, so that we may despise the one and love the other, reject the one and embrace the other, and love God more than ever before and love this world less. For what is this world but vanity of vanities?

Antilegon:

You greatly belittle that which some make their god. You speak contemptuously of that which most men hold in high value and admiration. You disgrace that which multitudes would honour. You make light of that which many consider of great importance. Let us, therefore, hear your reasons: show us more fully what it is; describe it to us.

Theologus:

The world is like a smooth sea, a display of foolish pleasures, a stage of vanity, a maze of confusion, a pit of sorrow, a place of filthiness, a valley of misery, a spectacle of woe, a river of tears, a platform of deceit, a cage filled with owls, a den of scorpions, a wilderness of wolves, a den of bears, a whirlwind of emotions, a false comedy, a delightful madness; it contains false delight, assured grief, certain sorrow, uncertain pleasure, lasting woe, fickle wealth, long heaviness, and short-lived joy.

Philagathus

Now you have indeed described it fully and portrayed it vividly. One would think a person bewitched or completely mad if they were to set their mind on it after hearing this. But I am still eager to hear a little more about what I asked you before, specifically where the strength and poison of the world particularly lie.

Theologus:

A great strength of the world lies in this: it draws down the stars from heaven and causes them to fall to the earth, as is said of the Dragon's tail in the book of Revelation. This represents ambition, covetousness, and the love of this world. We may wonder and lament to see how the love of these things has wounded and overcome many excellent servants of God, both preachers and followers of the Gospel. This clearly demonstrates its strength. It is the strongest and final weapon that Satan uses to attack us when no other temptation prevails. When no temptation could affect Christ, he brings forth this ultimate weapon, which never fails: "All these things I will give you," showing him the glory of the whole world. Thus, he (knowing that it never fails) thought to overcome Christ himself with it. Therefore, the very sting and strength of the world and the devil lie here. For whom has he not taken with the lure of "All these things I will give you"? Whom has he not wounded? Whom has he not deceived? Whom has he not overthrown? With this, he enticed Balaam; with this, he deceived Achan; with this, he overthrew Judas; with this, he bewitched Demas; and with this, in our present days, he has deceived

many individuals of exceptional gifts. Truly, one is a phoenix among men who is not overcome by this. It is a marvel in the world to find someone unmoved by money.

Philagathus

I am now fully convinced about this matter. However, one thing often comes to my mind: that these miserable worldlings cannot find true comfort in their pleasures and profits because they have no comfort in God, nor peace in their own consciences.

Theologus:

You speak the truth. It is impossible for those who love this world to find genuine comfort in God. No one can serve two masters, both God and riches. Their situation is therefore very dangerous and fearful, even though they may not see it or feel it. Allow me to illustrate this with a simple example. Let's suppose one of these wealthy worldlings is dressed in velvet and cloth of gold, in the most magnificent manner, and seated at a table furnished with all the delicacies of the world. They are attended and served by many in a lordly and pompous manner, sitting in their splendid dining chamber, gleaming like gold. The first, second, and third courses are brought in accompanied by minstrels and musical instruments, in a truly royal fashion. They sit in their chair like a king on their throne. Yet, despite all this, if a dagger were held to their heart during this entire time, ready to stab them, what pleasure, joy, or comfort could they find in everything else? Similarly, no matter what pomp or pleasures wicked worldlings have in this world, their guilty and hellish conscience is like a dagger always held close to their hearts, preventing them from finding true comfort in anything.

Or let me put it this way: Suppose a person has committed high treason and is subsequently apprehended, arraigned, and condemned to be hanged, drawn, and quartered. What can bring comfort in such a case? Can mirth, music, gold, silver, lands, or possessions provide any solace? No, none of these can help or bring any comfort. The constant thoughts of death grip their hearts to such

an extent that none of these things can offer any relief or mitigate their grief. So, what is the one thing that can bring comfort in such a situation? Only a pardon, sealed with the King's official seal and signed with his own hand. As soon as they receive this, their heavy heart is revived, and they leap for joy. This, undoubtedly, is the very reason for the condition of all profane atheists and worldlings who lack assurance of the King of heaven's pardon for their sins. In such a state, what joy can they find in their food, drink, possessions, livestock, spouses, children, lands, or any other thing? The dreadful thoughts of hell immediately cross their minds and utterly dampen and shatter all their mirth. Their own consciences cannot be silenced but rise up in a most terrifying manner and testify against them, plainly telling them that they will be damned, no matter how merry and jocund they may appear in this world while putting on a brave face. For it is certain that inwardly they experience many moments of dread and heartaches. Their mirth and revelry are nothing more than superficial laughter, lacking genuine inner comfort. Therefore, the wise King says, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Likewise, the holy man Job declares, "Terrors of conscience come upon the wicked man like waters; in the night a whirlwind carries him away secretly." Eliphaz the Temanite affirms the same point, saying, "The wicked man is continually as one who labours in childbirth; a sound of fear is in his ears," and so on. Thus, we can see that even though many carnal atheists and ungodly individuals may outwardly appear to float along in all mirth and jollity, seemingly carrying on smoothly, inwardly they are tormented by terrors and the most dreadful convulsions of conscience.

Antilegon:

You have expressed strong opinions against covetousness, but in my opinion, as long as a person desires only what is rightfully theirs, they cannot be considered covetous.

Theologus:

Yes, they can. It is not only considered covetousness to greedily

desire the possessions of others, but also to be excessively frugal and hoard one's own wealth, refusing to part with anything. We see the world is full of such penny-pinchers who will not let go of anything unless it is forcefully taken from them, like a key from Hercules' hand.

These greedy misers would rather part with their own blood than their possessions. They will deprive themselves of necessities to accumulate wealth. And once they have acquired it, do you think they will easily part with it? No, no, a person will not give up their wealth for anyone's pleasure. They would rather eat humble fare and drink meagerly than diminish their wealth. Therefore, the scripture says, "Do not eat the food of a stingy man, nor desire his delicacies; for as he thinks within himself, so is he. 'Eat and drink!' he says to you, but his heart is not with you. You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your pleasant words." The old saying goes, "The covetous man lacks as much of what he has as what he does not have," because he has no use for what he possesses. So, you see, there is great strength in covetousness when it comes to miserly hoarding of our own possessions.

Antilegon:

Nevertheless, people must pursue their worldly affairs and strive to make a living. The world is harsh, and acquiring wealth is not easy. Therefore, people must engage in their work, or else they may end up begging or starving.

Theologus:

I do not deny that you should diligently pursue the tasks of your occupation, as long as it is done in the fear of God and with a clear conscience, as I mentioned before. However, God condemns this greediness and miserliness, as well as the excessive love of money.

Philagathus

Believe me, I don't know anyone who hates it. It seems that everyone loves gold and silver.

Theologus:

It is one thing to utilise these things and another to love them and be attached to them. As the Scripture says, "If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them" (Psalm 62). Saint John also says, "Do not love this world or the things in this world." He does not say, "Do not use this world," but "Do not love this world." We may use it, but we must not love it. Therefore, the Apostle says that those who use this world should do so as if they were not using it. Here, he allows for a sober and moderate use of worldly things in the fear of God. We must use this world for the sake of necessities, just as we use food and drink. We should not indulge in more of this world than is necessary to avoid excess. The Holy Spirit says, "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with what you have." Therefore, the man who is content with his present state, carries himself moderately and comfortably within it, is truly happy. For the Spirit says, "There is no profit to a man under the sun except to eat, drink, and enjoy the fruits of his labor. I also saw that this is from the hand of God." In these words, the wise King conveys that the best we can achieve in this world is to make a moderate and comfortable use of the things that God has bestowed upon us. Furthermore, he affirms that to use them rightly and with true comfort is a rare gift from God. As someone said, "He is a wise man who is not grieved by what he does not have, but rejoices in what he has, using them for God's glory and his own comfort." Therefore, I conclude this point and give you an answer: we may use gold, silver, and the things of this world in a sober and godly manner, but we must never love them excessively or give our hearts to them.

Antilegon:

Well, even so, I cannot help but see that these preachers, scholars, and devout individuals are just as eager for the world and as covetous as anyone else.

Theologus:

Now you reveal your venomous spirit against better men than yourself. And I have a four-fold answer for you. First, I answer that

although godly men may be somewhat overtaken in this way and be overly attached to worldly things, they do not indulge in it as grossly as others. Secondly, if God allows them to be occasionally overcome by the world, He, in His great wisdom and mercy, turns it for their good. Through this, He humbles them and then raises them up again. Thus, all things work together for good for those who love God. Thirdly, I answer that we live by rules, not by examples. Even the best of God's people have experienced their own deficiencies and weaknesses. Therefore, we cannot establish rules for our lives based on the shortcomings of the most excellent servants of God. It is wicked and impious to use the sins of David's adultery, Lot's drunkenness, Peter's denial, Abraham's deceit, Solomon's idolatry, and others as a shield and defense for one's own sins. Lastly, I answer that your own speech greatly wounds you. It is evident that it does not improve your argument in the least. If preachers and other godly men, after much prayer, tears, and diligent effort, cannot escape unharmed and are sometimes wounded and almost overthrown by the world and the Devil, then what will become of you, who make no effort whatsoever and willingly yield to the Devil? If the Devil overcame David, Lot, Samson, Solomon, and other such remarkable individuals, what will happen to mere worldlings and atheists? If the bravest and most skilled warriors in a battle fall, what will become of the faint-hearted soldiers? As Saint Peter said, "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" So, I turn your own argument against you, since godly men cannot navigate this world without facing trials, what will become of those who have no understanding of godliness?

Antilegon:

Yet, I reiterate that men must live, men must strive for success in this world. We cannot sustain ourselves solely by the Scriptures. And as for what you call covetousness, it is merely good financial management.

Theologus:

I thought we would come to this eventually. Now you have hit the

mark. You have returned to your old inclination, like a hare returning to its old hiding place. For this is precisely the hiding place and refuge of the world, where they attempt to conceal covetousness. But I will do my best to flush you out of it using the Scriptures.

First, Solomon says: "He who spares more than is right will surely come to poverty." So, you see, covetousness leads to poverty. Therefore, I reason as follows: something that leads to poverty is not good financial management. However, covetousness and excessive saving lead to poverty. Therefore, it is not good financial management. Solomon also says: "He who is eager for gain troubles his own house." This means that the covetous person causes many problems in their estate and family. From this Scripture, I reason as follows: something that troubles a person's house is not good financial management. However, covetousness troubles a person's house. Therefore, it is not good financial management. Finally, the old proverb says: "Covetousness brings nothing home." Therefore, it is not good financial management. We often see that people, due to their greed for more, lose what they could have otherwise had. One wise heathen says: "Evil gain is as bad as loss." But the covetous person seeks wicked gain and therefore seeks loss. Consequently, they are not a good manager. Another says: "Unjust gain brings both loss and misery." Therefore, it is far from virtue and good financial management. So, I hope that you are now so exposed both by God and men that this hiding place cannot conceal you. Therefore, you must leave it and seek another refuge, for it will not serve your purpose.

Philagathus

Now, I must say, you have completely silenced him and thoroughly ferreted him out of his deep hiding place. It is most certain that what you say is true: that wise heathens have condemned covetousness and all unjust gains, which we both practice and defend. They will indeed rise up in judgment against us. But now let us leave this arguer and proceed with our matters. There is one more thing I would like to know, in which I desire to be satisfied.

Theologus:
What is that?

Philagathus
I would like to know the specific remedies against covetousness.

Theologus:
There are two special remedies against covetousness: contentment and meditating on God's providence.

Philagathus
Let us hear something about contentment from the Scriptures.

Theologus:
The Apostle says: "Having food and clothing, we must be content with that." For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we shall take nothing out of it. The Spirit also says: "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with what you have." Furthermore, the Apostle says: "He had learned to be content in whatever state he was." Note that he says he had learned, for he did not have it naturally. For contentment is a unique gift from God, as it is written: "The righteous eats to the satisfaction of his soul, but the belly of the wicked shall be empty." An ancient Father says: "We ought to accustom ourselves to live with little and be content, so that we do not engage in wicked or filthy things for the sake of gain." Another says: "He is not poor who has nothing, but he who desires much. Neither is he rich who has much, but he who lacks nothing, for contentment never lacks. There is no grief in lacking, but there is excessive desire in having. If we live according to nature, we shall never be poor; if we live according to our own desires, we shall never be rich." Thus, both God Himself (the source of all wisdom) and people, both in the state of nature and grace, all advise us to strive for contentment. Then we shall have a powerful remedy against covetousness.

Philagathus

Let us hear something about the second remedy against covetousness.

Theologus:

A serious contemplation of God's providence is an immediate remedy against the foolish and excessive worries of people for this life. If we would truly consider and deeply contemplate the providential care that God has shown His children throughout history regarding food and clothing, and how remarkably He has provided for them, it would be enough to correct this evil in us and serve as a notable safeguard against covetousness.

We read about how wonderfully the Lord provided for His prophet Elijah during the great famine and drought in Israel. Did the Lord not command the ravens to feed him by the brook Cherith? Did the ravens not bring him bread and meat in the morning and evening, and did he not drink from the brook?

Why should I mention how miraculously God provided for Hagar and her child when they were cast out of Abraham's house and brought to great distress? They were both on the verge of death due to lack of food.

Did not God help in times of need, as He always has? Did He not send His angel to comfort and provide for them? What can I say about how wondrously God provided for His church in the wilderness? Did He not feed them with manna from heaven and give them water from the rock to drink? Has not our heavenly Father made many grand and generous promises to provide for His children's needs? Should we not believe that He will keep His word? Does He not say: "The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek Him will lack no good thing"? Does He not say: "Fear Him, all you saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing"? Does He not say: "No good thing will be withheld from those who walk uprightly"? Does He not say: "Our heavenly Father knows that we have need of

these things, and all these things will be given to us if we earnestly seek His kingdom"? Does He not instruct us to cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us? Does He not tell us not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear? By this, He means that we should not be consumed by distracting or distrustful thoughts. Does He not say that He will never leave us or forsake us? Does He not say: "The Lord is near; do not be anxious about anything"? Are these promises not sufficient to strengthen our faith in God's providence? Should we think that God jests with us? Should we think that He does not mean what He says? Should we imagine that He will not keep His word? Oh, it would be blasphemy to even entertain such thoughts, for God is true, and all men are liars. He is faithful to His promises. His word is more trustworthy than that of a prince or ten thousand obligations. So why do we not rely on it? Why do we go any further? Why do we not take Him at His word? Why do we not depend on Him completely? Why are we still covetous? Why are we still distrustful? Why do we pretend and deceive? Oh, we have little faith! Our Lord Jesus (knowing well the inherent distrustfulness deeply rooted in our nature) not only makes these great and royal promises to us, which would be enough, but also strengthens and supports us with many strong reasons to counter our weakness in this matter. He leads us to reconsider things. He says: "Consider the ravens; consider the birds of the sky. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet God feeds them; they lack nothing. Consider how the lilies grow; they do not toil or spin, yet Solomon in all his splendor was not adorned like one of these. Oh, if only we would contemplate these considerations! If only we would realize that our life is worth more than food and our bodies worth more than clothing! If only we would recognize that all our worrying and striving cannot bring any good to us, not even a single inch to our height! Truly, truly, if we would deeply ponder these reasons given by our Savior and apply them to ourselves, they could serve as a strong defense against covetousness. If people would consider how the great King of heaven (whose path is in the whirlwind and the clouds are the dust of His feet) cares for the little wren and the humble sparrow, how He watches over them, provides for them

every day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—it could correct our lack of trust. For who has ever seen these creatures, or any other soul, starve from hunger? They have such a good Father and nurse. And are we not much better than they? Does not God care for us more than for them? Indeed, a thousand times more. For He loves them, but He loves us for our sake. How much more then does He love us? Therefore, I say again and again, if we would consider these things and take them to heart, they would crush covetousness and drive it out of our hearts completely. Let us consider, therefore, that God provided for mankind even before mankind existed. How much more will He provide for us now that we exist? Is He not our Father, and will He not provide for us? Is He not our King, and will He not take care of us? Is He not our shepherd, and will He not watch over us? Has He provided heaven for us and will He not give us the earth? Has He given us His Son, Jesus Christ, and will He not, with Him, give us all things? Does He provide for His enemies and neglect His chosen ones? Does He send rain and make the sun shine on the unjust and not on the just? Does He provide for those who are not part of His family and not provide for His own family? Would a man feed his pigs and not care for his servants? Or would he care for his servants and not look after his own children? Oh, let us consider these reasons! Let us remember that our heavenly Father has as much concern for the preservation of His creatures as He had for their creation. Let us remember that our life does not consist of these things, but rather in God's providence. Let us remember that He who gives us the day will provide for our daily needs. Let us remember that God always provides for our sustenance, though not necessarily for our indulgence. Let us remember that God will not starve the souls of the righteous. Let us remember how God has never failed those who trust in Him.

Philagathus

So what is the reason that many people lack material possessions?

Theologus:

The reason lies within themselves because they lack faith. If we had

faith, we would lack nothing. As an ancient Father said, faith does not fear famine. Another one said, since everything belongs to God, one who has God can lack nothing unless he himself is lacking to God. Therefore, to have God is to have everything. If we have Him as our friend, we have enough; we need not seek further. He will make people our friends; indeed, He will make angels and all creatures serve us. He will give them a special charge to watch over us, protect us, and pay us continuous homage. Therefore, let us make God our friend, and then we have achieved all at once that concerns our well-being in both this life and the next. But if He does not stand by us, if we do not have Him on our side, if He does not support us, then all other things, no matter what they may be, are of no use to us; they are worthless. For what profit is there in having everything if we do not have Him who gave us everything?

Philagathus

You speak the truth in this, without a doubt. We see that many have great abundance of material things, but because they do not have God, they cannot find true comfort or blessing in them.

Theologus:

That is true indeed. As our Lord Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." And again He said, "Even if a man has an abundance, his life does not consist in the things that he possesses." For without God's blessing, there can be no genuine comfort in anything. We observe in our daily experience how the Lord curses the wicked, even if they have plenty. Some, despite their abundance, are afflicted with constant illnesses. Others with abundance waste away from consumption. Some die from excess and overindulgence. Others suffer premature deaths amidst their merriment. Some experience great losses at sea and on land. Others are tormented by cursed spouses and disobedient children. Some commit murders and treasons, thereby losing everything in an instant. Others are mysteriously consumed by the hidden curse of God, without anyone knowing how. Some with great riches fall prey to murderers, thieves,

and poisoners. Therefore, the wise king said, "There is a grievous evil under the sun: riches kept by their owner to his hurt." (Ecclesiastes 5:12)

Zophar the Naamathite also said, "When the wicked man fills his belly, God will send His fierce anger upon him, raining it down as his food."

Thus, it is evident that man's life and well-being do not depend on the abundance of material possessions, but solely on the blessing and providence of God. It is His blessing alone that brings wealth without sorrow. It is better to have a little and be content than to have great abundance as many wicked people do. It is better to have a little with the fear of the Lord than to have great wealth that brings trouble. It is better to have a little with righteousness than to have great income without fairness.

Therefore, I conclude this point. Man does not live by bread alone, but by the blessing upon bread; not by outward means, but by the blessing upon means. For how can bread, being lifeless and devoid of its own life, give life to others?

Philagathus

I do not fully understand the meaning of the phrase "By every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

Theologus:

It refers to the decree, order, and providence of God that sustains all things, including the entire natural order.

For the Scripture says, "He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and they were created." From these words, we clearly see that God speaks, and it is done; He commands, and all creatures are preserved. God accomplishes all things with a word. He created all things with His word; He sustains all things with His word. He speaks, and it is done. His words are words of power and authority. Whatever He says, whatever He commands, must be done

immediately, without delay. There is no resisting Him. If He calls for famine, there is famine. If He calls for abundance, there is abundance. If He calls for pestilence, there is pestilence. If He calls for the sword, there is the sword. All angels, all humans, all beasts, all fish, all birds, all creatures must obey Him and be at His command. He is the supreme Commander. His word commands heaven, earth, and the sea. All creatures must be obedient to His will and subject to His order.

This is why all things in heaven, earth, and the sea maintain their unchanging and fixed courses, times, and seasons because He has commanded them to do so. They must always, at all times, and forever obey because creatures must obey the Creator. This "Act of Parliament" was enacted in the first week of the world and has never been and can never be repealed.

Philagathus

But let me bring you back to the point we were discussing: please answer this for me. Do many beloved children of God sometimes experience a lack of material things and find themselves in great distress in this life?

Theologus:

Yes, certainly. Elijah experienced lack and distress. Paul experienced lack and faced many distressing situations. The faithful Christians mentioned in the book of Hebrews also experienced lack and went through incredible hardships. Many of God's beloved ones in every age have experienced and continue to experience lack and great distress. However, it is an absolute truth that no matter how much God's children may lack and be brought low, they are never completely forsaken. Even in the most extreme situations, they receive help.

On this matter, the Apostle speaks most notably, saying, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not

destroyed." The Prophet Jeremiah also says, "The Lord will not forsake forever; though he brings grief, he will have compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men." The Psalmist affirms, "Surely the Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage." The Lord himself declares, "For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you." Therefore, we can fully assure ourselves and write it down as an undeniable and confirmed truth that God's children will never be completely forsaken in their troubles.

Philagathus

Since God's care and providence for his children is so great, as you have explained extensively, what then, I ask you, is the reason why God allows them to be brought into so many troubles and necessities?

Theologus:

Their benefit and profit are the reasons, not their harm. He loves them when he disciplines them. He favors them even when he appears to be most against them. He aims at their good even when he seems angriest with them. He wounds them to heal them. He presses them to bring them ease. He makes them cry so that they may later laugh. He always intends well for them; he never intends harm. His love towards them is steadfast. If he brings them into necessities, it is only to test their faith, love, patience, and diligence in prayer.

If he casts them into the fire, it is not to consume them, but to purify and refine them. If he brings them into great dangers, it is to make them cry out to him more earnestly for help and deliverance.

He presses us so that we may cry out; we cry out so that we may be heard; we are heard so that we may be delivered. Therefore, no harm is done to us; we are more frightened than harmed.

Just as a mother, when her child is misbehaving, threatens to throw it to the wolf or frightens it with some scarecrow or boogeyman to make it cling to her and be quiet, the Lord often shows us the terrifying faces of troubles and dangers to make us lean closer to Him and hold on tightly. He does this also to teach us to value His gifts more when we have them and to be more grateful for them, such as health, wealth, peace, liberty, safety, etc. Thus, we see that nothing but good is intended by God. As it is written, "All things work together for good to those who love God." Even the afflictions of God's children are sanctified by the spirit, making them partakers of God's holiness. Through affliction, they experience the peaceful fruit of righteousness and attain greater joy in the Holy Spirit. They become crucified to the world and the world to them. They are conformed to Christ's death and kept from the condemnation of the world. They learn valuable lessons in experience, patience, hope, etc. Therefore, all things considered, God's children do not lose through their afflictions; rather, they gain. It is better for them to have afflictions than to be without them. Afflictions are very beneficial for them. When God's children are disciplined, it is as it should be. To them, the cross is mercy, and loss is gain. Afflictions serve as their schooling, and adversity becomes their best university.

"It is good for me," says the holy man of God, "that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." Through his afflictions, he learned much and became a good student in God's book, well-versed in His statutes and laws. He grew in great wisdom and judgment through his chastisements. In God's merciful providence, everything turned around for his everlasting comfort. I say again and again that all things work for the good of God's chosen people. Therefore, the condition that God desires His children to be in is always best for them. He, who can discern what is truly best, sees it as the best for them, whether it is sickness or health, poverty or plenty, prison or liberty, prosperity or adversity. Sometimes, sickness is better for us than health, and poverty is better than plenty. If, therefore, the children of God are sick, it is best for them. If they are poor, it is best for them. If they are in any trouble, it is best for them because their

loving Father will turn it for the best. He often limits our lusts and desires because He knows they would harm us. In His fatherly care, He takes the knife away from us because He knows we would hurt ourselves with it. He keeps us from excessive health and wealth because He knows we would be worse off for them. He does not allow us too much ease and prosperity in this world because He knows it would poison us. He does not grant us constant rest like stagnant ponds because He knows we would gather scum and filth. He deals with us in a fatherly and merciful manner in all things, seeking our greatest good even when we think He is causing us the most harm.

And to sum it up, He brings us into troubles and difficulties, especially for the purpose of hearing from us. He knows our nature very well and is familiar with our disposition. He knows that we will not come to Him unless we are in need of Him. We do not care for Him as long as everything is going well for us. But when we encounter distress or lack something we greatly desire, then He is sure to hear from us. As He says through the Prophet, "In their affliction, they will seek me early."

And another Prophet says, "Lord, they have visited you in trouble. They poured out a prayer when Your chastisement was upon them." So now I hope you clearly see the reason why the Lord brings His children into so many troubles and necessities.

Philagathus

I do see it indeed, and I am very satisfied with it. But let me ask you one more thing. Are God's children always certain to be delivered from their troubles?

Theologus:

Yes, indeed, and without a doubt, to the extent that God sees it good for them. For it is written, "Great are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivers them from all." Saint Peter says, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation." It is as if he is saying that God is skilled and experienced in delivering His people,

so He can do it effortlessly and without any trouble at all. It is said of Joseph, when he was in prison, that when his appointed time came and the counsel of the Lord had tested him, the King sent and released him; the Ruler of the people delivered him. And again, the Scripture says, "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them and delivers them from all their troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and delivers them." In another place, the Lord Himself says concerning the righteous person, "Because he has loved me, I will deliver him; I will exalt him because he has known my name. He shall call upon me in trouble, and I will hear him. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and glorify him." Eliphaz the Temanite also says, "He shall deliver you in six troubles, and in the seventh, no evil shall touch you." The Lord says, "Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself for a little while until the indignation passes over." The Prophet says, "On Mount Zion, there shall be deliverance, and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their inheritance." There are countless other passages in the Scriptures that could be quoted for this purpose, but these should suffice. Therefore, let us know with certainty that just as trouble and affliction are certain for the children of God, so is deliverance from them. We can write about the one and count on it as surely as the coat on our back, and in God's appointed time, we can write about the other and have complete confidence in it, as sure as the Lord is true. Abraham was in trouble but was delivered. Job was in trouble but was delivered. David faced great troubles but was delivered. The three children in the furnace were in trouble but were delivered. Daniel in the lions' den was in trouble but was delivered. Jonah in the whale's belly was in trouble but was delivered. Paul faced innumerable troubles but was ultimately delivered from them all.

Philagathus

Considering that what you say is true, it follows that God's children are disciplined only for their own good, and they can always be sure of deliverance in His appointed time. With this being the case, I

believe there is no reason at all for them to be overly burdened or excessively downcast in their afflictions.

Theologus:

Absolutely, there is no reason at all; rather, there is a reason for them to rejoice, clap their hands, and sing away their worries. Can a father forsake his children? Or a king his subjects? Or a master his servant? Or a shepherd his sheep? Doesn't Jehovah say, "I will not leave you nor forsake you"? Doesn't our heavenly Father know that we have need of these things? Hasn't God given us His word that we shall not lack outward things? Hasn't He said that they shall be provided for us? So why should we be dismayed? Why should we hang our heads low? Why don't we lift up our hearts and be of good cheer? God is our beloved Father; He is our best friend; He is our daily Provider. He takes care of us at His own expense; He begrudges us nothing; He considers nothing too much for us. He loves us dearly; He is extremely careful and tender with us; He cannot bear even the slightest wind to blow upon us. He will not let us lack anything that is good for us. If we desire to eat gold, we shall have it. He has given us His faithful promise that as long as we live, we shall never be in want. Let us, therefore, rejoice and be merry, for Heaven is ours, earth is ours, God is ours, Christ is ours, everything is ours.

As the Apostle says, "All is yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." The world claps their hands and boasts prematurely, saying that everything belongs to them. But the children of God can say, and say truly, "All is ours." For they have a true title and rightful ownership through Christ in all the creatures. They have many privileges and great prerogatives. They are citizens of heaven and earth, the only free inhabitants of the world. Christ has purchased their freedom. Christ has set them free, and therefore they are truly free. They are free from sin, free from hell, free from damnation. They are at peace with God, men, and angels. They are at peace with themselves. They are at peace with all creatures. They are young princes, companions of angels, descended from the highest house, from the royal blood of heaven, citizens of Paradise, and heirs

apparent to the immortal crown. Therefore, God has commanded His angels to guard them, being such young princes as they are. Yes, He has given a strict charge to all His creatures to look after them, to ensure they lack nothing, to protect them from harm. He is so caring, so cautious, so tender towards them. The angels must comfort Jacob. The whale must rescue Jonah. The ravens must feed Elijah. The sun and moon must wait for Joshua. The sea must divide itself so that Moses and his people may pass through. The fire must not burn the three children. The lions may not devour Daniel. All creatures must change their nature rather than God's children not be helped and delivered. Oh, how great is the happiness of God's chosen ones! Who can express it? Who can describe it? They do not fully grasp their own happiness; it is hidden from them. Afflictions cloud it; troubles overshadow it; crosses dim it; and there is an earthly barrier between their sight and it. But this is most certain and sure, that the best is yet to come for the children of God. All the sweetness is yet to be experienced. Their happiness does not manifest in this world. Their life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ appears, they will also appear with Him in glory. It has not yet been revealed what they shall be, but when He comes, they shall be made like Him. Their names are already recorded in the book of life, and one day they shall be crowned. One day it will be said to them, "Come, you blessed, etc." One day they shall enjoy His presence, where there is fullness of joy and eternal pleasure at His right hand. Psalm 16. Therefore, let all of God's hidden ones rejoice, sing, and be merry. Though they may be despised, trampled upon, treated as nobodies, and walk as shadows in this world, regarded as the very refuse of the earth and the outcasts of the world, the time will come when their happiness and felicity shall be such that it has never entered into the heart of man. It is endless, indescribable, and inconceivable.

Philagathus

I now clearly see that there is no reason for God's people to be overly sad and gloomy in their afflictions. I see that although they are not free from all afflictions, they are free from all harmful afflictions. For

no rod, no cross, no chastisement is harmful to them; instead, everything ultimately leads to a blessed outcome.

Theologus:

You have expressed a great and undeniable truth. There is no affliction or trial that God imposes upon His children which, if they endure it with patience, firmly trust in His mercy, and obediently wait for His good pleasure, does not have a blessed and comforting end. Therefore, the people of God can be joyful in the midst of their sorrows. They can, with patience and comfort, submit themselves to their Father's corrections, accepting them patiently and even embracing His holy rod, saying to themselves: "Since my Father wills it so, I am content. I am willing to go along with His plan." As old Eli said, "It is the Lord; let Him do what He will." And as David humbly submitted in a certain situation, saying, "Here I am, let Him do to me as He sees fit in His own eyes." And in another place, he said, "I was silent; I did not open my mouth, because it was You, Lord, who did it." Behold, the patience of God's saints and their humble submission to His holy will. They know that everything will end well, and that thought brings them joy. I conclude, therefore, that the children of God are happy in whatever state they may be in: happy in trouble, happy out of trouble, happy in poverty, happy in plenty, blessed in sickness, blessed in health, blessed at home and abroad, and blessed in every way. On the contrary, the wicked are cursed in whatever state they may be in: cursed in sickness, cursed in health, cursed in plenty, cursed in poverty, cursed in prosperity, cursed in adversity, cursed in honor, cursed in dishonor. Everything works together for their destruction. Nothing brings them any good. They are not made any better by God's mercies or judgments. All circumstances are the same to them. They remain unchanged in both prosperity and adversity; they are unyielding. And as we say, "A good year does not improve them, nor does a bad year harm them."

Philagathus

You have elaborated on this point for some time. Now, proceed to the

fourth sign of a person's damnation, which is the contempt of the Gospel. Explain both the gravity of this sin and the danger it poses.

Theologus:

This sin is of a different nature than the previous ones. It is a sin against the first commandment. It directly concerns God Himself, for to despise the Gospel is to despise God Himself, whose Gospel it is. If to despise the ministers of the Gospel is to despise God and Christ, as our Lord Jesus affirms (Luke 10:16), then how much more to despise the Gospel itself? Therefore, meddling in this sin is dangerous. It is like meddling with sharp tools, involving oneself in matters of princes, touching the Ark, or approaching the holy mountain—all of which are filled with great peril and danger. Indeed, it is like spilling the sacrament. It is "Noli me tangere." It is railing against a King. It is spitting in God's face. It is high treason against the King of glory. Therefore, this sin, above all others, can never be tolerated and must not be tolerated in any way. For can an earthly king endure the contempt of his laws? Can he tolerate the contempt of his own person? Can he bear someone spitting at his scepter or throwing a stone at it? No, surely he will not.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit says, "He who despises Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." How much worse punishment, do you suppose, will be deserved by the one who tramples underfoot the Son of God, and profanes the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outrages the Spirit of grace? And again, "If the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" If those who did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth received a just punishment, how shall we escape if we reject Him who speaks from heaven? Therefore, our Saviour Christ says that it will be easier for Sodom in the day of judgment than for those who despise the Gospel.

Furthermore, He says that the Queen of the South will rise up in judgment against all perverse despisers of His Word. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here. For Christ is greater than Solomon, and His doctrine and wisdom are far more excellent. Therefore, their sin is greater who despise it, and they will never be able to justify it. For the Spirit says, "He who despises the word will be destroyed."

Saint Peter also tells us that the people of the old world and the men of the first age are now in hellfire because they despised and disobeyed the doctrine of Christ, which (though not personally, yet in His divine spirit) He spoke through Noah. So we can clearly see that God will never accept that His glorious Gospel should be universally and openly despised as it is.

Philagathus

You have spoken the truth, and you have also shown it from the Scriptures, that the contempt of the Gospel is a grievous sin. Yet, despite that, it is truly lamentable to see how little people value it and how lightly they regard it. Many consider it to be no more than an eggshell; they think it is not worth a farthing. They won't even bother to go to the door to hear it. They view it as nothing more than our breath and a sound to them, and that's the end of it. They see it as mere noise or empty sound in the air, or like a distant voice that they don't understand. They have never experienced its power in their hearts. Therefore, they prioritize their sheep, farms, oxen, profits, and pleasures above it. They fail to recognize it as the precious jewel that it is. Although our Lord Jesus Himself compared it to a hidden treasure and a most precious pearl, these filthy swine of the world trample it under their feet. They do not understand its value. Though the wise Solomon said that all the merchandise of gold, silver, pearls, and precious stones cannot compare to it, these beasts, these dogs and hogs of the world, despise it. They value a cow more than Christ's glorious Gospel. They are like Aesop's cock, which considered a barleycorn to be of greater worth than all the precious

stones in the world. They are like little children who value their rattles more than a bag of gold. They are like the Gadarenes who valued their pigs more than Christ and His Gospel. They make nothing of it. They don't think it's worth their while. Many of them loiter in the streets even on the Sabbath. While the Gospel is preached in their churches, many are engaged in card games and gambling in alehouses. On the Sabbath, many sleep in their beds throughout the entire sermon in the afternoon. Many will hear a sermon in the morning and consider that to be enough for God's requirement, as if He is somewhat indebted to them for it. But as for the afternoon, they won't listen to any sermon. Instead, they go to bowls or tables. These people serve God in the morning and the devil in the afternoon. Some pursue prostitutes on the Sabbath. Some engage in dancing and bear-baiting. Some sit in their stalls or shops. Some sit by the fireside. Some loiter in the streets. Some play stool-ball, while others watch. Oh, wretched creatures! Accursed wretches! Monstrous hellhounds! They openly and grossly despise the Gospel of Christ! What will become of them in the end? Surely their damnation does not sleep. A thousand deaths await them. They are exposed on all sides to the wrath of God. And we may wonder at His marvelous patience, that He does not rain down balls of wildfire from heaven to consume and burn them, their shops, and their houses, making them spectacles of His vengeance for such flagrant contempt of such sacred, holy, and lofty things.

Theologus:

You have spoken with great truth, zeal, and piety, and I commend you greatly for it. I must affirm the same things because they cannot be denied. And personally, I believe that the Gospel has never been so openly despised in any age (by a people living under its profession and under a godly and Christian ruler) as it is in this age. For although some put on a show of religion, they have denied its power. They pervert the grace of God into license, as S. Jude says in verse 4. They use the Gospel as a cover for their sins. They receive it and embrace it only insofar as it aligns with their profits and pleasures, their desires and preferences, their reputation and strategies, and

not a bit further. They will practice it at their convenience. These people profess to know God, but by their actions, they deny Him and are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work. This age is full of such worldly Protestants.

Phil.

Indeed, this age is filled with many hollow-hearted hypocrites, pretenders, and time-servers. Although they may put on a face and pretend to love the Gospel, their hearts are not with it. Their hearts are with atheism; their hearts are with Popery. They have a Pope in their belly; they are Church-Papists. Even though they occasionally come to church, listen to a sermon, and show a good demeanor to the preacher, their hearts are consumed by covetousness. The Lord laments this through His prophet Ezekiel, saying, "This people will sit before you and hear your words, but they will not do them. With their mouths, they make jests, and their hearts are set on covetousness." God also laments this through His prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, and then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered,' while you continue in these abominations? Has this house become a den of thieves, which was meant to be a holy place?" We see here how the Lord rebukes His people and sharply reproves them for abusing His temple, worship, and sacrifices, using them as a cover for their sins and turning His house into a den of thieves, instead of an assembly of saints. This is a vivid description of our time, where many engage in worldly activities, prayer, and sacraments not to kill and mortify sin, but to nourish and protect their sins. They foolishly believe that if they come to church, pray, and listen to the sermon, they are absolved of their sins, even though they do not forsake them. They think they have given God His due and therefore feel more emboldened to sin afterward. These hypocrites are like rogues who use medicine not to heal wounds but to create them. They are like the Papists who believe that if they attend Mass in the morning, they can do as they please for the rest of the day.

Theologus:

I can see that you have greatly profited in the knowledge of God and true religion. You have spoken wisely and like a knowledgeable person in matters concerning God. The common people indeed think that all religion consists of outwardly serving God, even though their hearts are far from Him. To them, God can rightly say, "This people draw near to Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." God can justly express all His complaints against His people Israel and Judah, as found frequently in the words of the Prophets. He abhorred their sacrifices, loathed their offerings, detested their incense, despised their new moons, and disdained their rams, lambs, and goats, considering them as nothing more than human blood, dog's blood, and swine's blood. All this was because their hands were filled with blood, they did not execute justice and judgment, they were disobedient to His will, their hearts were not with Him, and they used or rather misused all these things as coverings for their sins.

Philagathus

The great contempt shown towards the Ministers of the Gospel in this age strongly indicates contempt for the Gospel itself. One cannot love the Gospel and hate the faithful Ministers of it. However, through lamentable experience, we see that the most revered, godly, and learned Ministers are mocked by lowly and despicable individuals. As Job said, "They whose fathers I have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock, they were the children of fools and the children of villains, more vile than the earth." Now, every rascal dares to ridicule and scorn the most esteemed and venerable Fathers and Pastors of the Church, mocking them as they walk in the streets or ride along the highways. Although the Holy Spirit bestows upon them glorious and lofty titles (such as stewards of God's own house, dispensers of His secrets, administrators of His treasure, guardians of the broad seal, keepers of the keys of heaven, God's secretaries, God's ambassadors, angels, and even the very glory of Christ) these vile scoundrels and venomous vermin of the earth dare to call them proud prelates, lowly priests, and contemptible parsons. This is a

monstrous and intolerable impiety! Now, the most sacred function (which is esteemed in the sight of God, His angels, and in itself most honorable) is held in the greatest contempt among all vocations. The earth is now filled with rank atheists and mock gods who scoff at the Gospel and deride all religion. These individuals do not pretend in any way. They do not put on a show; they are not hypocrites. They do not hide their sins but openly declare them, much like the people of Sodom. They do not care if they never attend church; they have no interest in it. They live like beasts, believing the Scriptures to be mere fables. They hurl insults at the Ministers and Preachers, openly opposing them and behaving as notorious mockers and graceless individuals.

Theologus:

The Apostle S. Peter foretold that in the last days, mockers would come, living according to their own lusts, and so on.

Regarding such individuals, a godly writer says, "The word of God is carelessly contemned, his promises are counted vain, and his threatenings fables." The poet also says:

Alas, men live as if death will never follow,
Or as if all talk of hell were a complete lie.

Now is also the time when the world is filled with papists and atheists, and most people live as if there were no God. Religion is now hated, true godliness is despised, zeal is abhorred, sincerity is scoffed at, uprightness is loathed, preachers are contemned, professors are disdained, and almost all good men are mocked. We can justly complain with the Prophet: "Judgment is turned backward, and justice stands far off. Truth has failed in the streets, and equity cannot enter." Indeed, truth has failed, and those who refrain from evil make themselves a prey. The Prophet Micah laments the times, saying, "The good man has perished from the earth, and there is no righteous man among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his neighbor with a net." The Prophet

Jeremiah also complains of the same evil in his time, namely, that the people had reached a point of shamelessness in sinning. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not ashamed, and they could not feel any shame." This is a vivid picture and a true representation of our time. For now we have put on a brazen face, we have become shameless in sin. We cannot blush; we cannot feel shame. We are nearly beyond shame and beyond grace. Oh Lord, what will this behavior lead to in the end!

Philagathus

We have valid reasons to fear that a great judgment from God is imminent, and may even be hanging over our heads. The Lord will never leave the contempt of His Gospel and His ministry unpunished.

Theologus:

You have spoken the truth. We have heard before how the old world was plagued for this sin. We read about the severe affliction the Jews suffered at the hands of the Romans, just as our Lord Jesus had plainly foretold. We also know that after the Lord Himself had established and spread the Gospel through His Apostles, conquering the world in the process (symbolized by the white horse, its rider, bow, and crown), there came a time when it began to be despised and trivialized in the world. At that point, God brought fearful plagues upon the earth, including wars, bloodshed, tumults, famine, and pestilence (represented by the red horse, black horse, and pale horse that appeared when the second, third, and fourth seals were opened). Undoubtedly, God will severely punish all injuries, wrongs, and contempt directed at His faithful ambassadors, as stated in Revelation 11:5, where it is written that if anyone were to harm the two witnesses with their two olive trees and two lampstands (symbolizing the faithful preachers of the Gospel with their spiritual treasures and heavenly light), fire would proceed from their mouths and devour their adversaries. This means that the fire of God's wrath will consume all who have oppressed them through mockery, ridicule, slander, imprisonment, or any other form of indignity. We

have clear examples of this in Scripture. First, we read how fire came down from heaven and consumed the contemptuous captain and his fifty men when Elijah threatened them. Second, we learn how two bears came out of the forest and tore apart 42 young men who mocked Elisha, the prophet of God, calling him "bald-head" and "bald-pate." These examples make it evident that although the Lord may seem to overlook these things for a time, the day will come when He will rain fire and brimstone upon all scoffers of His faithful ministers and those who contemptuously reject His Gospel. All of this is plainly stated in Proverbs 1:24-32, where it is shown how the wisdom of God, even Jesus Christ, cries out loudly in the world and reveals Himself in the open streets, yet is despised by wicked worldlings and mocking fools. Therefore, Christ says, "Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, you have hated knowledge and despised all my counsel; therefore, I will laugh at your destruction and mock when your fear comes upon you like a sudden desolation and your destruction like a whirlwind. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me early, but they will not find me." Here we see the terrifying wrath and vengeance threatened from heaven against all profane contemners of Christ and His eternal Gospel, as well as against those who reject the faithful publishers and proclaimers of it. Take heed, you despisers, and be astonished. Consider carefully what will become of you in the end. Do not think that the just God will always tolerate your manifest contempt for His Word and the most zealous preachers and followers of it. No, rest assured that He will settle the score with you eventually. He will strike you sideways and diagonally; He will pursue you relentlessly with His judgments and will not cease until He has destroyed and consumed you from the face of the earth. Remember what He says in Deuteronomy, "If I whet my glittering sword and my hand takes hold of judgment, I will execute vengeance on my enemies and repay those who hate me; I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour the flesh of my adversaries."

Philagathus

Truly, sir, you have a valid concern that due to our great contempt of the Gospel and our general apathy in both professing and practicing it, God may take it away from us and give it to a people who will bear fruit from it.

Theologus:

Indeed, we should fear that for our sins, especially our rejection of the heavenly sustenance, the Lord may remove our spiritual guidance, silence the trumpets of divine truth, cease the sweet bells of Aaron from ringing in our ears, bring about a loss of spiritual vision, and let our Sabbaths become devoid of the word of the Lord, as foretold by the prophet Amos. Then our days of peace and prosperity will turn into weeping, mourning, and lamentation. May God, out of His infinite mercy, turn this away from us.

Philagathus

Amen, Amen. Let us all earnestly pray day and night that, by God's infinite mercy, these fearful judgments that our sins continually cry out for may be averted. May His glorious Gospel continue to be with us and our descendants, with even greater success.

Asunetus:

Undoubtedly, it is a great sin to despise the word of God, and I believe there are none so wicked who would do so. We ought to love God's word; may it never be otherwise. It is a pity for someone who does not love God's word to exist.

Theologus:

Those are merely empty words. It is easy to speak well. Many will say the same as you, but both you and they, in your actions, clearly show that you do not value it; you regard it no more than a dishcloth. I suspect that if the matter were thoroughly examined, you hardly have a Bible in your house. And even if you do, it is evident that you rarely read it with care or conscience, and you seldom listen to the preached word. Otherwise, how could you be so ignorant as you are?

Asunetus:

I admit that I and some others are somewhat negligent in hearing and reading the word of God, but you cannot say that we therefore hold it in contempt.

Theologus:

Indeed, your continuous negligence and carelessness clearly demonstrate contempt. It is evident that you have no desire or inclination for the holy word of God. You would rather do anything else than read or meditate on it. It is burdensome to you. You don't even read two chapters in a week. All religious exercises are bitter and tedious to you. They are like vinegar to your teeth and smoke to your eyes. Your excessive love for this world and vanity has taken away your appetite for heavenly things. And while you try to excuse it with negligence, the Apostle hits the mark when he says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Notice that he says, "if we neglect."

Antilegon:

It seems you think men have nothing else to do but read the scriptures and listen to sermons.

Theologus:

I do not say that. I do not say you should do nothing else. For God allows you, with a clear conscience and in His fear, to fulfill the duties of your calling, as mentioned before. But what I condemn in you and many others is that you give no time to private prayers, reading, and meditation in God's word—neither in the morning nor evening, neither before your work nor after. And even though you often have enough free time, you would rather spend it in vanity, idle chatter, and gossiping than in any worthwhile religious exercise. This clearly shows that you take no delight in holy things and that there is no true fear of God before your eyes.

Antilegon:

I'm telling you plainly, we must attend to our business; otherwise, we

may end up begging. We can't live off the Scriptures. If we devote ourselves to sermons, we'll never prosper. Do you think everyone is obligated to read the Scriptures? Don't we have our five senses? Don't we know what we're supposed to do? You're trying to make fools of us, it seems. But we are neither drunk nor mad.

Theologus:

That every person, regardless of their status, is morally obligated to hear and read the word of God has been demonstrated and proven at the beginning of our conversation. But as for your five senses, they won't suffice in these matters, even if you had fifteen senses. For all the intellect, reason, and understanding of natural men in God's matters is nothing but blindness and utter foolishness. The Apostle states that the wisdom of the wisest in this world is not only foolishness with God but is actually enmity against God. And again, he says that the natural man (with all his five senses) does not understand the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned. Elihu speaks wisely to this point, saying, "There is a spirit in man, but the inspiration of the Almighty gives understanding."

Antilegon:

I do not understand the Scriptures you quote; they do not penetrate my mind.

Theologus:

I believe so indeed. For the Holy Spirit says, "Wisdom is too high for a fool."

Antilegon:

Are you calling me a fool? I am no more a fool than you are.

Theologus:

I am not calling you a fool, but I am telling you what the Scripture says. It calls all people, even those who are otherwise wise, shrewd, and learned, fools until they are truly enlightened and inwardly

sanctified by the Spirit of God. This is evident in Titus 3:3, where the Apostle affirms that both Titus and himself were fools without understanding and sense in matters concerning God before they received the illuminating Spirit of God's grace.

Philagathus

I beg you, good Mr. Theologus:

gus, leave him be. He will never stop arguing. I see he is a skilled arguer. So let us proceed to discuss the fifth sign of condemnation, which is swearing.

Theologus:

Indeed, it can rightly be called a sign of condemnation. In fact, I consider it more than just a sign; it is a clear demonstration of a reprobate. For I have never known any person who truly fears God in their heart to be a habitual and frequent swearer.

Philagathus

I completely agree with you on that. It cannot be that true fear of God and regular swearing coexist in one person, since swearing is expressly forbidden. God adds a severe threat to His law, stating that He will not hold guiltless those who take His name in vain but will punish them sharply and severely.

Theologus:

You are correct. And God also says that if we do not fear and dread His glorious and awe-inspiring name, Jehovah, He will bring upon us extraordinary plagues. Through His prophet Malachi, He declares that He will swiftly testify against those who swear falsely. The prophet Zechariah states that the flying book of God's curse and vengeance will enter the house of the swearer, and they will be cut off.

Therefore, let all swearers be cautious and take heed of their actions in time. We can see that there is a punishment in store for them.

Philagathus

Considering the severity of these threats, which come directly from the God of Heaven Himself, one would think they should make people's hearts tremble and cause them to be afraid of uttering such oaths as they do. But it seems that they are completely hardened, devoid of feeling, and past the reach of grace.

Theologus:

Indeed, that is true. However, we can observe through lamentable experience how people continue to swear and blaspheme. Swearing has become an exceedingly common sin among us today. Many cannot speak a sentence without including an oath. Numerous individuals have developed such a wicked habit of swearing that they cannot give it up, just as a Black-moore cannot change their skin or a leopard its spots. Swearing has become natural to them due to custom, and they are deeply entrenched in this habit. I truly believe that even if swearing were considered high treason, some would still not be able to refrain from it. And I am certain (despite how lightly we regard it) that it is high treason against the crown of Heaven. Indeed, it is a sin directly against God Himself, against His very person. That is why He has forbidden it in the first commandment of His law.

Philagathus

Undoubtedly, this vice of swearing is the most prevalent among all other sins in this country. Even little boys and children in the streets utter fearful oaths. It would make one's heart tremble to hear them. We might think that they have learned such language from their mothers' milk, but we are sure that they have acquired it from the evil example set by their parents. Nowadays, it is rare to have a conversation with someone without them using oaths in their ordinary speech.

Theologus:

I will tell you something astonishing, and it saddens me greatly to say

it. I truly believe that there are a hundred thousand oaths sworn in this land every day of the year.

Philagathus

Undoubtedly, Sir, you are correct. Nowadays, there are almost as many oaths as there are people, with only a few exceptions. In fact, I know several individuals from my own experience who, if given the opportunity, will swear a hundred oaths every day of the year.

Theologus:

Oh, what a lamentable situation it is! We can indeed echo the ancient complaint of the prophet Jeremiah, who said that in his time, the land mourned because of oaths. It is truly astonishing that the land does not collapse under the weight of oaths. If God were not infinitely patient, how could He endure His sacred and glorious name to be blasphemed so many thousands of times in a single day, and by miserable wretches like us?

Philagathus

We can certainly marvel and be amazed at the patience and long-suffering of God, that He has spared us for so long and given us ample time for repentance. However, the prophet also states that, although the Lord is slow to anger, He is great in power and will not let the wicked go unpunished. Even though He may overlook their monstrous oaths for a time, He does not forget them in the least. He keeps a record and registers them in His book of accounts, so they stand as evidence against them. And when the day of reckoning arrives, He will present them all in order and hold them accountable.

Therefore, let wicked swearers and blasphemers not think that they will always escape without consequences just because God leaves them alone for a while and defers their punishment. The longer God delays, the more terrible His strikes will be when they come. The longer an arrow is held in the bow, the stronger the shot will be when it is released. Though God may move slowly to execute wrath, He has an iron hand and will strike with deadly force when the time comes.

Even though God may grant the wicked a false sense of security for a time (as Job says), His eyes are fixed on all their ways. And in another place, he says, "The wicked are reserved for the day of destruction, and they shall be brought forth for the day of wrath." Thus, the righteous man Job plainly affirms that the state and condition of all rich and worldly individuals is like that of an ox that is fattened for the day of slaughter. In the same chapter, he states, "They spend their days in wealth and suddenly go down to hell." Now, I ask you to name the oaths that are so prevalent and common among us.

Theologus:

There are six oaths that are the most prevalent and common in every person's speech, and they are as follows:

- By my faith.
- By my troth.
- By our Lady.
- By Saint Mary.
- By God.
- As God shall judge me.

It is difficult to have a conversation with someone without them uttering one of these phrases in their everyday speech.

Asunetus:

Do you consider it such a grave matter for a person to swear by their faith or their troth?

Theologus:

Yes, indeed I do. Our faith and our troth are the most precious jewels we possess. Should we then gamble them away with every word we speak? It shows that we are not trustworthy and even bankrupt individuals. For who, except a bankrupt, would pledge their most valuable jewel for every trivial matter?

Asunetus:

I know a man who never swears except by saying "Cock" or "Pie" or "Mouse-foot." I hope you won't consider those as oaths. He is as honest a man as ever lived, and you will never hear an oath from his lips.

Theologus:

I do not believe that he is as honest as you claim him to be. For it is no small sin to swear by creatures. The Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah, "They have forsaken me and sworn by those who are not gods." Therefore, to swear by creatures is to forsake God. And I believe you would not consider a person honest if they forsake God.

Asunetus:

I do not believe that swearing by trivial things is a forsaking of God.

Theologus:

People like you will only believe what aligns with your own fantasies, not the word of God. But regardless of what you believe or don't believe, the word of God remains steadfast and none of it will ever be proven false. However, I will tell you this: the more base and lowly the thing is that you swear by, the greater the oath becomes. This is because you attribute to a base creature what is exclusive to God alone: namely, the knowledge of our hearts and the discernment of secret things. When a person swears by something, they call it as a witness to their conscience that they speak the truth and do not lie. This act belongs only to God. Therefore, when we swear by creatures, we are robbing God of His honor. Swearing by the cross of money, bread, a mouse foot, the fire they call "God's Angel," or anything similar is a theft of God's honor and an attribution of what is proper only to the Creator to the creature.

Asunetus:

Then what do you say about those who swear by the Mass and by the Rood?

Theologus:

Their sin is just as great as the others. Swearing by idols such as S. Mary, our Lady, the Mass, the Rood, and so on is a serious offense. The prophet Amos says, "They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and that say, 'Thy God, O Dan, lives,' even they shall fall and never rise up again." To swear by the sin of Samaria is to swear by idols, as Samaria was full of idols.

Furthermore, the Lord threatens through the prophet Zephaniah that He will cut off those who swear by the Lord and by Malcham, or by their King. The idolaters called their idol Molech, their King.

Asunetus:

Since you condemn both swearing by creatures and swearing by idols, then what should we swear by? It seems you want us to swear by nothing.

Theologus:

In our everyday communication, we should not swear at all, whether by one thing or another. As our Lord teaches us, our communication should be simple and truthful, with a straightforward "yes" or "no." Anything beyond that comes from evil. Saint James also says, "Above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. But let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no,' lest you fall into condemnation."

Antilegon:

It seems you are an Anabaptist. You condemn all swearing; you don't want any swearing at all.

Theologus:

Not so. Although I condemn swearing by creatures, swearing by idols, and vain swearing, I do allow swearing before a Magistrate and privately as well, in important matters, to further establish the truth.

This is justified by God Himself, as He says, "You shall swear, 'The Lord lives,' in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness." In these

cases only, the name of God is to be sworn by, as it is written: "You shall fear the Lord your God, and you shall serve Him, and shall cleave unto Him, and shall swear by His name."

Asunetus:

Are we not allowed to swear by God in our everyday conversation?

Theologus:

By no means. That is taking the name of God in vain, which you know is forbidden.

Even a wise Heathen could say this: "When an oath is imposed upon you, accept it for two reasons: either to clear yourself from a serious crime and accusation, or to protect your friends from danger." Therefore, that Heathen man does not allow any oath in common conversation, let alone swearing by God. Another says, "Avoid an oath, even if you swear truthfully." So we see that even Heathens condemn vain swearing.

Asunetus:

Yes, but despite all that, we must swear; otherwise, people won't believe us.

Theologus:

Yet, swearing won't make them believe you any more. It is evident that many have no conscience about it whatsoever. They treat it as casually as cracking nuts. So, why would any wise person believe them, even if they swear excessively? However, if you always have a conscience to speak the truth from your heart, without any oaths at all, you will be better believed by all honest and wise individuals than with a thousand oaths.

Antilegon:

It is the custom to swear.

Theologus:

But it is a wicked and devilish custom.

Antilegon:

I hope, sir, we may swear, as long as we swear truthfully and swear by nothing but that which is good.

Theologus:

It has been answered before that in vain matters, you may not swear at all.

Antilegon:

As long as we do no worse than that, I hope God will consider us excused.

Theologus:

God will not consider you excused when you break His commandments and continue to do so.

Antilegon:

What do you say then about those who swear by wounds and blood, and similar things, as a form of boasting, thinking it adds to their speech?

Theologus:

Hell is ready for them, and they will one day know the consequences of blaspheming God.

Antilegon:

What do you think of those who swear by God's life, God's soul, God's body, God's heart?

Theologus:

Their actions are most woeful and dangerous, and I tremble at their mention. They are utterly horrendous, monstrous, and outrageous blasphemies, enough to make the stones in the street crack and the clouds fall upon our heads. We may believe that all the demons in hell are ready to hurl such blasphemous villains into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, forever.

Antilegon:

Do you find in the Scriptures that God will punish swearers so severely?

Theologus:

Yes, indeed. In addition to what has been previously mentioned, we have numerous other examples that illustrate the wrath of God against blasphemers. Let's consider Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, who, for his outrageous blasphemies against the God of heaven, was tragically killed by his own sons, Adramelech and Sharezer, while he was worshipping his idol god, Nisroch, in the Temple. This serves as a fearful demonstration of God's wrath.

Furthermore, we read of an incident where the Israelites slew one hundred thousand Aramites in a single day for their blasphemy against God. And when twenty-seven thousand survivors sought refuge in the city of Aphek, a great wall collapsed, causing their demise. Moreover, let's not forget the seven sons of Saul, the King of Israel, who were hanged before the Lord in Mount Gibeath as punishment for breaking the oath made to the Gibeonites long ago. These examples clearly reveal that the just God, even in this earthly life, sometimes avenges blasphemers and oath-breakers. Consequently, even the heathens throughout history have been cautious when it comes to fulfilling oaths, as evidenced by Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, who instructed Joseph to honour his oath to bury his father in the land of Canaan.

Philagathus

It seems to me that these terrifying and dreadful examples of God's vengeance against swearers and blasphemers should instill fear in the hearts of our own blasphemers.

Theologus:

One would indeed think so, if anything could accomplish it. But alas, they have become so hardened in their ways and in all other forms of sin that nothing can move them. Perhaps only a severe law, such as

mandating that every swearer and blasphemer endure fifteen minutes of holding their hand in boiling lead, could somewhat restrain them and make them reconsider their oaths. However, unless such measures are taken, they will not fear anything until they find themselves in the fires of hell, at which point it will be too late for repentance.

Philagathus

What could be the cause of such frequent and excessive swearing? Surely it is not an inherent and innate sin in our nature like some other sins.

Theologus:

No, indeed. But I believe these three factors contribute to its prevalence:

- Custom.
- Lack of admonition.
- Lack of punishment.

Philagathus

So what are the remedies for it then?

Theologus:

The remedies are as follows:

- Discontinuation.
- Prayer.
- Friendly admonition.
- Implementation of strict laws.

Philagathus

Very well, now that we have discussed swearing sufficiently, please proceed to the next sign of condemnation: lying.

Theologus:

Swearing and lying are closely related. A frequent swearer is often a

habitual liar as well. Those who have no regard for swearing will have no qualms about lying. Just as the Lord despises one, He also despises the other. And just as He punishes one, He will punish the other. Solomon declares: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." Saint John also states: "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." Furthermore, the same holy man of God proclaims that liars will have their share in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Philagathus

The Scriptures you mention clearly reveal that God detests liars and has prepared great torments for them. Therefore, the noble Prophet David declares his intention to banish all liars from his house. He declares that those who tell lies will not be allowed in his presence. A lying tongue is one of the six things that God hates and finds abhorrent. Yet, despite this, we witness the lamentable reality of how many people have trained their tongues to lie, as the Prophet states, and there is no truth in their lips. This vice is nearly as prevalent as swearing. It is difficult to find a person who will consistently speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth from their heart, with sincerity and simplicity, in all circumstances, among all individuals, without any deception or pretense. Where, I ask, can such a person be found? I would eagerly like to see them. I would be delighted to lay my eyes upon such an individual. It would bring joy to my heart to behold such a person.

Theologus:

A man like the one you speak of is hardly to be found among human beings. They are black Swans on the earth, they are white crows: they are rare birds. There are very few who will speak the truth from their heart, although I hope that some such individuals exist. But, for the most part, especially among the influential, lying, deceit, and fraud prevail. There is no truth, honesty, conscience, simplicity, or straightforwardness among people in these most corrupt times. Faith and truth have completely vanished. As the noble prophet says: The

faithful have disappeared from among the children of men. They speak deceitfully with each other, flatter with their lips, and have a double heart. Nowadays, people study the art of lying, flattering, fawning, glossing over, and deceiving. They have one face for the public and another in their hearts. They speak with honey in their mouths but carry gall in their hearts. Their tongues are as smooth as butter and oil, but their hearts are filled with bitterness, poison, and wormwood. They are outwardly courteous and civil, full of empty compliments, while inwardly lacking truth and sincerity. They will speak kindly to you while plotting harm against you. They will show you a friendly countenance while wishing ill upon you. In their outward appearance, they will present themselves in a pleasing manner, while their hearts are full of venom and malice. This treacherous brood merely waits for the right time and opportunity to catch someone off guard, and then they will sting and unleash their malice upon them. These fawning curs won't bark until they bite. They will hide and lie low until they spot an advantage, and then they will reveal their true nature. They will raise a person up and turn them over if they can. These individuals are like deep waters that appear calm, like a dangerous rock hidden beneath a calm sea. As the Heathen say, they are like the Sirens' song that leads sailors to their doom, like the Fowler's whistle that brings death to birds, like the hidden bait that spells doom for fish, like the Harpies with their virgin faces and vulture's talons, or like the Hyena that speaks like a friend and devours like a foe. Just as Scripture says, they are like Joab, the captain of the host, who spoke kindly to Amasa, another captain, and kissed him, only to immediately stab him. They are like the servants of the Herodians and Pharisees who approached our Lord Jesus with many insincere flatteries, calling him a good master and praising his teachings as the plain truth, claiming he taught the way of God truly and showed no partiality, showering him with morning greetings and all that nonsense, when in reality, their purpose was to entangle him in his words, trap him, and find an opportunity to harm him, to cut his throat and deal with him harshly. This is what the wise man meant when he said, "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet." And again, "Fawning lips and

an evil heart are like silver dross overlaid upon an earthen pot." In another instance, he declares, "He who bears hatred will counterfeit with his lips, but he lays deceit in his heart. When he speaks kindly, do not trust him, for there are seven abominations in his heart. He will conceal his malice with deceit, but it will be revealed in the congregation." In another place, he pronounces a curse upon all these hollow-hearted hypocrites and honey-mouthed flatterers. He says, "To him who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, a curse shall be imputed."

Philagathus

You have accurately described the state of men in this age, who have faces, countenances, and tongues, but no hearts. They openly profess lying and dissembling. They say that one cannot survive without deception, they have pleasant faces but deceitful hearts, and they have forgotten that honesty is the best policy.

Theologus:

The Holy Spirit often refers to all unregenerate men as fools in the Proverbs of Solomon, or as it is in Hebrew, men without hearts. This is because they have no heart for God, no heart for His word, no heart for His children, no heart for godliness, no heart for anything that is good. They lack an honest, upright, and straightforward heart. They are all talk, but there is no action. They make grand promises but only deliver trivial things. They speak well of religion but do nothing to practice it. They give pleasant words to their friends but do nothing of substance for them.

Philagathus

The world is filled with these masked impostors, and lying and dissembling have never been more prevalent.

Theologus:

It is true that lying and dissembling are rampant and widely practiced vices among all sorts of people, but they particularly overflow and abound among shopkeepers and servants. It has

become their trade and occupation, and they cannot do anything but lie. It clings to them like a nail to a door.

Philagathus

I personally know some shopkeepers who engage in lying all day long, from morning till evening, in order to sell their poor quality goods and deceive unsuspecting customers. If customers come in quickly, their lives consist of swearing, lying, dissembling, and deceiving. They lie as effortlessly as a dog trots, as the saying goes. It's a wonder that their shops and all their goods don't go up in flames due to their constant, immoral, and abominable lying, against their own knowledge, against their conscience, against God, against their fellow human beings, against heaven and earth, against men and angels.

Theologus:

It is true, we can marvel at God's longsuffering in this matter. But it should be noted that God does not immediately punish all notorious sinners in this life. He reserves thousands for the judgment of the great day. In this life, He only selects a few whom He strikes down as examples for others, so that they may fear, tremble, and learn from the harm that befalls others.

Therefore, even in this life, we witness some liars, drunkards, whoremongers, swearers, worldly misers, ruffians, and murderers being struck down by God's avenging hand. However, for every one He punishes in this life, He allows a hundred to escape. If He were to punish all offenders in this life, what purpose would the judgment to come serve? If He were to punish none, then we would think there is no God or that He is idle in heaven, not doing good, evil, or intervening in earthly matters, as some Epicures have imagined. To avoid these extremes, God, in His heavenly wisdom, has chosen to intervene with some even in this world.

Philagathus

I believe that gains acquired through swearing, lying, and deceit will

never prosper in the long run.

Theologus:

You are not mistaken in that belief. God will blow upon all such ill-gotten gains, and they will go into a bottomless purse, as the Prophet says in Haggai 1:6. In the book of Proverbs, the Holy Spirit provides many excellent sayings on this matter. For instance, in chapter 13, it is said: "The wealth of the wicked is soon gone, but the wealth of the diligent will increase." Again: "Deceitful dealings lead to poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth." In another place, it is stated: "The deceitful person does not roast what he catches while hunting." That means they will not enjoy or taste the spoils they obtained through fraud for long. Troubles of one kind or another will arise, preventing them from possessing or finding pleasure in their ill-gotten gains. It is said: "The bread gained by deceit may be sweet at first, but afterward, the mouth will be filled with gravel." This signifies that the crafty person will encounter many troubles in the end. Their conscience will rebuke and torment them, or vengeance will afflict them for their deceit. The fears, worries, and sorrows they experience will be like sharp stones, causing discomfort and vexation. Therefore, instead of enjoying a satisfying meal, they will feed on gravel, and instead of wheat, they will consume pebbles. There is little pleasure to be derived in the long run from ill-gotten goods or unlawfully acquired wealth. The Holy Spirit has passed judgment upon them, declaring that they will never prosper.

Philagathus

It sometimes happens that they prosper for a while, but as we say, the third generation shall never enjoy them. God will curse our descendants, and our children's children will suffer the consequences of our sins. Therefore, the righteous man, Job, says that the offspring of the wicked will not be satisfied with bread. Without a doubt, God will bless only that which is acquired with a clear conscience through the works of our calling. It will remain blessed for us and our descendants. Thus, the Spirit says, "The just man who walks in his uprightness is blessed, and his children shall be blessed after him."

But God will not bless, but curse that which is acquired with an evil conscience, such as swearing, lying, dissembling, deceiving, and so on.

Theologus:

Some wise writers have spoken prudently on this matter. One says, "Unjust gains bring short pleasures but long sorrows." Another says, "Choose loss rather than filthy lucre, for the former will grieve you only once, while the latter will grieve you forever." A third says, "It is better to be honestly poor than wickedly rich, for the former elicits pity, while the latter invites reproach." Even one of the wise Heathens says, "We should not become rich unjustly but live on just things, which he calls holy things."

Philagathus

Do we not have examples in the Scriptures of those who were punished for lying?

Theologus:

Yes, we read how the Gibeonites, for their lying and deceit, were made slaves and servants to the Israelites. Gehazi, the servant of the prophet Elisha, was struck with a severe leprosy for his lying and greed. Ananias and Sapphira, for their lying and deceit, were struck dead by God's immediate hand at the rebuke of Peter.

Zophar, one of Job's friends, speaking of such people, says, "They shall suck the poison of asps, and the viper's tongue shall slay them. They shall flee from iron weapons, and a bow of steel shall pierce them through."

By all these examples, we can clearly see how greatly God abhors lying and deceit.

Philagathus

Oh, if only we could follow the counsel of the Apostle who says, "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds." And again, "Cast away lying and speak the truth to your

neighbor." The language used by the Apostle is very powerful, implying that we should cast lying away with disdain and detestation, as if it were a filthy, stinking rag hanging around our necks, which we swiftly snatch away and throw into the fire, ashamed that it was ever seen or known. I wish that we could have such a detestation and disgust for lying that we would spit at it and cry out "shame" upon it and all who use it! Oh, that we could hate it as much as the devil, who is its father, and as much as the fires of hell, which is its reward! Oh, if we could only reach the point of the heathen man who says, "I hate him like the gates of hell, who speaks with a forked tongue!"

Antilegon:

Nevertheless, we find in the scriptures that even some of the godly have been caught in lying, yet without sinning in doing so, such as Abraham, Jacob, Rahab, and the Midwives of Egypt. Therefore, why can't we do the same?

Theologus:

I already told you that you should not take the infirmities of God's people as rules for your own life. Furthermore, I must clarify that all these individuals did indeed err in their actions. Some of them, I admit, are praised for their love for the church and their charitable affection towards God's people, but none of them are praised simply for lying, which even the heathens condemned. As one of them said, "Lying corrupts a person's life," and every wise and godly person hates lying.

Antilegon:

But can't we lie now and then for our advantage?

Theologus:

No, certainly not. There is no true advantage to be gained that way. When you calculate your accounts, deduct all expenses, and cover all your deceit, your net gains will be very small. Through your deliberate and habitual lying, you gain inner sorrow and lose true

joy; you gain momentary pleasure and lose eternal glory; you gain hell and lose heaven; you make the devil your friend and God your enemy. Now, consider your gain.

Philagathus

I urge you to bring this discussion to a conclusion and briefly show us the main causes of lying.

Theologus:

The main causes of lying are as follows:

- Custom.
- Fear.
- Greed.
- The devil.

Philagathus

What are the remedies?

Theologus:

The remedies are as follows:

- Discontinuation.
- Courage in godliness.
- Contentment.
- Sincere prayer.

Philagathus

You have spoken enough about this vice to make those who have even a drop of grace or a spark of fear towards God detest and abandon it. As for those who are depraved, let them continue in their filthiness. Now, I ask you to share your thoughts on the seventh sign of condemnation: drunkenness.

Theologus:

It is such a brutish and beastly sin that one would think it shouldn't even need to be spoken against, as all reasonable people should

naturally abhor it and tremble at the thought of it. It is an utterly swinish thing that transforms a person into a beast. It steals away a person's heart from all goodness, as the Prophet Hosea testifies, saying: "Whoredom, wine, and new wine take away their heart." For what heart, what appetite, what inclination can whoremongers and drunkards have towards anything that is good? They are far from it, far from God, and far from all grace and goodness. The Prophet Joel says: "Awake, you drunkards; weep and howl, all you drinkers of wine." Moreover, the mighty God of heaven pronounces a woe against those who eagerly pursue drunkenness from morning till night, until they are inflamed with wine. Our Lord Jesus himself warns us to be cautious, saying: "Take heed that your hearts are not overcome with excess and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day come upon you unexpectedly." Thus, you hear how both Christ himself and various Prophets strongly condemn this gross bestiality that now abounds and prevails among humanity.

Philagathus

Indeed, that is true. But almost nothing can make people abandon it, as it is an extremely prevalent and common vice. We see many individuals who consider themselves important (and, as we say, no small fools) yet succumb to it, thereby losing all their credibility and reputation among wise individuals. They prove themselves to be nothing but swine and brutish beasts, as the Holy Spirit declares: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whoever is deceived by it is not wise."

Theologus:

The wise king in the same book vividly and comprehensively describes the inconveniences and harms that accompany drunkenness and follow drunkards closely. To whom (he asks) is woe? To whom is alas? To whom is strife? To whom is babbling? To whom are wounds without cause? To whom is the redness of the eyes? The answer is: to those who linger long at wine, to those who seek out mixed drinks. In the same chapter, he advises: "Do not be among those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat,

for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags." Furthermore, he warns that their eyes will behold strange women and that they will be like a person lying in the middle of the sea, sleeping at the top of a mast. In all these descriptions, the Holy Spirit vividly portrays the characteristics of drunkards—their staggering, reeling, snorting, and senseless indulgence. Behold the cursed fruits and consequences of drunkenness: woe, alas, grief, misery, beggary, poverty, shame, lust, strife, babbling, brawling, fighting, quarreling, excess, sickness, diseases, swinish sleeping, recklessness, and sensuality. Thus, I conclude that drunkenness is a vice more suitable for a hog than for any reasonable person. As someone said, it is the capital city of all vices in the province.

It is well said by the Heathen writer: "When the wine is in, a man is like a running coach without a coachman."

Philagathus

Let us hear about the punishments that have been inflicted upon drunkards in past ages, so that people may learn to be cautious from their examples.

Theologus:

Amnon, one of David's wicked children, was killed by his brother Absalom while he was drunk. Ben-Hadad, the King of Syria, was defeated by Ahab, the King of Israel, when he was drunk. Elah, the King of Israel, was slain by his servant Zimri, the captain of his chariots, while he was drunk, and Zimri succeeded him as king. Lot, while drunk, committed incest with his own daughters and was consequently punished through his descendants. Thus, we see that even kings have faced punishment for this kind of sin. Therefore, let people finally learn to shun vice and embrace virtue, and as the Apostle says, let them work out their salvation with fear and trembling. All our evasions and escapes will serve no purpose in the end. When we have twisted and turned in all directions, we will ultimately find ourselves subject to God's wrath.

Antilegon:

Why do you consider it such a serious matter if a person gets a little drunk now and then? Everyone has their faults, and even the best of us can improve. When neighbours gather occasionally at the pub to play a game of Maw for a pint of ale, without any ill intentions, I believe it fosters good fellowship and strengthens neighbourly love. It's not as grave as you make it out to be.

Theologus:

I see you're trying to downplay the issue and sugarcoat it with pleasant words, as if it weren't such a significant evil. However you try to soften it, the Apostle plainly states that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. I believe this single sentence is enough to astonish and deeply affect the hearts of all drunkards in the world. It is essentially saying that all drunkards are notorious reprobates and hellions, marked by Satan and destined for eternal destruction and damnation.

But you claim you mean no harm. I respond that regardless of your intentions, your actions are wrong and your companionship is equally bad. What good intentions could you have? And what do you call good fellowship when labouring men, craftsmen, and the like, spend their entire days idling away in taverns and pubs, wasting their time and money on gambling, indulgence, swearing, staring, excessive drinking, squandering, boozing, brawling, and quarrelling? There is no true fellowship in it; it is pure impiety. If we can even call it impiety, for poor men to live idly and dissolutely, neglecting their occupations while their wives and children sit at home starving, on the brink of begging or stealing. I implore you to speak your conscience: what good fellowship is there in this?

Antilegon:

Yet despite all that, there are some who avoid alehouses and yet are as bad as any others. They engage in backbiting and slandering their neighbours; they harm others just as readily. They are envious,

judgmental, and scornful of our company. Yet we consider ourselves as good as them, despite their outward displays of holiness.

Theologus:

You speak more than you know or can justify, criticizing those who are better than yourself. Even if that were the case, you would only be justifying one sin with another, a lesser sin with a greater one, which serves no purpose.

Antilegon:

Are you then condemning all forms of good fellowship?

Theologus:

No, no. I highly value godly and Christian fellowship and recognize it as one of the greatest comforts we have in the world. I know we are commanded to love brotherly fellowship. However, when it comes to your companionship centered around drinking, I hate it and detest it. For it is written: "He who follows the idle will be filled with poverty." And again: "He who keeps company with revelers dishonours his father." And in another place: "He who loves amusement will be a poor man, and he who loves wine and oil will not be rich."

Philagathus

Good Mr. Theologus:

gus, let us not waste more words with him. Instead, let us focus on the heart of the matter and tell us briefly, what are the main causes of drunkenness.

Theologus:

The causes are as follows:

- Bad company.
- Alehouses.
- Idleness.
- A wicked disposition.

Philagathus

What are the true remedies then?

Theologus:

The remedies are as follows:

- Avoiding bad company.
- Staying away from Alehouses.
- Diligently working in our respective occupations.
- Leading a good and righteous life.

Philagathus

Well, Sir, you have covered enough ground on this matter. Let us now move on to the eighth sign of condemnation, which is idleness.

Theologus:

Regarding idleness, I will say this briefly: it is the root of all vices and the enemy of all virtues. It is the source of all enormities. It is the mother of whoredom, pride, theft, drunkenness, ignorance, error, poverty, slander, backbiting, gossiping, brawling, quarrelling, and more. Idleness was one of the main sins of Sodom, as stated by the Prophet Ezekiel: "Pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was found in her and her daughters." Solomon also has much to say on this matter. He says, "The sluggard craves and gets nothing." And again, "The sluggard considers himself wiser than seven men who can provide sound advice." This means that he considers himself wiser than many because he avoids exerting effort while others work. He says, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest," and his poverty comes upon him like a traveller, suddenly and strongly. He folds his hands and eats his own flesh, for he is too lazy to even bring food to his mouth.

In another passage, the Holy Spirit says: "The lazy man does not plough in winter, therefore he will beg in summer and have nothing." Furthermore, it is said that the lazy man is akin to a great spender.

Moreover, it is stated that the sluggard turns himself on his bed, like a door on its hinges. That is, he remains in bed as if he were attached to it.

And because the Spirit emphasizes this point, it is further written about the idle man that he says: "There is a great lion in the way, I shall be slain in the streets." This means that when there is a good task at hand (such as preaching, praying, reading, giving to the poor, etc.), he retreats, he shrinks back, he finds one obstacle or excuse after another. Then profit and pleasure, business and idleness, matters at home and abroad, company, and a thousand distractions lie in his path, like so many lions, to hinder and obstruct him. Thus, we can see how vividly and abundantly the holy Scriptures depict the lazy and indolent individuals of this world, the sons of idleness, who are as unwilling to engage in any good thing as a bear to the stake. When it comes to the duties of religion, they approach them as reluctantly and cheerfully as a thief ascends the ladder to be executed for his theft.

Philagathus

I clearly see that this sin of idleness is a very grave evil and the root of many vices. Yet, despite that, there are many who believe they were born to live idle lives, such as young gentlemen and the like, who imagine that their purpose in life is nothing more than hunting, hawking, playing cards, gambling, indulging in revelry, and spending their days in pleasure and vanity. Similarly, there are many lazy individuals, both in towns and villages, who do nothing all day long except wander the streets, sit on stools, and frequent taverns and alehouses. Many wealthy citizens, especially women, regularly stay in bed until nine o'clock, and then they rise and prepare themselves for dinner. After a hearty meal, they spend the remainder of the day and a good part of the night in playing, gossiping, prattling, babbling, and chattering. Shame on this idle way of life. Many profane servants also falsely assume that they were born solely to gamble, revel, swear, engage in promiscuity, create disturbances, and waste their time in

idleness. But concerning all these, the pagan philosopher aptly remarked: "Both gods and men despise the idle person."

Theologus:

It is a sorrowful thing to witness so many men and women living idly and unproductively as they do. Alas, there are far too many who have no honest occupation, contribute nothing of value, and are of no benefit to anyone. They do no good for the Church or the society at large. They are like drone bees, burdens on the earth. God has no use for them, the Church gains no good from them, the society reaps no benefits, their neighbours receive no profit, and the poor receive no relief. They believe that their purpose in life is to do nothing but eat, drink, sleep, and engage in frivolous activities. They think they should spend their time in gambling, dancing, promiscuity, indulging in excessive feasting and gluttony. They indulge themselves, resembling the pigs in Epicurus' herd, pampering their bellies and fattening themselves like boars in a pigsty until they become well-fed. As Job says, their bones are filled with marrow, their faces swell with fatness, and they have plump rolls of flesh on their sides. Oh, what a beastly life this is! Shame upon it, shame upon it. It is more fitting for Epicures than Christians, more suitable for swine than for humans, more in line with Sardanapalus, Heliogabalus, and similar self-indulgent gods than with the followers of the Gospel. However, concerning such individuals, Job speaks clearly: "They spend their days in pleasure and suddenly descend into hell."

Philagathus

But may Lords and Ladies, gentlemen and gentlewomen, and other affluent individuals not be allowed to live idly, considering they have the means to support it?

Theologus:

God does not permit anyone to live idly. Both great and small should be engaged in some form of useful activity, whether for the benefit of the Church or society, for the proper management of their households, for the welfare of towns and parishes, and for those with

whom they interact, or for the aid and support of the poor, or for the advancement of the Gospel and the maintenance of the Ministry, or for any other good purpose. Our intellect, education, reading, skills, prudence, wealth, health, wisdom, and authority should be directed towards these ends. We should be aware that one day we will give an account of our stewardship and be held accountable for how we have utilized our talents. For this reason, Job states that man is born to toil, just as sparks fly upward. God has imposed this upon Adam and all his descendants: "By the sweat of your brow, you shall eat your bread." Some identify four reasons why every person should diligently work in their respective occupations:

First, to bear the burden placed upon all humanity by the Lord.

Secondly, to acquire the necessities of life.

Thirdly, to contribute to the well-being of human society.

Lastly, to avoid evil thoughts and actions.

Saint Paul finds great fault with some in the Church of Thessalonica because they walked in disorder, meaning they were idle and without a lawful occupation. He concluded that those who would not work should not eat. Therefore, it is clear that God does not allow idleness in anyone. As shown before, when we are idle, we are vulnerable to the devil and his temptations, and he gains power over us. When David idled at home instead of going to battle as kings usually did, he quickly fell into the grievous sins of adultery and manslaughter. As long as Samson fought against the Philistines, he could not be captured or defeated. But after he gave himself to idleness and pleasure, he not only committed fornication with the prostitute Delilah but also was captured by his enemies and had his eyes painfully gouged out. These examples demonstrate how dangerous idleness is as a sin.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit directs us to learn from the little creature, the Ant, both to avoid idleness and to exercise wisdom and prudence in our actions. "Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides her food in the summer and gathers her provisions in the harvest." Truly, it is remarkable to observe the ceaseless effort and unwearied labour of this simple creature during the summer to ensure provision for the winter. Let us, therefore, learn wisdom from her example and consider the mirror of all creatures. Let us ponder how birds fly, fish swim, worms crawl, the heavens revolve, the elements move, the sea ebbs and flows incessantly. Even the earth, the heaviest and most cumbersome creature of all, never ceases its work, bringing forth its produce in summer and toiling inwardly throughout the winter, preparing and digesting nourishment for the coming spring. Thus, we witness the diligent and arduous efforts of all creatures in their respective ways. It is, therefore, a great shame for us to live idly,

carelessly, and dissolutely. Let us learn (finally) to avoid laziness and each live faithfully, diligently, and industriously in our respective callings. In doing so, we will keep Satan at bay and prevent idleness from allowing sin to infiltrate our souls.

Philagathus

I must confess that idleness is a grave vice in whoever possesses it. But in my opinion, it is particularly repugnant in Magistrates and Ministers.

Theologus:

That is indeed true. Magistrates and Ministers have a responsibility to guide, govern, shepherd, and watch over the people of God. Neglecting their duties and responsibilities is a grave matter, as it can cause harm to many. The Heathen Poet rightly said that a magistrate or a minister cannot be lazy and slothful, as they have been entrusted with the care of the people and many things depend on them.

It is truly lamentable when magistrates are profane, irreligious, adherents of popish practices, vicious, and negligent in fulfilling their calling. And how much more lamentable it is when ministers neglect their studies, slack in preaching and prayer, and devote themselves to covetousness, pride, worldly affairs, or spend their time idly in taverns, alehouses, gambling, rioting, and immoral company. May both these types of public figures cast off idleness and sloth, and with diligence, faithfulness, care, and conscience, fulfill their duties. It is an excellent thing for anyone to be a good person in their respective position. A good magistrate rules well, governs wisely, supports good causes, and defends them. They also oppose bad individuals and causes, and punish them firmly and severely. Moreover, they uphold virtue out of a genuine love for it in their heart and punish vice with fervent zeal and hatred against it. They do so not merely for personal gain or to please others, nor out of obligation or necessity, but out of love for God, concern for His glory, a sense of duty, and a zealous opposition to sin.

Likewise, it is commendable for a minister to be a good person in their role. They should be diligent and studious in the Word of God, earnest and laborious in preaching, driven by love for God, zealous for His glory, and filled with deep compassion for the souls of the people. They should seek to bring people to God by all possible means, conducting themselves wisely, religiously, blamelessly, and without offense.

Furthermore, it is praiseworthy to be a good wealthy person who uses their riches to do much good. Such a person maintains a good household, provides for the poor, supports the needs of the saints, and gives cheerfully and wisely where there is a genuine need.

Similarly, being a good neighbour or a good citizen of a town is commendable. It brings about a peaceful, harmonious, joyful, and comfortable living environment for everyone.

Lastly, being a good poor person means being humble, lowly, dutiful, industrious, ready to help, and willing to please. Oh, I must say, this is an excellent and glorious thing when everyone fulfills their respective roles and responsibilities. When husbands fulfill their duties as husbands, wives as wives, fathers as fathers, children as children, masters as masters, and servants as servants. When each person sets their sights on God and diligently carries out the tasks that pertain to them. For in doing so, the honor of God, the glory of the ruler, the wellbeing of the Church, the strength of the nation, the safety of cities, the stability of kingdoms, and the very preservation of all things are ensured.

Antilegon:

You have made valid points in some aspects. However, I still fail to see why rich men and women cannot live idly, considering they have more than enough to sustain themselves. After all, can't a person do as they please with their own belongings?

Theologus:

No, indeed. You cannot take your own knife and use it to slit your own throat, nor can you take your own bow and use it to kill your own child. Therefore, that reasoning is flawed. Even though wealthy men and women have an abundance of everything and may not need to labor, they should still engage in profitable activities in some other way. Let them occupy themselves with some good pursuits. If they cannot find anything to do, let them devote themselves to private prayer and reading of the Scriptures, so that they may be able to instruct and encourage others. Alternatively, let ladies and gentlewomen follow the example of the virtuous woman Dorcas, who bought cloth, cut it out, worked on it, sewed shirts, smocks, coats, and garments, and gave them to the poor. It is said of Dorcas that she was a woman full of good works and acts of charity. She had a compassionate and kind heart, she befriended the poor, clothed the needy and naked, knowing it was a sacrifice pleasing to God. Oh, if only the wealthy women of our land would follow Dorcas's example. But alas, these times produce few Dorcases.

Philagathus

Just as you have explained the causes of the previous evils, I now ask you to reveal the causes of this one as well.

Theologus:

The causes of idleness are:

- Evil examples.
- Poor education.
- Living without fulfilling one's calling.

Philagathus

Please also enlighten us about the remedies.

Theologus:

The remedies are:

- Providing a good education.

- Engaging in labor during youth.
- Setting good examples.
- Being diligent in a lawful occupation.

Philagathus

Now let us discuss the final sign of condemnation: oppression. I implore you, sir, to share your thoughts on this topic based on the Scriptures.

Theologus:

It is such an extensive matter that I do not know where to begin or end with it. It is an abyss of the most grievous wickedness. I will enter into a maze from which I will not know how to escape. However, since you are eager to hear about it, I can say this: it is an exceedingly cruel monster, a bloodthirsty vice, a hideous and repugnant fiend from hell. The Scriptures cry out against it in many places, condemning it and consigning it to hell. They also thunder and flash upon all those who are tainted and corrupted by this vice, labeling them with names and titles derived from the effects of this sin, which are most fitting for oppressors. They are described as grinding the faces of the poor, stripping their skin and flesh from their bones, and devouring them like bread. These are the individuals who strive to devour everything, like savage beasts, and gain control of the entire earth by any means necessary—through oppression, fraud, and violence. These earthworms and ravagers are akin to the whale that engulfs other smaller fish, the lion that devours other animals, and the falcon that preys upon other birds. These greedy wolves consume all and swallow up the impoverished of the land. Consequently, the prophets of God unleash numerous severe woes against them.

First, the Prophet Isaiah says, "Woe unto them that join house to house, and field to field; till there be no place for the poor to dwell in; that they may be placed by themselves, in the midst of the earth."

Secondly, the Prophet Jeremiah says, "Woe unto him that builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers without equity."

Thirdly, the Prophet Micah says, "Woe unto them that covet fields, and take them by violence; and so oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

Fourthly, the Prophet Habakkuk cries out, saying, "Woe unto him that builds a Town with blood, and erects a City by iniquity." Saint James also threatens these types of men severely, saying, "Go to now you rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your gold and silver is cankered: and the rust of them shall be a witness against you; and shall eat your flesh, as it were fire."

Lastly, Saint Paul plainly says that extortioners shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Thus, we see the many fearful woes and threats that are pronounced from heaven against these deadly cut-throats of the earth.

Philagathus

And it is not enough. For they are deeply entrenched in their sin, and the stain of it is so ingrained in them that it will hardly ever be washed away. It is true, as you said, that these cruel, oppressive blood-suckers are the most harmful and dangerous vermin that crawl upon the face of the earth, and yet I believe there have never been more of them than in these days. The wicked world is now filled with those who, in various ways, bite, pinch, and torment the poor, as we witness in our daily sorrowful experiences. But you can speak more on this than I. Therefore, I beseech you, expose the various forms of oppression used in these days.

Theologus:

There is oppression through usury.

Oppression through bribery.

Oppression through excessive rent increases.

Oppression through imposing exorbitant fines.

Oppression in business transactions.
Oppression in lease agreements.
Oppression in housing rentals.
Oppression in land rentals.
Oppression through imposing unfair agreements on the poor.
Oppression through forcibly evicting the poor from their homes.
Oppression through renting poor people's houses right over their heads.
Oppression through charging excessive fees.
Oppression by lawyers.
Oppression by Church officers.
Oppression by monopolizers.
Oppression by hoarders.
Oppression of the Church.
Oppression of the Ministry.
Oppression of the poor.
Oppression of widows.
Oppression of orphans.

And thus we see how everything is filled with oppressions: nothing but oppressions, oppressions.

Philagathus

Indeed, this is an extremely cruel and oppressive era in which we live, a true iron age. It seems that the powerful individuals have no other concern but oppression. They are completely focused on it, obsessed with it, finding pleasure in it, and therefore they are driven mad by it. As Solomon says, oppression makes a wise person mad. It appears that this vice is so powerful that it can strip people of their sanity and drive them to madness in their pursuit of acquiring wealth by any means necessary, regardless of how or from whom they obtain it. However, undoubtedly, the all-wise God has established many good laws to suppress this evil and threatens to enforce them personally. His laws specifically provide for the protection of the poor, the fatherless, the widows, and the strangers. But you, Mr. Theologus:gian, can recite these statutes better than I can since you

are a dedicated divine. Therefore, I implore you to enlighten us with your knowledge.

Theologus:

In the 22nd chapter of Exodus, God established the following law: "You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless." Furthermore, He says, "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your fellow countrymen or a foreigner residing in your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise, he may cry out to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin." Moreover, the Lord declares, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." God Himself threatens to swiftly witness against those who withhold the wages of the hired workers and mistreat the widows and the fatherless. The Apostle admonishes, "Do not oppress or defraud your brother in any way, because the Lord is an avenger of all such offenses." Solomon also states, "If you see the oppression of the poor and the denial of justice and righteousness in a province, do not be astonished at the situation. For a high official watches over another official, and higher officials watch over them." All these sacred statutes and laws enacted and provided against oppressors clearly demonstrate the Lord's concern for His poor, distressed, and destitute people.

Philagathus

But these oppressive monsters are utterly indifferent. No law of the Almighty can restrain them; nothing can frighten them or hold them back. They have made a pact with Hell and death. They are completely numb and hardened. As Job says, "These are the ones who hate the light; they do not know its ways nor stay on its paths." Their hearts are as hard as diamond. Nothing can sway them or have any effect on them. There is much talk about the stone in the

kidneys, which indeed is a great torment to the body (but there is no lamentation about the stone in the heart. I mean a heart of stone, which is the most severe disease that can afflict a person's soul), and yet in these times it is becoming increasingly prevalent. For people's hearts are as hard as brass and the lower millstone, as the Scripture says. Many, especially these merciless and oppressive tyrants, say in their hearts, "God will neither do good nor evil." Therefore, they put the day of reckoning far from them and draw near to the throne of iniquity. They are at ease in Zion; they lie on beds of ivory, stretch themselves on their couches, eat the lambs of the flock and the fattened calves. They sing to the sound of the harp and invent musical instruments like David. They drink wine from bowls, and no one grieves for the affliction of Joseph, meaning the hardships of God's people. The Prophet Isaiah also laments about these kinds of people, saying, "They do not regard the work of the Lord or consider the operation of His hands." And another Prophet says, "They say in their hearts, 'God has forgotten; He hides His face and will never see.'" They are so arrogant that they do not seek God; they always think there is no God and that His judgments are far from their sight. Their ways always prosper, and therefore they say in their hearts, "We shall never be shaken or face any danger."

Theologus:

You have spoken very truthfully about the hardness and callousness of these men's hearts, who show no mercy towards their poor neighbors, making it almost impossible for anyone to live near them. They disrupt and disturb everything, leaving no peace for the poor to dwell in. As the wise king rightly says, "A powerful man causes trouble; he hires both the fool and those who pass by." But the poor man speaks with prayers, meaning through pleading and supplications. For the poor are afraid of them; they tremble at the sight of them, just as beasts tremble at the roar of a lion. Many poor farmers, poor labourers, poor shepherds, poor labourers, poor widows, and hired workers quake and tremble when these greedy wolves appear. And, as Job says, "The poor of the earth hide together," for in their hearts, they cannot bear the sight of them.

They would rather meet the devil than encounter them, fearing some form of displeasure. They fear being evicted from their homes or being subjected to increased rent and harsher conditions. They worry that their best cattle will be taken away, their horses borrowed, their carts commandeered, or that they will be forced to work for a week without pay. They fear being charged a year's worth of grazing for a couple of geldings. They anticipate quarrels and other miseries inflicted upon them. These poor souls don't know what to do or which way to turn because of these cruel oppressors. They are weary of their lives and find no remedy other than to endure it with resignation. They often wish they were out of this world and buried alive. They say that they would forgive anyone who strikes them on the head. What a pitiful case! What a lamentable state of affairs! These poor vulnerable creatures toil and labour throughout the year, in winter and summer, in frost and snow, in heat and cold, just to meet their rent payments and be able to face their merciless landlords. Yet their rent is so high that all their efforts are barely enough to pay it. And once it's paid, alas, the poor man, his wife, and children have little left to sustain themselves. They must make do with meagre provisions and scanty clothing. Sometimes they have food, sometimes they don't. The poor children cry out for bread. Poor widows and orphaned children are found weeping and mourning in their homes and on the streets. We can, like Solomon, consider all the oppressions that occur under the sun. We witness the tears of the oppressed, and there is no one to comfort them. The powerful ones wrong the weaker, just as stronger beasts push and harm the weaker ones. These greedy oppressors squeeze the poor until they are in pain. They take away whatever little the fatherless and widows have. If there is a cow or a few sheep left, they will claim them. If there is any small property or land, they will devise ways to seize it and take it away. These tyrants will get as close as the very bed the poor sleep on. They know very well that the poor cannot afford to seek justice against them, so they can commit any wrong and exhibit any cruelty they desire. This is why the oppressed shed tears and why the poor weep and lament. But alas, poor souls, they may weep to ease their hearts, but there is no one to comfort them. They cannot find a

remedy. However, the eternal God surely sees them and will seek revenge. For the cries of the poor, the fatherless, and the widows have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts, who is an avenger of such things, a strong avenger, as Solomon says, "Do not enter the field of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you." And again, "Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and rob those who rob them." Therefore, we see that the just God will take revenge on these unmerciful tyrants. He will not forever tolerate these wrongs and injustices committed against the poor.

In the eighth chapter of the Prophet Amos, he swears by the greatness of Jacob that he will never forget any of their deeds. And again, through his Prophet Jeremiah, he asks, "Shall I not avenge such a nation as this?" Surely, he will set his face against them to uproot them from the earth. Indeed, they are not worthy to crawl upon the face of the earth or to breathe among the sons of men. It is written in the book of Psalms that God will set their adversaries against them, like an archer shooting at a target. He will separate them, and the strings of his bow will be ready to strike their faces. Be astonished at this, O heavens, and tremble, O earth. Listen to this, you cruel landlords, unmerciful oppressors, and bloodsuckers of the earth. You may truly be called bloodsuckers, for you drain the lifeblood of many poor men, women, and children. You consume it, you drink it, you have it served at your lavish tables every day, you devour it, and you live off it. As Job says, "The wasteland provides you and your children with food," meaning you sustain yourselves through robbery and murder. But woe, woe to you, that you were ever born. For the blood of the oppressed, which you have consumed and imbibed, will one day cry out for swift vengeance against you, just as the blood of Abel cried out against Cain. Their blood will testify against you on the day of judgment, and the tears of many poor, starving children, orphans, and widows will cry out against you. If the Lord avenged the cruel and unjust treatment of poor Naboth by Ahab, will he not avenge you? Did dogs lap up the blood of Ahab, and will you escape? No, no, you will not escape. The Lord

will be a swift witness against you, as he declares in Malachi. Was the Lord angry with the rich among his people for oppressing the poor, so that the cry of the people and their wives against their oppressors reached the Almighty? And do you think you will go unpunished? Does not a similar cause bring forth a similar effect? Does not the same sin lead to the same punishment? Therefore, know with certainty that the Lord has treasuries full of vengeance against you, and one day he will unlock them and bring them forth for all to see.

Know also that the construction materials of your houses, the stones in your walls, which you have built through oppression and bloodshed, will cry out against you on the day of the Lord's wrath, as the Prophet Habakkuk tells you. The stones will cry out from the walls, and the beams from the timber will respond. The Prophet tells you that the walls of your houses, built with blood, will loudly cry out and act as choristers in this matter, answering one another on either side. One side sings, "Behold blood," while the other side sings, "Behold murder." One side sings, "Behold deceit," while the other side sings, "Behold cruelty." One side sings, "Behold pillaging and plundering," while the other side sings, "Behold greed." One side sings, "Behold robbery," while the other side sings, "Behold poverty." Thus, you see how the stones and timber of your houses will speak out against you. And no matter how you put on your brazen brows and harden your hearts against these threats from the most terrifying God and Lord of hosts, one day you will, whether willingly or unwillingly, be brought forth to judgment. You will face your reckoning, be apprehended, summoned, and arraigned before the great Judge of the world at God's tribunal seat. Then, a sentence will be passed against you—the most dreadful sentence: "Go, you cursed, into hell-fire, to be tormented with the Devil and his angels forever." Oh, then, woe, woe to you! For what will it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul, as our Lord Jesus says? Surely, it would be as if one gained a penny but lost a hundred thousand pounds. For if one who has not given from his own goods acquired righteously will be cast into hell-fire, as our Saviour affirms, then where will one be cast who has stolen other people's goods? And if

one will be damned for not clothing the naked, what will become of one who has made those who were clothed naked? Therefore, repent in time, O you cruel oppressors. Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Put aside your savage cruelty, visit the fatherless and widows in their distress, share your bread with the hungry, help those who suffer wrong to receive their rights, show mercy to your tenants, no longer increase your rents, do not pinch the poor souls for whom Christ died; pity them, I say, but do not oppress them. Treat them kindly and friendly. Remember your great accounts, consider the brevity of your days and the fleeting nature of your life. Rent your hearts, not your clothes. Turn to the Lord with all your heart, with weeping, fasting, and mourning. Prevent God's wrath with a sacrifice of tears, appease his anger with sincere words and a contrite spirit. Be grieved for the past and amend your ways for the future. Do not continue to fight against God with swords drawn. It will not benefit you to strive; he is too powerful for you. Your only wisdom is to surrender. Therefore, come in, rebellious generation, submit yourselves to the great King, humble yourselves under his mighty hand. Lay down your swords and shields, yield to your God. In doing so, you will escape the coming vengeance. God will accept you, have mercy upon you, show you favor, grant you a general pardon for all your rebellions, and admit you into the company of his faithful and loyal subjects.

Philagathus

I understand from the various statements you have mentioned that ill-gotten wealth obtained through oppression and cruelty will never prosper in the long run. For oppressors mint their money on the backs of their neighbors. How then can it be blessed?

Theologus:

You have spoken the truth. Just as it has been shown before that goods obtained through swearing and lying are cursed, those acquired through oppression and violence are even more cursed. Thus, the Lord says through his Prophet Jeremiah: "As the partridge gathers the young she has not brought forth, so he who gathers

riches unjustly will leave them in the middle of his days. At his end, he will be a fool, and his name will be written in the earth."

Philagathus

I wish that our Magistrates and Governors would promptly take measures to remedy these issues and address the grievous wrongdoings among us. Or better yet, they themselves would intervene and rescue the oppressed from the hands of the oppressors.

Theologus:

Job was an outstanding man in such matters. It is said of him that he broke the jaws of the unrighteous and snatched the prey from his teeth. Here we see how Job was a means to deliver the innocent and rescue the lamb from the lion's claws. Moreover, it is written of him in the same chapter that the blessing of the one ready to perish came upon him, and he made the widow's heart rejoice. He was the eyes to the blind, the feet to the lame, and the father to the poor. When he did not know the cause, he diligently sought it out. Oh, what an exemplary man he was! Oh, that we had many Jobs in these days! Wise Solomon advises us all to follow Job's example in this regard. He says, "Deliver those who are oppressed and led to death. Should you not withdraw yourself from those who are going to the slaughter?" I wish that this holy counsel would be seriously considered and practiced among us!

Philagathus

I wonder how these cruel oppressors can have the audacity to enter God's holy temple to pray and offer sacrifices to Him. We see that many of them, despite having such filthy hands and hearts as we have heard, will shamelessly presume to come to church and pray. Or at the very least, when they are in their beds at night, half asleep, they will rush through their prayers or mumble some Our Fathers.

Theologus:

Oh, what a pity it is for those poor souls! Everything they do in

matters of worshipping God is nothing but hypocrisy and deceit. In truth, they do not care for God; they only love Him superficially. They may speak His name, but their hearts are consumed by greed, and their hands are stained with blood. Consequently, God despises both them and their prayers. He says, "Even when they stretch out their hands, I will hide My eyes from them; even though they make many prayers, I will not listen. For their hands are full of blood."

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit says, "He who turns his ear away from hearing the Law, even his prayer is abominable." David says, "If I cherish wickedness in my heart, God will not hear my prayer." Our Lord Jesus also affirms that God does not listen to sinners, that is, stubborn and unrepentant sinners. Therefore, by all these testimonies from the Holy Scriptures, we can clearly see how little value God places on the prayers of oppressors and all other profane and ungodly individuals. He hates them and regards them as repulsive and detestable.

Philagathus

Now, in conclusion, please explain the causes of oppression.

Theologus:

The causes are as follows:

- Cruelty
- Greed
- Hard-heartedness
- A guilty conscience
- The Devil

Philagathus

Let us also hear about the remedies.

Theologus:

The remedies are as follows:

- Compassion

- Contentment
- Tender emotions
- A clear conscience
- Abundant prayer

Philagathus

Now, sir, you have thoroughly expressed your thoughts on these grave corruptions of the world and convincingly proven them to be the deadly poison of the soul. Therefore, I ask you to also enlighten us on whether they are not harmful to the body, possessions, and reputation.

Theologus:

I have spent more time discussing these common vices of the world because almost everyone is tainted by one or another. Therefore, they cannot be condemned enough. As the Apostle John testifies, the whole world lies in these vices. If people could be cured of these diseases, undoubtedly a pathway would be opened for an abundance of grace, and we would witness a flourishing Church and society. However, as long as these vices persist, there is little hope for greater mercies and blessings to be bestowed upon us, and we will struggle to establish a deep communion with God. These vices blind our eyes, burden our hearts, and hinder many things from us, as the Prophet Jeremiah says. Regarding your request, I must admit that just as these vices are the ruin of the soul and clear signs of condemnation, they are also highly dangerous to the body, possessions, and reputation. They pose a threat to the entire land, including the Church and society.

Philagathus

Please show us from the Scriptures the dangers they bring to the body.

Theologus:

The Lord our God declares that if we refuse to obey Him and break His covenant, He will bring upon us swift plagues, wasting diseases,

and fever that will consume our eyes and make our hearts heavy. He also warns that if we do not obey His voice and keep His commandments, He will send pestilence upon us until we are consumed. He will afflict us with fever, with the boils of Egypt, with hemorrhoids, with scabies, and with itch. He will strike us with madness, blindness, and confusion of heart. Thus, you can see the severe evils that the Lord threatens to afflict our bodies with in this life for these sins and others like them. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit says, "Fear God and turn away from evil, so health will be to your navel and refreshment to your bones."

Philagathus

What harm do these aforementioned sins bring upon our possessions and outward state?

Theologus:

They cause God to curse all our endeavors, as abundantly revealed in the previously mentioned chapters. The Lord says, "If you will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, you shall be cursed in the city, cursed in the field, cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl, cursed shall be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your land, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock." He continues, "The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake." Furthermore, He declares that He will break the staff of our bread, so that ten women shall bake bread in one oven and deliver it by weight, and we shall eat and not be satisfied. Therefore, it is evident that these sins will bring upon us God's wrath and affect all that we possess.

Philagathus

How do these sins harm our reputation?

Theologus:

These sins bring disgrace, shame, and infamy upon us, causing us to be hated and despised by all good people. They completely tarnish our reputation. Just as virtue brings honour and reverence to

individuals, vice makes them vile and contemptible. This is stated when the Lord threatens Israel that, due to their sins and disobedience, they will become a proverb and a subject of gossip, a reproach and a source of astonishment among all nations. In various other places in the Prophets, He threatens to make them a reproach, a shame, and objects of hissing, nodding heads from all nations.

Philagathus

I truly believe that as sin generally tarnishes everyone's good name, which people hold dear and protect, it particularly stains those who hold high positions and are noted for their learning, wisdom, and godliness.

Theologus:

You have spoken most truly, in line with the Scriptures. For the Scripture says, "As a dead fly causes the perfumer's ointment to give off a foul odour, so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour in one held in esteem." Solomon illustrates that if a fly enters the perfumer's box of precious ointment and dies, it spoils the ointment's fragrance. Similarly, if a small sin enters the heart and manifests itself in the actions of a person renowned for their exceptional gifts, it will tarnish their reputation, even if they are highly esteemed.

Philagathus

Please explain this more clearly.

Theologus:

The reason is that when a person of high standing or exceptional qualities possesses one particular vice or flaw, it becomes the focal point of attention. It overshadows all their other virtues and merits. This can be observed in all experiences. For example, if a nobleman is known for his courtesy, patience, humility, and devotion to religion, but is also excessively covetous, the common people will primarily focus on that aspect. They will say, "He is indeed a good man, but for one thing: he is extremely covetous, oppresses the poor, and treats his tenants harshly. He neglects his responsibilities, and

does little good in the community." This single flaw tarnishes their reputation.

Similarly, if a judge, a justice, or a magistrate possesses excellent qualities such as prudence, wisdom, temperance, generosity, and legal knowledge, but has a tendency towards anger or accepting bribes, it greatly troubles the people. They will remark, "He is indeed a worthy man, but there is one thing that ruins it all: he has an excessive temper and easily becomes furious. He gets angry over every trivial matter and loses control. Moreover, he is corrupt and easily swayed by bribes. He is willing to do anything for personal gain."

Furthermore, if a preacher is highly gifted and admired by the common people for his scholarly abilities, profound theological understanding, and remarkable sermons, they may still find fault with him. They will say, "Oh, he is indeed a worthy man, an excellent scholar, a profound theologian, and an exceptional preacher. But, there is one thing that spoils it all: he is excessively proud. He is as proud as Lucifer. Despite his great gifts, he is well aware of his superiority. He carries himself with arrogance, looks down upon others with disdain, and displays an immeasurable sense of self-importance. He believes he is elevated above others and reaches the clouds with his head." Thus, we see that even a single sin can tarnish the reputation of an otherwise outstanding individual.

Philagathus

Why does one sin have such a significant impact on the reputation of highly esteemed individuals?

Theologus:

The reason for this is that such individuals are like candles placed on candlesticks, or rather on scaffolds or mountains, for everyone to behold and scrutinise. Indeed, they have a thousand eyes upon them each day, not merely observing them, but also prying into every detail, seeking out even the tiniest speck to magnify it into a

mountain. Just as a small spot is easily noticed on a clean white paper, while twenty large blots on a piece of brown paper are hardly discerned, the same holds true for noble men, judges, magistrates, justices, preachers, and professors. The slightest blemish or flaw is quickly seen in them, whereas among the common and more morally corrupt individuals, almost nothing is noticed or taken into account.

Philagathus

Since the gaze of all people is fixed on those who have some reputation, they need to be extremely cautious in their actions, so as not to provide any advantage to those who seek to exploit their mistakes.

Theologus:

Indeed, they must. Furthermore, they should always pray like David: "Direct my steps, O Lord, according to your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me." And again: "Order my steps in your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me." Even if such individuals are even slightly prone to swearing, lying, excessive drinking, or immoral conduct, it is immediately noticed. As a result, their credibility is shattered, their reputation tarnished, their fame overshadowed, and their good name quickly diminished.

Philagathus

Now that you have demonstrated the significant harm these sins cause to our souls, bodies, possessions, and reputation, I implore you to explain the danger they pose to the entire nation.

Theologus:

Undoubtedly, they bring down the wrath of God upon us all and provide just cause for Him to break everything apart and utterly overthrow the well-being of both the church and the state. They are like the kindling that ignites God's anger and indignation upon us. As the Apostle says, "For because of such things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

Philagathus

Tell us from the Scriptures how the Lord in the past has punished entire nations and kingdoms for these sins and others like them.

Theologus:

In the fourth chapter of Hosea, the Lord declares to His people that He has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land because there is no truth, mercy, or knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and sexual immorality abound, and one act of bloodshed follows another. Therefore, the land shall mourn, and all who dwell in it shall be cut off.

Here we see what will provoke God against us and cause us all to mourn. Likewise, the Lord threatens through His prophet Amos that He will punish the entire land for the cruelty and oppression of the poor. "Shall not the land tremble for this," says the Lord, "and everyone mourn who dwells in it?"

Furthermore, the Lord says through His prophet Jeremiah, "Do they provoke me to anger?" They bring confusion upon themselves. Therefore, the Lord declares, "Behold, my anger and my wrath shall be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn and not be quenched."

Again, the Lord says, "If you will not listen to these words, I swear by myself," says the Lord, "that this house shall become a desolation. I will raise up destroyers against you, each with his weapon, and they shall cut down your finest cedar trees and throw them into the fire."

Likewise, the Lord threatens through His prophet Ezekiel, saying, "Because you have not walked in my statutes nor kept my judgments, behold, I, even I, am against you and will execute judgment in your midst, in the sight of the nations. I will do in you what I have never done before and will never do again because of all your abominations. In your midst, fathers will eat their sons, and sons will

eat their fathers." Again, through the same prophet, the Lord says, "The land is full of the judgment of blood, and the city is full of cruelty. Therefore, I will bring the most wicked of the nations to possess their houses. I will also put an end to the pride of the mighty, and the holy places shall be defiled. When destruction comes, they will seek peace, but it will not be found. Calamity will come upon calamity, and there will be rumor upon rumor. They will seek a vision from the prophet, but the law shall perish from the priests and counsel from the elders. The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people in the land shall be troubled. I will deal with them according to their ways and judge them according to their judgments, and they shall know that I am the Lord." Lastly, the Lord says through His prophet, "Listen, O earth, behold, I will cause a plague to come upon this people, the fruit of their own imaginations because they have not heeded my words or my law, but have cast it off." There are numerous other passages in the writings of the prophets to support this point, but these should suffice to demonstrate that the just God punishes whole nations and kingdoms for their sins and rebellions.

Philagathus

Since all these sins, for which the Lord executed such widespread punishments on His own people, abound and overflow in this land, may we not justly fear a great plague to befall us? Moreover, our transgressions are increasing daily and reaching their full measure, so it seems that the harvest of God's vengeance is drawing near and approaching.

Theologus:

Indeed, we have every reason to fear and tremble. If God did not spare the angels who sinned, how will He spare us? If He did not spare His own people, what can we expect? If He did not spare the natural branches, how will He spare us who are wild by nature? Are we better than they? Can we expect to be spared when they were punished? Are not our sins as numerous and as great as theirs? Does not the same cause produce the same effect? Has the arm of the Lord

grown weak? Is God not the same just God who punishes sin now as He was then? Yes, absolutely. Therefore, we have ample reason to mourn, lament, quake, and tremble because a naked sword of vengeance hangs over our heads. Just as Jeremiah, Amos, and Habakkuk did when they clearly saw the imminent wrath of God approaching upon the people of Israel and Judah.

Philagathus

I believe we have even more reason to doubt and fear because the punishment of these aforementioned vices is neglected by the authorities. It is common that when those who bear the sword of justice do not wield it to punish notorious offenders and wrongdoers, the Lord Himself will take matters into His own hands and seek revenge personally, which is most dreadful and dangerous. It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Theologus:

You have spoken the truth. If those who are God's deputies and representatives on earth faithfully fulfill their duties in punishing vice and upholding virtue, in striking down the wicked and favoring the righteous, then certainly evil will be removed from the land, God's wrath will be prevented, and His judgments will be intercepted. As it is written, "Phinehas stood up and executed judgment, and the plague was stayed." But if they, out of fear, favoritism, affection, gain, flattery, bribery, or any other improper motive, are too lenient and lax in punishing gross offenders and are more inclined to harm the righteous, they greatly provoke God's wrath against the land and against themselves.

Philagathus

One thing I deeply lament is the absence or minimal condemnation, whether by civil or ecclesiastical authority, for various of these aforementioned vices such as pride, covetousness, oppression, lying, idleness, swearing, and so on.

Theologus:

It is truly a lamentable thing. For where do we witness a proud man being punished, a covetous man being punished, an oppressor being punished, a swearer being punished, a liar being punished, an idle person being punished? Now, because they know they cannot or will not be punished, they are completely hardened and emboldened in their sins, as the wise man says: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the children of men are fully set in them to do evil."

Philagathus

One thing I am greatly puzzled by, and I also desire further clarification, is why, under such a godly ruler, with so many good laws, preaching, and teaching, there is still such an excess and overflow of sin in all estates.

Theologus:

There are various and manifold causes for this. However, I will mention four main ones, in my opinion. The first is man's natural corruption, which is so strong that almost nothing can restrain it. The second is bad examples and external provocations to evil. The third is the lack of proper teaching in many congregations throughout the land, which leads to many people not recognizing sin as sin. The last reason is the corruption and negligence of some who hold positions of authority.

Philagathus

Doesn't this inundation and overflow of sin, along with the impunity it enjoys, foretell great wrath against us?

Theologus:

Yes, undoubtedly, as has been partially shown before. And there are various other signs of wrath, though of a different kind, which include:

- Ingratitude for the Gospel.

- Abuse of our prolonged period of peace.
- Our general sense of security.
- Our secret idolatries.
- Our maturity in all forms of sin.
- Misuse of all God's mercies.
- Misuse of His patience.
- Lukewarmness among believers.
- Failure to learn from past judgments, such as plagues, famines, scarcity, and the threat of war.

Philagathus

I consider the fact that we have not learned from past warnings to be a significant sign of impending vengeance.

Theologus:

That is indeed true. It is a common occurrence with God that when people do not learn from mild corrections and ordinary punishments, He imposes greater ones upon them. And when a previous trouble does not bring about any good, we should fear a final and devastating trouble. We find evidence of this in the prophecy of Hosea, where it is stated that initially, God treated Ephraim like a moth and Judah like rottenness. But when they did not take it to heart and make any progress, God treated Ephraim like a lion and Judah like a lion's cub. In another passage, the Lord declares that if they do not respond and yield obedience at the first warning of His wrath, He will punish them seven times more. And if they persist in their stubbornness, He threatens to bring upon them seven times more plagues in accordance with their sins. If, even after all these warnings, they still refuse to reform and persist in their defiance against Him, He threatens to multiply their punishments seven times more and, for the fourth time, yet seven times more. We can see this illustrated in the Book of Judges. It recounts how the Israelites, due to their sins, were subjected to the King of Aram Naharaim for eight years. However, since they did not learn anything from it and returned to their old sins, they served Eglon, the king of Moab, for eighteen years. After that, because of their new sins and

provocations, the Lord allowed them to be oppressed by the Midianites for seven years. Even after all this, when they persisted in renewing their sins, the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who grievously troubled and oppressed them for eighteen years. Finally, we read that when neither famine nor pestilence could bring them back to Him, the Lord handed them over to the sword of their enemies and kept them in bondage and captivity for seventy years. After their release from captivity and their safe return to their own nation, enjoying a period of peace and rest, they eventually fell back into their sinful ways. As a result, the Lord afflicted them severely through the divided Greek Empire, by the hands of Magog, Egypt, Seleucids, and Ptolemies, for a span of almost three hundred years. This is exactly what the Prophet Hosea foretold, that the children of Israel would remain without a king, prince, offering, image, ephod, and teraphim for many days.

Philagathus

You have provided a comprehensive explanation of this last indication of vengeance. Namely, that God initially deals with us lightly, but if we persist in sin, He will punish us severely. If people do not yield to His gentle reprimands, He will strike harder and harder until He breaks down our stubbornness and brings our proud hearts down. Therefore, it is wise to yield at the first warning, for our resistance against Him achieves nothing. It only leads Him to increase the severity of His blows, striking us from all sides. He cannot tolerate our obstinate defiance. But now, to the point. Since there are numerous signs and indications of God's wrath, I ask you to explain what prevents its full execution and downfall.

Theologus:

The prayers and tears of the faithful are the special means that prevent God from striking us. The prayers of the righteous hold great power with Him, capable of achieving all things. Saint James says that the fervent prayer of a righteous person has significant

influence, citing the example of Elijah as proof. For, says James, though Elijah was a man with the same human passions as us, his prayers were able to open and shut the heavens. Similarly, Abraham prevailed with God through his prayers for Sodom, to the extent that if there had been only ten righteous people found there, the city would have been spared. In the 15th chapter of Jeremiah, the almighty God declares, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My affection could not be toward this people." This clearly shows that Moses and Samuel could have done much with Him if He had not been so determined to punish His people for their sins. Likewise, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, He says, "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were among them, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness." This also indicates that if there had been any possibility of pleading with Him for the land, these three men could have done it, but He was firmly set against it. Considering that zealous preachers and true followers of the Gospel prevail so much with God through their prayers, they are said to be the defense and strength of kingdoms, countries, churches, and commonwealths. Elijah is described as the chariot and horsemen of Israel, and Elisha was surrounded by a mountain full of horses and chariots of fire. It is certain that Elijah and Elisha are not only the chariots and horsemen of Israel but also, through their prayers, they cause God Himself to be a wall of fire around the land, as the prophet says in Ezekiel 22:30, "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land; that I might not destroy it: but I found none." This demonstrates that if there had been just a few who stood in the breach, He would have spared the entire land. This is further evident in the prophecy of Jeremiah, where the Lord says, "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her." Therefore, consider and understand what one person can do, yes, what a single individual can do: what an Abraham can do, what a Moses can do, what an Elijah can do, what a Daniel, Samuel, Job, or Noah can do! Sometimes, due to their great favour with the Eternal, one person is capable of achieving more for a land through their

prayers and tears than many wise men with their counsel or valiant men with their swords.

Indeed, it is evident from the sacred Scriptures that a single humble preacher, filled with the Spirit and power of Elijah, can accomplish more in his study—whether for offense or defense, for averting wrath or obtaining mercy—than a whole royal army of forty thousand strong. As the Spirit speaks, even if they all have their swords girded to their thighs and are the most valiant men in Israel. All of this is clearly demonstrated in one verse from the book of Psalms, where the Prophet, after listing the sins of the people, adds: "Therefore the Lord intended to destroy them, but Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them." So, you see, what one person can accomplish with God! One person can bind the hands of God in such a way that He has no power to strike when He should. It is as it is said of Lot: "I can do nothing until you have come out." See how the Lord says He can do nothing because He chooses not to do anything! He willingly allows His hands to be shackled and bound behind Him for the sake of a few, whom He values more than the whole world—so precious and dear they are in His sight. Similarly, it is written that the Lord was greatly incensed against the Israelites for their idolatrous calf that they made in Horeb, yet He could do nothing because Moses would not allow Him. Therefore, He pleads with Moses, asking him to let Him be and not intercede for them anymore. "Oh," says the Lord to Moses, "let Me alone, that My wrath may become hot against this people, and that I may consume them." Thus, we see that unless Lot leaves the city and Moses lets Him be, He can do nothing. Oh, the depth and height of God's mercy towards mankind! Oh, the expanse of His love towards some! Oh, that the most glorious and invisible God should so greatly regard the sons of men! For what is man, that He should be mindful of him, or the son of man, that He should pay attention to him? Therefore, let us, who are the Lord's remembrancers, give Him no rest, nor leave Him alone until we have some assurance and firm guarantee from Him that He will turn away from us the wrath we justly deserve, that He will spare us and show us mercy. And as the

Prophet says, let us never cease seeking Him or giving up until He rebuilds and establishes Jerusalem, the praise of the world, lest it be charged against us as it was against some of the prophets in Israel that they were like foxes in the desolate places, that they did not rise up in the gaps or make up the hedge for the house of Israel. For nowadays, alas, we have many who break down hedges but few who build them; many who create breaches but few who repair them; many who open gaps but few who close them. We let in the floods of God's wrath upon us, but very few engage in true repentance to mend the breach and lower the sluices so that the rushing streams of God's vengeance may be stopped and contained.

Philagathus

I now clearly see that there are some who are highly favored by God and, as we say, greatly esteemed by Him since His love towards them is so great that He spares thousands for their sake.

Theologus:

It is written in the Proverbs of Solomon that the righteous in a land establish the king's throne, while the wicked overthrow it. The words are as follows: "Take away the dross from the silver, and a vessel for the finer will come forth. Take away the wicked from the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness." Likewise, in another passage, the wise man affirms that the righteous are the strength and defense of cities, towns, and communities, while the wicked weaken and destroy them. He says, "Scornful men set a city on fire, but the wise turn away wrath." Eliphaz's statement in Job is also excellent in this regard: "The innocent shall deliver the island, and it shall be preserved by the purity of their hands." In the book of Chronicles, we read that when the Levites and priests were cast out by Jeroboam, they came to Jerusalem, and all those who set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel joined them. Afterwards, it is said that they strengthened the kingdom of Judah and made Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, mighty. From all these testimonies, it is evident that princes, kingdoms, cities, towns, and villages are fortified by the presence of the righteous within them, and for their

sake, great plagues are held back. This was also recognized by one of the pagans, as evidenced by his words: "When God intends good for a city and desires to do good unto it, He raises up good men. But when He intends to punish a city or country and do evil unto it, He takes away the good men from it."

Philagathus

It is very clear from all the evidence you have presented that the wicked benefit every day of the year from the presence of the righteous who dwell among them.

Theologus:

All experience teaches it, and the scriptures abundantly affirm it. Didn't churlish Laban fare better because of his kinsman Jacob? Doesn't he acknowledge that the Lord had blessed him for Jacob's sake? Didn't Potiphar fare better because of godly Joseph? Doesn't the Scripture say that the Lord blessed the house of the Egyptians for Joseph's sake, and that everything he did prospered in his hand? Didn't Obed-edom fare better because of the Ark? Didn't the seventy-six souls on the ship with Paul have a better outcome because of him? Didn't the Angel of God tell him in the night that God had given him all those who sailed with him? Otherwise, most likely, they would have all been drowned. Therefore, the children of God can aptly be compared to a large piece of cork, which, although cast into the sea with many nails fastened in it, still floats and prevents them from sinking, which they would do on their own. What can we say then? What can we conclude, but that the ungodly are more indebted to the righteous than they realize.

Philagathus

I believe that if it weren't for God's children, the wicked would face great hardships. If they were separated and isolated from them, what could they expect but more and more wrath and plague until the Lord finally consumed them and swept them away like dung from the face of the earth?

Theologus:

Indeed, all creatures would frown upon them. The sun would reluctantly shine upon them, and the moon would withhold its light. The stars would not be visible to them, and the planets would hide. Beasts would devour them, and birds would peck out their eyes. Fish would wage war against them, and all creatures in heaven and earth would rise up against them. Yes, the Lord himself from heaven would rain down fire and brimstone upon them.

Philagathus

Yet, despite all this, it is astonishing to consider how intensely the wicked hate the righteous and oppose them in almost everything. They revile and slander, scoff and scorn, mock and deride them as though they were unworthy of living on the earth. They esteem every insignificant scoundrel and prefer every vile scoundrel over them. And even though they owe their lives, liberty, breath, safety, and everything else to them, still they would be content to eat their hearts with garlic. Such is the magnitude, the fiery nature, the burning and hissing fury of their hatred and malice towards them.

Theologus:

They can be aptly compared to a moth that eats away the very cloth it was born in. Or to a certain worm or canker that corrodes and eats through the heart of the tree that nourishes it. Or to a man standing on a branch at the top of a tree, where there is no more support, and yet with an axe chops off the branch, causing himself to fall with it and break his neck. Similarly, the fools of this world do their best to cut apart the branch that holds them up, but they may easily know what will follow.

Philagathus

I clearly see that they are their own enemies, obstructing their own progress, and truly not knowing what they do. The benefit they receive from such individuals is exceedingly great, and therefore, by harming them, they only hold the stirrup for their own destruction.

Theologus:

Now, let's apply these things to ourselves and return to the initial question of this argument: Shouldn't we be amazed that our nation has been spared for so long, considering how horrendous and outrageous its sins are?

Philagathus

We can rightfully marvel at God's astonishing patience. And we can believe that there are some in the land who stand in the breach, enjoying great favor with His Majesty, since they prevail so much.

Theologus:

The merciful preservation of our most gracious king (who is the lifeblood of our nation), the prolonged period of peace and the spread of the Gospel, the prevention of the sword from striking our land due to our sins, the thwarting of many plots and cunning schemes that were devised against our state, even endangering the life of our Majesty: all of these make me believe that there are strong advocates pleading with God for the common good of us all.

Philagathus

Indeed, you may think so. For our sins have caused us to lose (and we continue to lose, into God's hands) our King, our Country, our Peace, our Gospel, our lives, our possessions, our lands, our livelihoods, our spouses, our children, and everything we have. But it is only the righteous (who are close to the King and highly favoured) who intercede and earnestly plead for us, seeking the release of our forfeitures and the opportunity to regain all these things, or at least an extension of time. But may I ask, sir, shouldn't we also attribute something regarding our well-being to the wisdom of our land, the established laws, and the counsel of our wise governors?

Theologus:

Yes, certainly, to a great extent. They are the ordinary and external means that God uses for our safety. For even though the Apostle Paul had received a guarantee from God for the safety of his own life and

everyone on the ship, he said, "Unless these sailors stay in the ship, we cannot be saved." By this, he showed that faith and prayers must be joined with the best and wisest means. Therefore, every day we kneel down to thank God for the good means of safety He has given us.

Philagathus

Well then, since the prayers of the righteous have been significant means thus far, both in averting and turning away wrath and in the continuation of favour, please tell me what is the best course of action to take and what should be done with sound wisdom to prevent future dangers and to continue experiencing God's blessings and mercies upon us.

Theologus:

The best and most reliable course of action, as I can consider and comprehend, is to sincerely repent for our past sins and reform our lives for the future. We should seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near. We must abandon our own ways and thoughts and turn to Him with all our hearts, with weeping, fasting, and mourning, as advised by the Prophet Joel. For our God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. All the prophets counsel us to follow this path and clearly teach that if we all (from the highest to the lowest) approach the Lord with genuine repentance and offer the sacrifice of a contrite spirit, He will undoubtedly be appeased towards us and show mercy for our transgressions. This is explicitly stated in the seventh chapter of Jeremiah, where the Lord says to His people: "If you thoroughly amend your ways and your deeds, if you execute justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever." Similarly, He says through the same prophet: "Execute justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the

resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their servants and their people." And again, "O rebellious children, return, and I will heal your faithlessness." The Lord also speaks through His prophet Isaiah: "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." The Prophet Hosea says: "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up." And again: "O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon."

The Prophet Micah tells us what is good for us and what our best course of action is, as well as what the Lord requires of us. There are four things: to act justly, to love mercy, to humble ourselves, and to walk with our God. The Prophet Amos gives the same counsel, saying, "Seek the Lord and you shall live. Seek good, not evil. Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." The Lord Himself also says, "If this nation, against whom I have pronounced, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to them" (Jeremiah 8:8). Thus, we clearly see the advice and counsel given to us by the Prophets and holy men of God. The essence of it all is that if we truly repent and turn to Him with all our hearts, striving to obey Him and walk in His ways, then He will grant us any favor we seek from Him. Just as woolpacks and soft materials dampen the force of projectiles, repentant, tender, and humble hearts repel the arrows of God's wrath and avert His vengeance from us. Moreover, we can observe from experience that when potentates are offended or a great man harbours displeasure

against a poor man, the latter must run and ride, send presents, seek the help of friends, lose sleep, and remain restless until he has pacified the offended party. Likewise, we must deal with our God since He is displeased with us. Oh, if only we would promptly employ all possible means to appease His wrath! Oh, if only with one heart and voice, each and every one of us, from the highest to the lowest, would humble ourselves before our God, forsake our former evil ways, be grieved for what we have done, and purpose never to repeat such actions! Oh, may it truly touch our hearts that we have so often and grievously offended such a loving God and merciful Father! Oh, may we finally awaken, rouse our sluggish hearts, examine our dormant consciences, and cry out against our sins so that our sins may never cry out against us! Oh, may we judge ourselves, accuse ourselves, indict ourselves, and condemn ourselves; then we shall never be judged, accused, indicted, or condemned by the Lord! Oh, if only the magistrates, the clergy, and the common people would purpose and vow, even taking a solemn pledge, that from this day forward they would set their hearts to seek the Lord and wholeheartedly devote themselves to His obedience! Oh, if only all men, women, and children would fear God and keep His commandments, avoid evil and do good, strive to please God in all things, and be fruitful in all good works! Let us conscientiously perform the duties of our general callings and the duties of our specific callings, both those relating to our relationship with God and those concerning our interactions with others, so that God may be sincerely worshipped, His name truly revered, His Sabbaths devoutly observed, and everyone may treat their neighbours kindly, mercifully, justly, and uprightly, leading to no complaints or cries of injustice in our streets! I say again and again, if all of us, regardless of our status, rank, or condition, would walk in the ways of our God, then undoubtedly we would live and see good days. All future dangers would be prevented, our peace would be prolonged, our state would be established, our King would be preserved, and the Gospel would continue. We would continue to enjoy our lives, possessions, lands, livelihoods, our spouses, our children, our houses, our orchards, and gardens. Yes, as the Prophet says, we

would eat the good things of the land, spending our days in comfort, peace, and tranquility. We would leave great blessings to our children and future generations, from age to age and from generation to generation.

Philagathus

You have fully answered my question and satisfied me well with the scriptures. However, I would like to add one thing to what you have already explained. The Lord says through the Prophet Amos that because of their sins and rebellions, He had caused them to experience famine and scarcity, symbolized by "cleanness of teeth." Yet, they did not turn to Him. He also withheld rain from them and punished them with drought, yet they did not turn to Him. Moreover, He afflicted their crops, gardens, orchards, vineyards, fig trees, and olive trees with blight and mildew, and their produce was devoured by the locusts. Still, they did not return to Him. Lastly, He struck them with pestilence and the sword, overthrowing them like He did Sodom and Gomorrah, and they were rescued as a burning brand from the fire. Yet, despite all these trials, they did not turn to Him. The Lord declares, "You have not turned to me." Now, to get to the point, from all this, I understand that if we continue to multiply our transgressions, God will multiply His plagues upon us. Conversely, if we sincerely turn to the Lord our God with all our hearts, all plagues will be averted, all dangers will be prevented, and no harm will befall us. Because they refused to turn, God struck them. If they had turned, He would not have inflicted them. But now, I ask you to briefly conclude this matter and declare in a few words what is of utmost importance for our peace and the public good.

Theologus:

In brief, these are the things I believe are essential for our peace:

- Let Solomon carry out justice by executing Joab and Shimei.
- Let John and Elijah eliminate the priests and prophets of Baal.
- Let Aaron and Eleazar faithfully serve before the Lord.
- Let Jonah be cast out of the ship.

- Let Moses stand firm in the gap and not let his hand fall.
- Let Joshua succeed him.
- Let Cornelius and his household fear God.
- Let Tabitha abound in good works and acts of charity.
- Let Deborah judge for a long time in Israel, prosper, and achieve victory.
- Let us all pray that the light of Israel may not be extinguished.

And this, in essence, is the summary of what is necessary for our peace.

Philagathus

As far as I can recall, the sum of our discussion thus far can be condensed into these few points: First, the revelation of man's inherent corruption. Secondly, the terrible consequences stemming from it. Thirdly, the detrimental impact on our souls, bodies, possessions, reputation, and the entire land. Lastly, the remedies for all these issues. Now, I would like to address a matter you briefly mentioned: the signs of salvation and damnation. Please tell us plainly whether the state of a person's soul before God can be certainly discerned in this life through specific signs and indications.

Theologus:

In addition to the signs previously mentioned, we can consider these nine as well:

- Reverence for God's name.
- Observance of the Sabbath.
- Truthfulness.
- Sobriety.
- Industry.
- Compassion.
- Humility.
- Chastity.
- Contentment.

Philagathus

Indeed, I acknowledge that these are very good signs. However, not all of them are definitive, as some can be found in reprobates.

Theologus:

What do you say, then, about the signs mentioned by Saint Peter in the first chapter of his second Epistle? He lists these eight:

- Faith.
- Virtue.
- Knowledge.
- Self-control.
- Patience.
- Godliness.
- Brotherly kindness.
- Love.

According to Saint Peter, if these qualities are present in us and abound, they will prevent us from being idle or unfruitful in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus. In other words, they will make us sincere and faithful followers of the Gospel.

Philagathus

The essence of our discussion thus far, as far as I recall, can be summarised in these few points: Firstly, the exposure of man's inherent corruption. Secondly, the dreadful outcomes that arise from it. Thirdly, the harmful effects and consequences it has on our souls, bodies, possessions, reputation, and the entire land. Lastly, the remedies for all these issues. Now, I would like to reach a conclusion on a matter you briefly mentioned: namely, the signs of salvation and damnation. Please tell us plainly whether a person's soul can be certainly discerned before God in this life through specific signs and indications.

Philagathus

All of these, I admit, are excellent signs and indications of a person's

salvation. However, some of them can be deceptive, and it's possible to find flaws in some of these evidences. I desire to hear about some demonstrative and infallible evidences that no lawyer can find fault with. I believe that good theologians can judge the assurances and evidences of a person's salvation as perfectly as the best lawyer can judge the assurances and evidences by which people hold their properties and livelihoods.

Theologus:

You have spoken truthfully in that regard. I wish that all the Lord's people would present the evidences of their salvation so that we can discern them.

Philagathus

Therefore, please state which are the most certain and infallible evidences of a person's salvation that cannot be objected to.

Theologus:

I consider these to be the most solid and infallible:

- Firm faith in the promises.
- Sincerity of heart.
- The spirit of adoption.
- Genuine regeneration and sanctification.
- Inner peace.
- Firm grounding in the truth.
- Perseverance until the end.

Philagathus Now you've hit the mark, indeed. In my opinion, none of these can truly be found in any reprobate. Therefore, I believe no theologian can object to any of these.

Theologus:

No, I assure you, no more than a lawyer can find fault with the tenure of people's lands and fee-simples when both the title is good and strong according to the law, and the evidences of it are sealed, subscribed, delivered, conveyed, and witnessed properly, along with

all other signs and ceremonies (in the process of delivering and taking possession) observed strictly according to the law. For if a person has the aforementioned evidences of their salvation, it is certain that their title and interest to heaven is good according to the law of Moses and the prophets, which is the word of God. God Himself affirms them, Jesus Christ delivers them as His own deed, the Holy Spirit seals them, and even the three great witnesses who testify on earth (that is, water, blood, and the Spirit) all testify to the same.

Philagathus

Now you have fully satisfied me on this point. And one more thing I gather from all your speech: that you believe a person can be assured of their salvation even in this life.

Theologus:

Indeed, I do believe so. For whoever does not know in this life that they will be saved will never be saved after this life. As Saint John says, "Now we are the children of God."

Philagathus

But because many doubt this, and the Papists completely deny it, I ask you to confirm it for us from the Scriptures.

Theologus:

The Apostle says, "We know that if our earthly house of this Tabernacle be destroyed, we have a building given us of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Note that he says both he and the rest of God's people certainly knew that heaven was prepared for them. For the spirit of adoption bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. Furthermore, the same Apostle says, "From henceforth is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Here we see that he knew there was a crown prepared for him and for all the elect. And the same Spirit that assured it to Paul

also assures it to all the children of God, for they all have the same Spirit, though not in the same measure. Saint John also says, "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." In these words, Saint John tells us that if we sincerely strive to obey God, we have the true knowledge and fear of God within us, and consequently, we are sure of our salvation. Saint Peter says, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Why would the Apostle exhort us to make our election sure if no one could be sure of it? In Ephesians 2, the Apostle plainly states that in Christ Jesus, we are already seated together in heavenly places. His meaning is not that we are already in possession, but rather, we are as certain of it as if we were already there. The reasons for this are as follows: Christ, our head, is in possession, and therefore, He will draw all His members to Him, as He Himself says.

Secondly, we are as confident in the thing we hope for as we are in what we already possess. And we are sure of what we have, which is the work of grace. Therefore, we are sure of what we anticipate, which is the crown of glory. Many other passages from the Holy Scriptures could be cited to support this point, but I believe these are sufficient.

Philagathus

Just as you have demonstrated this through the Scriptures, please also explain it more clearly with logical reasoning from the same.

Theologus:

How can a person truly call God their Father (when they say: "Our Father who art in Heaven") and yet doubt whether He is their Father or not? For if God is indeed our Father and we are His children, how can we perish? How can we be damned? Would a father condemn his own children? Or shall the children of God be condemned? No, no. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And who can bring any charges against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies; who can condemn? It is therefore most certain and sure that all those who truly call God their Father and have Him as their

Father shall be saved. Furthermore, how can a person sincerely and deeply believe in the forgiveness of sins and yet doubt whether they will be saved? For if they are fully convinced that their sins are forgiven, what would prevent them from being saved? Moreover, as surely as we know that we are called, justified, and sanctified, we also know that we shall be glorified. We know the one with certainty, and therefore the other.

Asunetus:

I will never believe that anyone can truly know in this world whether they will be saved or damned. All people must have good hope and faith.

Theologus:

No, we must go beyond having good hope. We cannot risk our salvation on uncertain hopes. It is like hoping that tomorrow will be a sunny day but not being certain. No, no. In this case, which is of infinite importance, we must reach a state of certainty and complete conviction. We see that worldly people are reluctant to hold their lands and leases uncertainly, having nothing to show for them. They will not rely on the goodwill of their landlords or trust in uncertain hope. No; they are wiser than that. For the people of this world are wiser in their generation than the people of light. They make sure to have something to show for it. They have it in writing and sealed. They will not rely solely on the words and promises of the most honest men and best landlords. They cannot rest until they have it in writing, with sound legal counsel regarding their ownership, and made as secure for them as any law of the land can make it.

Are the people of this world so wise in these lesser matters, and shall we not be equally wise in matters of ten thousand times more importance? Are they wise for earthly things, and shall we not be wise for heavenly things? Are they wise for their bodies, and shall we not be wise for our souls? Shall we rely on hope alone for the state of our eternal inheritance, without any writings, evidences, seals,

witnesses, or anything to show for it? Alas, this is a weak tenure, a flawed title, a mere grasp indeed.

Asunetus:

Yet, despite all that, a person cannot be certain.

Theologus:

Yes, Saint John tells us that we can be certain. For he says: "Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us; because he hath given us of his spirit." He does not say we hope, but we know for certain. For whoever has the spirit of God knows for certain that they have it, and whoever has faith knows that they have faith, and whoever will be saved knows that they will be saved. For God does not work so mysteriously in people's hearts by His spirit that they cannot easily know whether it is from Him or not, if they would make a proper examination. Furthermore, the same Apostle says: "He that believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in himself." That is, they have certain testimonies in their own conscience that they will be saved. For we must find the assurance of our salvation from within ourselves, even from the work of God within us. For as much as a person feels within themselves an increase in knowledge, obedience, and godliness, they are all the more certain that they will be saved. A person's own conscience holds great weight in this matter and will not lie or deceive. As the wise man says: "As water reflects a face, so a person's heart reflects the person." That is, the mind and conscience of every person rightly (though not perfectly) tell them what they are. For the conscience will not lie but will accuse or excuse a person, serving as a thousand witnesses.

The Apostle also says: "No man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him." And the Scripture says: "The soul of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of the belly." Therefore, it is evident that a person must turn to the work of God's grace within them, even in their own soul. For by doing so, they will be certainly resolved one way or another. Just as Rebecca knew for certain, by the striving and stirring of the twins in her

womb, that she was conceived and quick with child, God's children know for certain, by the movements and stirrings of the Holy Ghost within them, that they have conceived Christ and will undoubtedly be saved.

Philagathus

I request that we delve into the foundation of this certainty of salvation and discuss it further.

Theologus:

The foundation of our salvation is rooted in God's eternal election, and in that regard, it remains firm and unshakable. As it is written: "The foundation of God stands firm." And again: "He is faithful who has promised. Even if we are faithless, he remains faithful." So, just as we know it certainly within ourselves through the consequences of election, it stands most securely in relation to God and His eternal and unchangeable decree. No number of weaknesses (not even all the sins in the world or all the devils in hell) can overthrow God's election. For our Lord Jesus says: "All that the Father has given me will come to me." And again: "This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up on the last day." Furthermore, our Savior Christ says: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." Therefore, we should be as certain of our salvation as we are of any other thing that God has promised or that we are obliged to believe. To doubt it, in light of God's truth, is blasphemous against the unchangeableness of His truth.

Philagathus

But aren't there some doubts, at times, even in the very Elect and those who have reached the greatest conviction?

Theologus:

Yes, indeed. For he who never doubted never truly believed. For whoever believes in truth sometimes experiences doubts and wavering. Just as a healthy body feels many slight discomforts of illness, which it could not feel if it were not healthy, so a sound soul experiences some doubts, which it could not easily feel if it were not sound. For we do not feel corruption through corruption; rather, we feel corruption through grace. And the more grace we have, the more sensitive we are to the feeling of corruption. Some individuals with sensitive skin and heightened sensitivity can easily feel the lightest feather placed gently on the palm of their hands, while others with slower sensitivity and tougher skin may not discern it as easily. Therefore, it is certain that although the children of God may experience doubts at times, those doubts do not in any way diminish the certainty of their salvation. On the contrary, they indicate a perfect soundness and health of their souls. When such minor doubts arise in the soul, the children of God counter them with the certainty of God's truth and promises, and easily overcome them. The people of the Lord have no more reason to fear these doubts than a person riding confidently through the streets on a strong horse with a sword by their side needs to fear the barking and yapping of a few small dogs.

Philagathus

Explain more clearly how and in what ways a child of God can have doubts and yet be fully assured.

Theologus:

Consider this analogy: Imagine a person standing at the top of the tallest steeple in the world, securely bound to it so that they cannot fall even if they wanted to. Yet, when they look downward, they feel fear because human nature is not accustomed to being so high in the air and looking down at the distant earth. However, when they look upward and realize they are firmly bound and out of all danger, they cast away all fear. Similarly, when we focus on ourselves, doubts and

fears arise, but when we direct our gaze upward to Christ and the truth of His promises, we become confident and cease to doubt.

Philagathus

Explain to us the origin of these doubts and fears and where they come from in the children of God.

Theologus:

They arise from the imperfection of our regeneration and from the inner struggle between faith and unbelief within the minds of the elect. These two forces strongly contend with each other in the most regenerated individuals, seeking to gain mastery and dominance. As a result, it sometimes happens that, due to the prevailing power of unbelief, even the most devout servants of God may fall into fits and bouts of despair, as Job and David did in their trials. Even in our present time, some of God's children are severely afflicted in this way and brought very low, even to the brink of despair. However, the Lord in His great mercy restores them, rescuing them from complete and final despair. They are humbled and tested through these intense struggles for a time, but it ultimately works for their great good. Just as we say that a fever in a young person is a sign of health, these burning fits of temptation in the elect are often signs of God's grace and favor. If they were not from God, the devil would not be so actively involved in tormenting them.

Philagathus

Isn't it mere presumption and excessive self-trust to be convinced of our salvation?

Theologus:

Not at all. The basis of this conviction does not lie within ourselves or anything within or outside of us, but solely in the righteousness of Christ and the merciful promises of God. Is it presumptuous for us to believe what God has promised, Christ has obtained, and the Holy Spirit has sealed? No, it is not presumption but a duty we are all bound to fulfill, as we will be held accountable on the dreadful day of

judgment. As for ourselves, we freely admit that in God's sight we are nothing but sinful and miserable beings, incapable of doing anything to contribute to our own salvation. However, through faith, we are justified and find peace with God, fully persuaded of His love and favor towards us in Christ.

Philagathus

Can't the reprobates and ungodly also have assurance of their salvation?

Theologus:

No, for the Prophet declares, "There is no peace for the wicked." Therefore, I reason in this way: Those who do not possess inward peace cannot be assured. But the wicked do not possess inward peace. Therefore, they cannot be assured. Steadfast faith in the promises provides assurance. But the wicked do not have steadfast faith in the promises. Therefore, they cannot be assured. The spirit of adoption provides assurance. But the wicked do not have the spirit of adoption. Therefore, they cannot be assured.

In conclusion, when a person feels in themselves an evil conscience, blindness, profanity, and disobedience, they will (despite their desires) sing this mournful song: "I do not know whether I shall be saved or damned."

Philagathus

Isn't the doctrine of assurance of salvation a comforting doctrine?

Theologus:

Indeed, it is. For unless a person is convinced of God's favor and forgiveness of sins, and consequently their own salvation, what comfort can they find in anything? Furthermore, the assurance of God's love towards us is the foundation of all our love and joyful obedience to Him. We love and obey Him because we know that He has loved us first and written our names in the book of life. On the contrary, the doctrine of the Papists, which promotes constant doubt

and fear in a servile manner, is most hellish and discomforting. As long as a person holds onto such beliefs, what encouragement do they have to serve God? What love for His Majesty? What hope in the promises? What comfort in times of trouble? What patience in adversity?

Antilegon:

On this matter, I completely agree with your perspective. I truly believe that a person should be persuaded of their salvation. As for myself, I have no doubt about it. I hope to be saved just like the best of them. I have no fear about that. I have such unwavering faith in God that even if there were only two people saved in the world, I hope I would be one of them.

Theologus:

You are indeed very confident. You are persuaded without even knowing. I wish your foundation was as solid as your empty confidence. But who is as bold as a blind horse? Your hope is nothing more than a fancy, like a sick person's dream. You hope for something you cannot even define. You have no basis for what you claim. How can you hope to be saved when you are not walking on the path of salvation? What hope can a person have to reach London quickly if they are not moving in that direction but doing the opposite? What hope can a person have of reaping a good harvest of corn if they take no action, neither plowing, sowing, nor harrowing? What hope can a person have of being well-nourished and in good health if they rarely or never eat? What hope can a person have of avoiding drowning if they jump into the sea? Similarly, what hope can you have of being saved when you are not walking in that direction, when you make no effort, and when you do everything contrary to it? Alas, there is nothing in you that aligns with the things the Scriptures affirm must be present in all those who will be saved. None of the aforementioned signs and tokens are evident in you. You are ignorant, profane, and careless. God is not worshipped under your roof. There is no true fear of God in yourself or in your household. You seldom listen to preached word. You are content

with an ignorant minister. You have no prayers in your family, no reading, no singing of psalms, no instructions, exhortations, or admonitions, or any other Christian exercises. You disregard observing the Sabbath; you show no reverence when using God's name; you sometimes utter horrible oaths and curses; you make a habit of swearing by your faith and your word. Your wife is irreligious, your children are undisciplined and ungracious, your servants are profane and careless. You set an example of atheism and immoral behavior in your own house. You are an avid gambler, a rioter, a spendthrift, a heavy drinker, a frequent visitor of alehouses, and a seeker of prostitutes. In conclusion, you indulge in all vices and wickedness. Now, I ask you, or rather let your conscience tell me, what hope can you have of being saved as long as you continue in this way? Doesn't Saint John say, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie"? Doesn't the same Apostle affirm that those who claim to know God but do not keep His commandments are liars?

Furthermore, doesn't he say, "Whoever commits sin is of the devil, and whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God"? Doesn't our Lord Jesus clearly tell the Jews (who boasted that Abraham was their father) that they were of their father the devil because they did his works? Doesn't the Apostle Paul say, "We are slaves of the one we obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness"? Doesn't the scripture say, "He who practices righteousness is righteous"? Doesn't our Lord Jesus affirm that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of His Father in heaven? Therefore, I conclude that since your entire lifestyle is carnal, careless, and dissolute, you have no justifiable hope of being saved.

Philagathus

I truly believe that the situation of this man (which you have just revealed) is the situation of thousands.

Theologus:

Yes, undoubtedly, it is a great pity (of thousands upon thousands).

Asunetus

Hold on a moment, sir, you are being quite strict. A gentle fire produces good malt. I hope you understand that we are saved by mercy, not by merit. If I were to do everything myself, what is the purpose of Christ? I hope that what I cannot do, He will do for me. And I hope to be saved by Jesus Christ just like the best of all of you.

Theologus:

Oh, now I understand where you're heading. You want to use Christ as an excuse for your sins. You want to sin freely and put it all on Christ's account. Truly, there are many thousands of people with your mindset who, upon hearing about God's abundant mercy in Christ, become bolder in their sinning. But they will one day learn at their own expense what it means to abuse the mercy of God. The Apostle says that the mercy and loving kindness of God should lead us to repentance. However, we see that it leads many to become even harder in their hearts. The Prophet says that with God is mercy, so that He may be feared. But many become more secure and careless because of it. But to get to the point: you say that you hope to be saved by Jesus Christ. And I respond that if those qualities, which the Scriptures declare to be in all those who shall be saved by Him, are found in you, then you may have good confidence and assured hope. Otherwise, not. Now, the Scriptures determine and state that if a person is in Christ and expects to be saved by Him, they must possess the following qualities:

- Firstly, they must be a new creature.
- Secondly, they must not live according to the desires of human beings, but according to the will of God.
- Thirdly, they must be zealous for good works.
- Fourthly, they must die to sin and live for righteousness.
- Fifthly, they must be holy and blameless.
- Sixthly, they must walk as Christ walked.

- Seventhly, they must crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.
- Eighthly, they must walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- Lastly, they must serve God in righteousness and true holiness all the days of their life.

Look, these are the things required of all those who shall be saved by Christ. Therefore, if these qualities are present in you to some extent, then your hope is valid, sound, and good. Otherwise, it is worth nothing. For in vain do people say that they hope to be saved by Christ when they live in a dissolute manner. The reason for this is that the members must be in harmony with the head. But Christ our head is holy; therefore, we, His members, must also be holy, as it is written: "Be holy, for I am holy." Otherwise, if we join profane and unholy members to our holy head Christ, we make Christ a monster. It would be like attaching the head of a lion to the neck of a bear, the body of a wolf, and the legs of a fox. Wouldn't that be a monstrous thing? Wouldn't it create a monstrous creature? This is what they attempt to do when they want Swearers, Drunkards, Whoremongers, and the like to be members of Christ and have life and salvation through Him. But since you presume so much about Christ, may I ask you a question?

Antilegon:
What is that?

Theologus:
How do you know that Christ died specifically for you, by name?

Antilegon:
Christ died for all men, and therefore for me.

Theologus:
But not all men will be saved by Christ. So how do you know that you

are among those who have a special connection to Christ and will be saved by His death?

Antilegon:

I know that we are all sinners and cannot be saved by anyone other than Christ.

Theologus:

Answer my question directly. How do you personally know that you are one of the chosen ones, one of those for whom Christ died?

Antilegon:

I know it through my faith in God because I trust Him completely and no one else.

Theologus:

But how do you know that you have faith? Or how can a person know their own faith?

Antilegon:

I know it because I have always had a sincere intention and faith towards God, as good as any man in my profession, and it is not from books. I have always feared God with all my heart and served Him through my prayers.

Theologus:

Enough of beating around the bush. Answer me directly. How do you know with certainty and assurance that Christ died for you specifically and by name?

Antilegon:

You're driving me crazy. You're shaking my faith. But if you're trying to make me turn away from Christ, I won't believe you. Because I know that we can only be saved through Him.

Theologus:

I'm not trying to turn you away from Christ, but to lead you to Christ.

How can I drive you away from Christ when you've never truly approached Him? How can I drive you out of Christ when you've never been in Him? But this is what deceives you and many others: you think you believe in Christ just because you say you do. As if faith consists of mere words. Or as if a person has faith simply because they claim to have it. If everyone who claims to have faith truly had faith, and if everyone who says they believe in Christ truly believed, then who wouldn't have faith? Who wouldn't believe? But in reality, your faith and the faith of many others is nothing more than mere imagination. However, you still haven't answered my question regarding your personal knowledge of Christ.

Antilegon:

I can't answer you any differently than I already have. And I believe I have answered you sufficiently.

Theologus:

No, no. You stumble in your words. Your answer is worthless. You speak without understanding. You are completely confused and misguided in this matter. But if you truly had the genuine knowledge and heartfelt experience of God, then I am certain you would have given a different and better answer. You would have spoken from the true sense and feeling within your own heart, and from the work of God's grace within you. But because you cannot provide a valid reason that Christ died for you specifically and by name, I suspect that you are not one of those who have a rightful claim in Him, and in whom His death truly takes effect.

Philagathus

I believe this question would confuse a great number of people, and there are only a few who can answer it correctly.

Theologus:

That is absolutely true. I know from sad experience that not even one out of a hundred can give a sound and satisfactory answer to this question. Only those in whom the transformative work has been

done and who inwardly feel that Christ is theirs can answer it. I have spoken with some who are intelligent, sensible, and learned, yet when confronted with this very question, they have struggled and stumbled greatly. Even though they may have tried to reason their way through it with their wit and learning, they lacked the personal experience of what they were saying, and therefore had no assurance. As a result, they were as good as not having answered at all. It is the sanctifying Spirit that brings this understanding. Without the experience of the Spirit's work, the question can never be soundly answered. Therefore, I conclude this matter by saying: Just as a branch cannot live and bear fruit unless it remains in the vine, we also cannot live unless we abide in Christ and are truly grafted into Him through a living faith. Only those who dwell in Him can benefit from Him. Only those who are transformed into Christ can live by Him. Only those who are in His body can partake of His body. Only those who are crucified with Christ can be saved by Him crucified. Only those who die with Him while alive can live with Him when dead. So let us root ourselves downward in mortification, so that we may grow upward in sanctification. Let us die to sin so that we may live for righteousness. Let us die while we are alive, so that we may live when we are dead.

Asunetus

If only those who possess the qualifications you mentioned can be saved by Christ, then Lord have mercy on us! The path to heaven is indeed very narrow, and very few will be saved. There are very few such individuals in the world.

Theologus:

You are not mistaken in that regard. When all is said and done, it is certain that only a few will be saved. I will demonstrate this to you through scripture, reason, and examples.

Asunetus

First, let us hear it proven by the scriptures.

Theologus:

Our Lord Jesus says: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life, and only a few find it." He also says, "Many are called, but few are chosen." In another instance, there is an account of a man who came to Jesus and asked Him specifically if only a few would be saved. To this, our Lord Jesus answered, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate. For many will try to enter but will not be able." In His response, although Jesus does not directly answer the question with a yes or no, He implies clearly through His words that few will be saved. Firstly, He tells us to strive earnestly, indicating that it is a matter of great struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Secondly, He affirms that the gate is very narrow, signifying that no one can enter without strong effort and determination. Lastly, He says that many who seek to enter will not be able to, indicating that even among those who seek, many will fall short because they do not seek Him in the right way. Isaiah also says, "Unless the Lord of Hosts had left us a remnant, we would have become like Sodom, and would have been like Gomorrah." The Apostle also quotes the Prophet, saying, "The Lord will carry out his sentence on earth, finishing it and cutting it short." These scriptures, I believe, are sufficient to prove that few will be saved.

Asunetus

Now, let us hear your reasons.

Theologus:

If we consider rationally, we might be more amazed that anyone should be saved, rather than so few. For we face all the obstacles and hindrances imaginable, both within and outside of us. It's as if the entire universe is against us. All the devils in Hell are against us, with their horns, heads, tremendous strength, infinite cunning, and deceptive temptations. There is a fierce current running against us. Then we have this present evil world against us, with its countless baits, traps, nets, snares, and deceitful schemes to catch, ensnare,

and entangle us. There are profits and pleasures, riches and honour, wealth and advancement, ambition and covetousness. We face a royal camp of spiritual and invisible enemies. Lastly, we have our flesh, our corrupted nature, against us: we have ourselves against ourselves. For we ourselves are as great enemies to our salvation as the world or the Devil. Our understanding, reason, will, and affections are all against us. Our natural wisdom is an enemy to us. Our lusts and desires provide strength to Satan's temptations. They are all in league with Satan against us. They participate with him in everything against us and our salvation. They fight under his banner and receive their rewards from him. It is difficult for us because the Devil has an inner faction against us, and we always carry within us our greatest enemy who is ever ready, day and night, to betray us into the hands of Satan, even to unbolt the door and let him in to slit our throats. Here, we see a vast army of dreadful enemies, a legion of Devils, lying in ambush against our souls. Are we not, therefore, miserable beings in a most pitiable state, being thus betrayed and besieged on all sides? Considering everything, is it not justifiable to marvel that anyone will be saved? For who does not see, who does not know, that thousands upon thousands are led astray to destruction by the temptations of the world, the flesh, or the Devil? But furthermore, I will demonstrate, by another very clear and evident reason, that the number of God's elect on the face of the earth is very few in comparison. This can be observed as follows: First, let us remove all Papists, Atheists, and Heretics from among us. Secondly, let us exclude all immoral and notorious evildoers, such as Swearers, Drunkards, Whoremongers, Worldly-minded individuals, deceivers, swindlers, proud individuals, Rioters, gamblers, and all the profane multitude. Thirdly, let us reject and separate all Hypocrites, carnal Protestants, vain profilers, backsliders, decliners, and lukewarm Christians. Let all these, I say, be set apart, and then tell me how many sound, sincere, faithful, and zealous worshippers of God will remain among us. I suppose we would not need the Art of Arithmetic to count them. I believe there would be very few in every village, town, and city; I doubt they would be sparsely found in the streets, so that one could easily count them

as they pass. Our Lord Jesus asks a question in the Gospel of Saint Luke, saying: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" To which we may answer, "Certainly very little."

Asunetus

Now, as you promised, provide examples to illustrate this point as well.

Theologus:

In the early days of the world, all flesh had become so corrupt in their ways that God could no longer tolerate them. He even purposed to destroy them by the floodwaters. When the flood came, how few were found faithful? Only eight people were saved by the Ark. How few righteous individuals were found in Sodom and the surrounding cities? Only one poor man named Lot and his family. How few believers were found in Jericho? Only one woman named Rahab. How few of the Israelites who left Egypt entered the Promised Land? Only two—Caleb and Joshua. The rest could not enter because of their unbelief. The true and invisible Church was small during the time of the Judges, as can be seen abundantly in that book. In the time of Elijah, the Church was so small that it seemed to have disappeared. During the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, the sincere worshippers were very few, as the prophets attest. During the captivity, the Church was like the moon hidden behind a cloud, driven into the wilderness, where it concealed itself. During the persecutions of the Greek Empire by Gog, Magog, and Egypt, the number of believers was at its lowest. In the time of Christ, what a small group did he start with! How corrupt were the priests, scribes, and Pharisees! At the beginning of the apostles' preaching, there were only a few believers. After the first six hundred years, what a decline there was in the Church during the height of Antichrist's reign! How few true worshippers of God were there in the world for almost seven hundred years! Since the spread of the Gospel, how few actually believe! As the prophet says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" Thus, you can see that it is evident (through Scripture,

reason, and examples from all ages) that the number of the elect is very small, and in the end, few shall be saved.

Philagathus

I beg you to tell us, how few and to what extent their numbers may be reduced. Will it be one out of a hundred or one out of a thousand who will be saved?

Theologus:

No one knows that, and I cannot provide a direct and certain answer to that. But I can say that in comparison to the reprobate, there will be only a few saved. Not all who profess the Gospel are truly part of the Church in the eyes of God. There are many within the Church who are not truly of the Church.

Philagathus

How do you support that argument?

Theologus:

I draw it from the ninth chapter of Romans, where the Apostle says, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." And again, Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved."

Philagathus

How do you apply this to the visible Church? In what comparison do you consider it? Let us hear your estimation. Some believe that one out of a hundred will be saved, while others think it will be as rare as one out of a thousand.

Theologus:

Indeed, I have heard some learned and pious theologians make such conjectures, but I cannot provide any certainty on the matter. However, if we consider the comparison made by the Holy Spirit between a remnant and the sand of the sea, it may shed some light on the subject.

Philagathus Does the knowledge of this doctrine discourage people from seeking God?

Theologus:

Not at all. On the contrary, it should awaken us and inspire us to be more diligent in pursuing our salvation, so that we may be counted among the few in Christ's small flock who strive for salvation with fear and trembling.

Philagathus

Some people trivialize these matters. Others say that the afterlife is of little importance compared to the present. They leave that matter to God, trusting that He who created them will save them. They hope to fare as well as others and manage as successfully as their neighbours.

Theologus:

It is truly sad that people are so careless and treat lightly the most weighty and important matter of all. It will be of no benefit for a person to gain the whole world but lose their own soul, as the wise author attests.

Asunetus:

I kindly request your permission to express my thoughts on this matter, sir. I am an ignorant man, so please forgive me if I speak incorrectly. A fool's words are easily spoken.

Theologus:

Go ahead.

Asunetus

I truly believe that God is stronger than the devil. Therefore, I cannot believe that God will allow the devil to have more power than Himself. He will not let it happen. He loves humanity too much for that.

Theologus:

You have a worldly understanding, thinking that God will wrestle and contend with the devil over this matter. God's power never contradicts His will. For God cannot do anything against His own will and decree because He does not want to.

Asunetus

But the Scripture says that God desires all men to be saved.

Theologus:

That statement does not refer to every individual person, but to people of all kinds. Some Jews, some Gentiles, some rich, some poor, some high, some low, and so on.

Asunetus

But Christ died for all, so all shall be saved.

Theologus:

Christ died for all in the sufficiency of his death, but not in its effectiveness for granting eternal life. Only the Elect, those chosen by God, shall be saved through his death. It is written, "This is my blood in the New Testament, which is given for you," referring to his disciples and chosen children. And again, Christ, being consecrated, becomes the author of salvation for all who obey him.

Asunetus

God is merciful, and therefore I hope he will save the majority out of his mercy.

Theologus:

The majority will perish, but all who are saved will be saved by his mercy. As it is written, "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens." And again, "It is not in the one who wills or runs, but in God who shows mercy." Therefore, even though God's mercy is infinite and Christ's merit is infinite, only the vessels of mercy will receive mercy.

Antilegon:

Can you tell who will be saved and who will be damned? Do you know God's secrets? When were you in Heaven? When did you speak with God? I believe that all men will be saved. For God's mercy surpasses all his works. Say whatever you want, but God did not create us to condemn us.

Theologus:

You are indeed very assertive, but more bold than wise. Christ says few will be saved, and you say all will be saved. Whom shall we believe, Christ or you?

Antilegon:

If two souls were to come, one from heaven and another from hell, and bring us certain news about the matter, then I would truly believe it.

Theologus:

Let's suppose that two souls of the deceased were to come, one from heaven and another from hell. I can tell you in advance what they would say and what news they would bring.

Antilegon:

What is it, I ask you?

Theologus:

They would say that there are few in heaven and many in hell. Heaven is empty, and hell is full.

Antilegon:

How do you know that? How do you know they would say so?

Theologus:

I am certain that if they speak the truth, they must say so.

Antilegon:

Must they? Why, I ask you, must they?

Theologus:

Because the word of God says so. Moses and the Prophets say so. If you refuse to believe Moses and the Prophets, you would not believe even if someone, or two people, or a hundred were to rise from the dead.

Antilegon:

But I would believe.

Theologus:

I ask you, which do you think is more trustworthy: God and his word, or the souls of dead men?

Antilegon:

If I were certain that God said so, then I would believe it.

Theologus:

If His word says so, doesn't He say so? Isn't He and His word the same?

Antilegon:

Nevertheless, even so, if I could hear God Himself speak it, it would greatly move me.

Theologus:

You reveal yourself to be a notable unbeliever. You refuse to believe God's word without signs, miracles, and wonders from the dead.

Antilegon:

You speak as if you knew for certain that hell is full. You're merely speaking randomly; you cannot tell for sure. You have never been there to see. But as for me, I believe there is no hell at all, only the hell of a person's conscience.

Theologus:

Now you reveal your true nature. You say you believe in no hell at all.

And I think if you were thoroughly examined, you would believe in no heaven, no God, and no devil.

Antilegon:

Yes, I believe there is a heaven because I see it with my own eyes.

Theologus:

It seems you will only believe what you see. But blessed is he who believes without seeing. You are one of the most ardent atheists I have ever conversed with.

Antilegon:

You should not judge; you do not know people's hearts.

Theologus:

From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. You have revealed enough about your heart through your words. For the tongue is the key to the mind. As for judging, I judge you only by your actions, which is lawful. For we can rightly say, a bad tree bears bad fruit, and one who does wickedly is a wicked person. But it is you and people like you who take it upon yourselves to judge people's hearts. Even if a person's outward actions are religious and honest, you condemn them. And if a person devotes themselves to the Word and prayer, reforms their family, and abstains from gross sins of the world, you immediately label them a hypocrite. And so, you presume to judge people's hearts, as if you know the motives behind these actions.

Antilegon:

I admit, I am a sinner, and as far as I know, so are all others. There is no person who cannot be improved. I pray that God grants us all His grace, so that we may please Him and ultimately reach heaven.

Theologus:

Now you try to lump everything together, as if you are as good as the best and as if there is no distinction among sinners. But you must learn that there is a great difference among sinners. There is the

penitent sinner and the unrepentant sinner, the conscientious sinner and the careless sinner, the sinner whose sins are not imputed and the sinner whose sins are imputed, the sinner who will be saved and the sinner who will be damned. For it is one thing to sin out of frailty and another thing to live in it, dwell in it, and engage in it, and as the Holy Spirit says, to imbibe it like a fish sucking in water and to draw it towards us with ropes and cords of vanity.

In conclusion, there is as great a difference between one sinner and another as there is between light and darkness. For although God's children are sinners in terms of the remnants of sin within them, the Scriptures call them just and righteous because they are justified by Christ and sanctified by His grace and the Holy Spirit. And for this reason, S. John says, "Whoever is born of God does not sin."

Antilegon:

What, I ask you, have you never sinned?

Theologus:

Yes, and what then? What good does that do you?

Antilegon:

You preachers cannot agree among yourselves. One says one thing, and another says another thing, so you confuse the ignorant people and they don't know which way to turn.

Theologus:

The preachers, thank God, agree very well together on all the main principles of religion and fundamental points of salvation. But if they disagree on some other matters, you need to test the spirits to see if they are from God or not. You must examine everything and hold on to what is good.

Antilegon:

How can ordinary and simple men test the spirits and doctrines of the preachers?

Theologus:

Yes, for the Apostle says, "The spiritual person discerns all things." And S. John says to the faithful Christians, "You have received an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things," meaning all things necessary for salvation. Therefore, those who have the Spirit of God can judge and discern doctrines, whether they are from God or not.

Antilegon:

I am not educated and knowledgeable, so I cannot judge such matters. As for attending sermons, I have no time for that. I have other things to do. Let those who are scholarly and listen to many sermons judge such matters. I will not get involved because they do not concern me.

Theologus:

Nevertheless, you should read the Scriptures and listen to the preaching of God's word, so that you may be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood in matters of religion.

Antilegon:

It seems you believe that no one can be saved without preaching, and that everyone is obligated to attend sermons. But I disagree with you on that.

Theologus:

Our Lord Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice." And he also says, "He who is of God hears God's word." Therefore, you do not hear it because you are not of God. You can see how Christ Jesus considers it a distinguishing mark of God's children to hear his word preached.

Antilegon:

But I believe we can serve God well enough without a preacher. After all, preachers are only human; what can they do? A preacher may be a good man while in the pulpit, but outside of it, they are just like any other person.

Theologus:

You speak disrespectfully of God's messengers and the sacred ordinance of preaching. However, the Apostle fully answers your objection by saying, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." So, how can one hear without a preacher? The Apostle clearly tells you that you cannot have faith or serve God rightly without preaching.

Antilegon:

Even if you preach as much as you can, you cannot improve the word of God. Some people add or remove whatever they want. The Scriptures are merely human inventions, and people made the Scriptures.

Theologus:

We preach not to improve the Word, but to improve you. As for adding or removing, that is a complete falsehood. And when you say that the Scriptures were made by men, it is blasphemous even to think so, and you deserve to be answered at the gallows.

Antilegon:

Now I see that you are angry. Despite your godliness, you easily become upset.

Theologus:

I believe it is not a sin to be angry against sin. Your sin is very great, and who can bear it?

Antilegon:

Throughout this discussion, you have spoken much in favour of preaching, but you have said nothing about prayer. I believe prayer is just as necessary as preaching. In the Scriptures, I find the command to pray continually, but I do not find a command to preach continually.

Theologus:

No one denies that prayer is most necessary and should always be

joined with preaching and all other holy exercises, as it serves as their handmaid. However, we give preference to preaching because it directs and sharpens prayer. It stirs us rightly in all spiritual actions and services. Without preaching, we cannot maintain a steady course and are prone to err. Now, as for your claim that you find "Pray continually" but not "Preach continually," if you were not deliberately blind, you would also find "Preach continually." The Apostle says to Timothy, "Be instant: Preach the word in season and out of season," which means always, as time and occasion permit.

Antilegon:

You praise preaching, but you say nothing about reading. I believe you condemn reading.

Theologus:

Does one who highly praises gold condemn silver? I openly confess that both public and private reading of the Scriptures are very necessary and beneficial. I wish it were more widely practiced. It is of great use in increasing knowledge and understanding, and it also prepares us to hear the preached word. Those who are completely ignorant of the Bible's history can derive little profit or comfort from hearing the word.

Philagathus

It appears that this man does not value either preaching or reading, as far as I can see. He seems to care little if the Scriptures were burned.

Theologus:

Oh, sirrah, you speak very impertinently. Speak when you are given permission. Who appointed you as a judge? You are one of his disciples, and that's why you speak in his defense.

Philagathus

No, sir. I hope I am Christ's disciple, and no one else's. But I cannot

remain silent in the face of your base cavilling and blasphemous speeches.

Antilegon:

I apologize, sir. You seem to be one of these Scripture enthusiasts. You're all about the spirit. It's overflowing from your nostrils.

Philagathus

You clearly reveal yourself to be a mocking skeptic.

Antilegon:

And you clearly reveal yourself to be one of those chosen people of God who know their place in heaven.

Philagathus

I pray that God shows you mercy and gives you a better heart. I can see that you are filled with bitterness and bound by wickedness.

Antilegon:

You think that only you and those who please your fancy are good. You want to be seen as pure. But, by God, there are plenty of deceitful rogues among you.

Theologus:

No, now you clearly show what spirit you possess. You swear and rail in the same breath.

Antilegon:

God forgive me. Why did he provoke me then? There are many busybodies like him in the world who won't let anyone be at peace.

Theologus:

I see that you can be easily provoked, since you're angry with him for speaking the truth.

Antilegon:

What does he have to do with me? He is more meddlesome than

necessary. Why does he say I am in a bad situation? I won't go to him to learn my duty. If I have faults, he won't answer for them. I will answer for my own faults, and each person will be accountable for their own actions. Let him mind his own business.

Theo.

You are too impatient; you always assume the worst. We should kindly and lovingly admonish one another, for we must care about each other's salvation. I assure you, he speaks out of love and compassion towards you.

Antilegon:

I don't care for such love. Let him keep it to himself. What does he think of me? Does he believe that I don't have a soul to save like he does? Or that I don't care about my salvation? He should know that I have just as much concern for my salvation as he does, even if I don't show it outwardly. All that glitters is not gold. I have good intentions, even if I can't express them.

Theologus:

Those words could have been spared. I hope you will be pacified, improve your life, and draw closer to God in the future.

Antilegon:

Truly, sir, you can think whatever you want about me. But I assure you, I care more about it than the whole world can comprehend. Thank God, I say my prayers every night before bed. And if sincere prayers won't help us, may God help us. I have always served God faithfully and genuinely, keeping Him in my thoughts. I treat others as I want to be treated. I attend church and engage in prayer while I'm there. And I hope I'm not as bad as this person makes me out to be. I'm certain that if I'm bad, I'm not the worst in the world; there are others just as bad as me. If I go to hell, I'll have companions and fare just as well as the rest.

Theologus:

You believe you have spoken wisely, but I do not appreciate your response. Your words reek of ignorance, pride, and disbelief. Firstly, you justify your faithless and ignorant worship of God. Secondly, you justify yourself by comparing with others, claiming that others are as bad as you and that you're not the worst in the world.

Antilegon:

Now I know that you speak out of ill will. You never had a good opinion of me.

Theologus:

I wish I could have a good opinion of you, as I desire, and that I could see in you what might draw my love and approval towards you. And as for ill will, the Lord knows that I bear none towards you. I wholeheartedly desire your conversion and salvation. I would consider myself fortunate if I could save your soul even if it meant losing my right arm.

Antilegon:

I hope I can repent, for the scripture says: Whenever a sinner repents, God will have mercy on him. So, if I have time, grace, and the opportunity to repent before death, to ask God for forgiveness, say my prayers, and cry out for God's mercy, I hope I'll do well enough.

Theologus:

You speak as though repentance were within your power and at your command, and that you can simply decide to have it in your heart whenever you want. This presumption leads you and many others to think of repentance only three hours before death. But you must understand that repentance is a rare gift from God, given only to a few. God knows well whom He grants repentance to, as it is a privilege reserved for the Elect alone. It is not an easy matter, attained without many fervent prayers, extensive hearing, reading, and meditating on the word of God. It is not as simple as the world

assumes. It is found only by those who diligently seek it and earnestly beg for it. It is not a matter of a mere three hours. Superficially saying "God have mercy" will not suffice. Haphazardly reciting a few prayers shortly before death does not avail much. While true repentance is never too late, late repentance is seldom genuine. Delays in this matter are dangerous, for the longer we postpone it, the worse our condition becomes. Just as a nail driven deep with a hammer is harder to remove, the longer we let a disease progress, the harder it is to cure. The deeper a tree's roots, the harder it is to uproot. The longer we delay our repentance, the harder it will be to repent. Therefore, it is perilous to postpone it until the last moment. As an ancient Father said, we read of only one who repented at the last, so that no one should presume, and yet of one, so that no one should despair.

Therefore, to conclude this matter, I want you to understand that the present time is always the time for repentance. The past cannot be recovered, and the future is uncertain.

Antilegon:

Sir, in my opinion, you have expressed some very dangerous ideas that could drive a person to despair.

Theologus:

What are those ideas, may I ask?

Antilegon:

There are several things, but one thing in particular troubles me deeply, and that is the small number of people you claim will be saved. I find it hard to believe that God created so many thousands only to cast them away once He is done with them. Do you think that God made us to condemn us? Are you suggesting that He is the author of condemnation?

Theologus:

Far from it. God is not the cause of people's condemnation; it is their

own doing. As it is written, "O Israel, your destruction is of yourself." God, in His great mercy, uses every possible means to save souls. He says through the Prophet, "What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done?" But let's address your question more directly. I deny that God created the majority of people solely for the purpose of perdition, as if that were the intended end in creating them. Rather, He created all things for the praise of His glory, as it is written, "He has created all things for Himself, and the wicked for the evil day." Therefore, it follows that the cause and purpose for which the wicked were created is not solely their destruction, but rather God's own praise and glory, so that His works may manifest and shine forth. However, it is certain that God, for just reasons (though unknown and hidden to us), has rejected a large number of people. The causes of reprobation are concealed within God's eternal counsel, known only to His godly wisdom. They are secret and hidden from us, reserved in His eternal wisdom to be revealed at the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus. His judgments, as the Scripture says, are like a great deep, and His ways are beyond our understanding. It is as impossible for us to comprehend the vast ocean in a small dish as it is to comprehend the reasons behind God's counsel in this matter.

Antilegon:

What reason, justice, or fairness is there in passing a sentence of death upon people before they are born, and before they have done good or evil?

Theologus:

I have already told you that we can never comprehend the reasoning behind God's actions in this matter. However, we must understand that His will is the standard of righteousness, and it must serve as our guide even without a thousand reasons. Whatever God wills, simply because He wills it, is to be considered just. We are unable to grasp the reasons behind many natural phenomena and things that are perceptible, such as the movement of celestial bodies, their incredible speed, their composition, size, height, and width. We

cannot fully understand the causes of thunder, lightning, winds, earthquakes, tides, and numerous other phenomena on Earth. So how can we possibly ascend to the secret chamber and council of God to scrutinise and uncover the depths of His secrets, which no human wit or intellect can ever reach? Therefore, let us learn to reverently honour that which we cannot comprehend in this life, in the fear of God.

I must say one thing to you: although God may decree something, He does not execute it upon anyone until they have deserved it ten thousand times over. For between the decree and its execution, sin arises in us, along with entirely just reasons for condemnation.

Antilegon:

If God has decreed our destruction, what can we do about it? Who can resist His will? Why then is He angry with us? After all, everything must necessarily happen according to His decree and determination.

Theologus:

Firstly, I respond to you with the words of the Apostle: "O man, who are you to argue with God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Doesn't the potter have the power to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use? Furthermore, I answer that God's decree does not force the will of man; rather, it works and moves on its own. It contains within itself the beginning of evil motion and willingly sins. Therefore, although God's decree imposes a necessity upon all secondary causes, requiring them to be shaped and disposed according to it, it does not impose coercion or constraint, for they are all driven by their own voluntary motion. Just as we see that the weight of a clock, being the primary mover, causes all the other gears to move but not in a particular direction—since their movement in one way or another is their own doing, that is, due to their own construction. Similarly, God's decree moves all secondary causes without taking away their own proper motion. God

is the author of every action but not of any evil in any action. Just as the soul of man is the original cause of all motion in man, as the philosophers argue, but not of crippled and impotent motion—that is caused by another factor, namely, some defect in the body. So, I say, God's decree is the root and first cause of motion but not of defective motion, which comes from ourselves. Likewise, when a bell rings, the cause is in the one who rings it, but when it clangs, the cause is in itself. Similarly, when an instrument produces sound, it is due to the person playing it, but when it produces discord, it is within itself, that is, due to its lack of proper tuning. Therefore, to conclude this point, all instruments and intermediate causes are moved by God, the first mover, in such a way that His movement is always good, holy, and just. However, the instruments being moved are carried in contrary motions according to their own nature and construction. If they are good, they are inclined towards what is good, but if they are evil, they are inclined towards evil. Thus, based on the dual origin of motion and will, there are distinct and diverse actions and effects.

Antilegon:

But why is it that man, of his own accord, desires what is evil?

Theologus:

It stems from the fall of Adam, through which his will was corrupted.

Antilegon:

What caused Adam's fall?

Theologus:

The Devil and the corruption of his own will.

Antilegon:

How could his will incline towards evil when it was made good, and he himself was made good?

Theologus:

Adam and his will were indeed made good, but it was a mutable goodness. To be unchangeably good is a quality that belongs solely to

God. And Adam was in such a state that he had the possibility to fall, as the outcome revealed.

Antilegon:

Wasn't God's decree the cause of Adam's fall?

Theologus:

No, it was the voluntary inclination of his will towards evil. Adam's will was neither forced nor compelled by any violence from God's intention to consent. Rather, of his own free will and with a ready mind, he turned away from God and joined with the Devil.

So, I conclude that if we consider the decree or outcome, Adam's sin was necessary. But if we consider the first mover and inherent cause, which was his own will, then he sinned voluntarily and contingently. For God's decree did not take away his will or its contingency; it only ordered and disposed it. Therefore, as a learned writer says, "He sinned willingly and by his own motion." Thus, no evil is to be attributed to God or His decree.

Antilegon:

How, then, do you conceive and understand God's purpose in all these matters?

Theologus:

Let me explain:

God decreed within Himself, in a single act:

- The existence of the world,
- The creation of Adam as a perfect being,
- Adam's fall by his own choice,
- The fall of all humanity with him,
- His intention to save some from the lost race,
- The means of salvation through His merciful Son,
- The condemnation of others for their sins.

Antilegon:

But how do you prove the decree of reprobation, which suggests that God determined the destruction of thousands before the world existed?

Theologus:

The Scriptures refer to the reprobates as "vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction." They also state that "God has not appointed us to wrath." Therefore, it logically follows that some are indeed appointed to wrath. Furthermore, the Scriptures indicate that the reprobates were ordained to stumble at the Word and were destined for condemnation since ancient times.

Antilegon:

But how do you reconcile this with the fact that God does not desire the death of a sinner? It would imply that He has not predestined anyone for destruction.

Theologus:

God does not desire the death of a sinner simply and absolutely, considering it as the destruction of His creation. Rather, He wills it as a means to demonstrate His justice and display His glory.

Antilegon:

God foreknew and anticipated that the wicked would perish due to their own sins, but He did not predestine them to it.

Theologus:

God's foreknowledge cannot be separated from His decree. Whatever God has foreseen and known in His eternal counsel, He has determined shall come to pass. Just as it pertains to His wisdom to foresee all things, it is His power to govern and control all things according to His will.

Antile.

What do you mean by "foreknowledge" in relation to God?

Theologus:

Foreknowledge in God is the attribute through which all things remain present before His eyes. Thus, in His eternal knowledge, nothing is past or future; all things are always present. And they are present in such a way that they are not mere concepts, forms, or motions, but they are present before God in their truth and perfection.

Antilegon:

How can God justly determine the destruction of individuals before they have sinned?

Theologus:

This objection has been partially addressed before. I mentioned that God condemns individuals only for sin, whether it be original sin alone or both original and actual sin. Although God, in Himself, determines the reprobation of many before all time, He does not proceed to execute it until there are both deserving actions and evident causes found in us. Therefore, those who confuse the decree of reprobation with damnation itself act unsoundly and foolishly, as sin is the cause of the latter and only God's will is the cause of the former.

Philagathus

Well, sir, since we have come this far in discussing this matter, prompted by this man's objections and arguments, I now ask you to speak about election and its causes. Show us from the Scriptures that God has chosen some for eternal life before all worlds.

Theologus:

Regarding the decree of election, hardly anyone doubts it, so a little proof will suffice for this point. I will simply confirm it with one or two testimonies from the holy Scriptures. First, the Apostle says: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we

should be holy and without blame before Him in love." These words are clear and direct in support of this purpose. Another confirmation is found in Romans 8, where it says: "Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Philagathus

What are the causes of election?

Theologus:

The causes of election can be found only in God Himself. His eternal election does not depend on man or anything within man, but is determined within Himself and established in Christ, in whom we are elected. This is fully proven in these words: "He predestined us to adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of His glory, by which He made us freely accepted in His beloved." Here, the apostle tells us that His free grace and the good pleasure of His will are the primary motives or causes of our election.

Philagathus

But the Catholics derive the first motive of election from man's merits and foreseen works. They claim that God foresaw who would repent, believe, and do well, and therefore chose them.

Theologus:

But they are greatly deceived. I say again and again that there was nothing in us that ever moved God to set His love upon us and choose us for life. He always found the original cause within Himself. As it is written, "He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will, He hardens." And again, "It is not in him who wills or runs, but in God who shows mercy." The Lord Himself also testifies that He chose His people not based on anything in them, but simply because He loved them and had a special favor towards them. So it is certain that God's eternal predestination excludes all merits of man and all power of his will to attain eternal life. His free mercy

and undeserved favor are the beginning, middle, and end of our salvation. In other words, everything is from Him, and nothing from ourselves.

Philagathus

So, does faith depend on election, or does election depend on faith? In other words, did God choose us because we believe, or do we believe because we are chosen?

Theologus:

Without a doubt, both faith and all its fruits depend on election. We believe because we are elected, not the other way around. As it is written, "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed."

Antilegon:

If people are predestined before they are born, what is the purpose of all the commandments, admonitions, laws, etc.? It doesn't matter how we live. Our godly or ungodly life cannot change God's purpose.

Theologus:

This objection is truly wicked and worldly, revealing a vile and immoral mindset in those who raise it. However, I would advise such individuals to consider the purpose of our election, which is that we should lead a godly life. As clearly stated in the first chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle says, "God chose us before the foundation of the world." But for what purpose? Is it so that we may live as we please? No, no, he says. It is so that we should be holy and blameless before Him. Furthermore, he states that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that is, to be holy and righteous. It is absolutely certain that we can only judge predestination by its effects: our calling, justification, and sanctification. Once we experience the work of grace within us (being born anew and renewed by the Holy Spirit, having a genuine hatred for sin and love for righteousness), then we can be sure, without any doubt, that we are predestined to life. It is as if God Himself appeared before us, whispered in our ears, and told us that our names are recorded in the

book of life. For whom He predestined, He called; and whom He called, He justified; and whom He justified, He glorified. Therefore, until we feel these signs of election working within us, we cannot have certainty in this matter. We should not focus on or meddle in it, but rather strive, to the best of our abilities, to live honestly and decently, waiting for God to have mercy on us and grant us true assurance. As for those who are careless and dissolute, disregarding everything and living recklessly, there is little hope that they are elected or will ever be called.

Antilegon:

I believe that preaching and spreading the doctrine of predestination has caused much harm. It would have been better if it had never been known by the people and kept completely hidden. This doctrine drives some to despair and makes others more complacent and careless.

Theologus:

You are greatly mistaken. This doctrine is a part of God's revealed Truth that He intended for His people to know. And truly, it is of immense and comforting use to the children of God against all assaults of the Devil and temptations of despair. When a person has truly experienced, through the effects, that God has chosen them for life, even though the Devil fiercely attacks them and their conscience is vehemently assaulted by sin and their own weaknesses, they know with certainty that God's eternal purpose and counsel are unchangeable. They understand that their salvation is not based on themselves or their own strength, but on the unalterable decree of God, which is an immovable foundation that always remains sure and firm. Therefore, no matter what the devil and sin may do, they will be upheld in righteousness and truth, as if carried in the arms of God, even to the end. For whom God loves, He loves to the end. Furthermore, when the Lord's people perceive (through their sanctification and new birth) that the Lord has rejected and reprobated countless others but has chosen them to be heirs of His glorious kingdom, despite being made of the same material as others,

and that He has done all this out of His free grace and undeserved mercy towards them, oh, how their hearts are enraptured with love for Him! How willingly and cheerfully they serve Him! How obediently and faithfully they obey Him! Yes, how they are wholly consumed and inflamed with desire for Him! It is the conviction and experience of God's love towards us that draws forth our love for Him in return, as Saint John says: "We love Him because He first loved us."

Furthermore, it is said of Mary Magdalene that she loved much because she was forgiven much. After she experienced the free pardon of her many and great sins, her affections were ignited with love and obedience towards Christ. Similarly, the Church in the Song of Solomon, after being in the banqueting house of all spiritual grace and feeling the banner of Christ's love displayed upon her, was immediately enraptured and cried out (as if in a swoon) that she was sick with love. And when Christ reached His hand through the door (that is, touched the innermost parts of her heart by His Spirit), her heart yearned, and her affections were stirred towards Him. This is what Saint Paul prays for on his knees, that it may be granted to the Ephesians to comprehend, together with all the saints, the breadth, length, height, and depth of God's love towards us, and to know the love of Christ (which surpasses knowledge) and to be filled with all the fullness of God. Thus, you can see the great and comforting use of this doctrine of election, both in providing strength and comfort against all temptations and in compelling us to love God and fear Him out of genuine love and obedience.

Philagathus

Well, Sir, I believe you have spent enough time addressing Antilegon's objections and cavils. From all of this, I observe one thing: there seems to be no end to cavilling and objecting against the truth. In just one hour, a person can raise more objections than a learned individual can effectively respond to in a day.

Theologus:

You speak the truth. And the reason for this is that humans possess an abundance of sin within them, while the Spirit of God resides within them only to a certain extent. Therefore, they can, by their sin, raise and conceive more objections against the truth than they will be able to answer and defend it.

Philagathus

Indeed, it is evident that errors are infinite, and objections are countless. There appears to be no end to the cavilling of people against God's sacred truth. It is important for us, therefore, to be firmly grounded in the truth so that we are not entangled or ensnared by any cavils or sophistications. However, I truly believe that despite all his objections and exceptions, Antilegon, in his conscience, desires, like Balaam, to die the death of the righteous and be counted among them, even though he seems to despise them.

Theologus:

I am also persuaded of this. For virtue triumphs over vice in such a way that where it is most hated, it is often secretly desired and longed for. And this is the great punishment that God inflicts upon the wicked: that they shall see virtue and waste away, having no power to follow it, as the Poet said.

Philagathus

Now, let us return to the point we were discussing before we got caught up in these objections and cavils: the small number of those who will be saved. You have provided us with several reasons for this, so please continue to elaborate on that point.

Theologus:

Just as I have previously mentioned various hindrances, both internal and external, that prevent us from drawing close to God and keep us bound in our sins, I will now add nine significant obstacles to eternal life. These may aptly be referred to as nine bars blocking the way to heaven and nine gates leading into hell.

Philagathus

Which ones are they?

Theologus:

They are as follows:

1. Infidelity.
2. Presumption of God's mercy.
3. Influence of the majority.
4. Long-standing habit of sin.
5. Continued avoidance of punishment.
6. Hope for a long life.
7. Self-conceit.
8. Association with wicked company.
9. Negative influence from Ministers.

Philagathus

Indeed, these are formidable barriers preventing entry into heaven and wide gates leading to hell. I request that you provide scriptural evidence for each of them and elaborate on them further.

Theologus:

The first hindrance, which is Infidelity, is proven in the fourth chapter of Hebrews, where it is written: "The Gospel was preached to us as well as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. So we see that because of their unbelief they were unable to enter." Here we see that unbelief prevented the people of old from entering the promised land, which symbolises God's eternal kingdom. And it is certain that the same unbelief bars many of us as well. There are those who believe nothing except their own fantasies. They refuse to believe the word of God, especially when it contradicts their desires, profits, and pleasures. Even if things are clearly proven to their faces, with chapter and verse shown to them, they still refuse to believe. Or even if they claim to believe, they never strive to put it into practice, but rather oppose God in all their actions. Most often, when God says

one thing, they say the opposite, challenging God and calling Him a liar. Others may say, "If everything the preachers say is true, then God help us." This is how Infidelity bars people from heaven and casts them into hell.

Philagathus

Now let us discuss the second obstacle, which is Presumption of God's mercy.

Theologus:

This is described in Deuteronomy 29, where the Lord says: "When someone hears the words of this curse and thinks he can safely persist in his own stubborn ways, adding sin to sin, the Lord will not be willing to forgive him. Instead, His anger and jealousy will burn against that person, and every curse written in this book will fall on him. The Lord will blot out his name from under heaven."

Here we see how the mighty God thunders against those who continue in their sins, presuming upon His mercy and saying in their hearts, "I will have peace, even though I follow the desires of my own heart." But it is just for God, when those moments before death arrive, to keep them in blindness and hardness of heart as a righteous punishment for their presumption. Therefore, the Prophet David, recognizing the seriousness of this sin, prays to be delivered from it, saying, "Keep me from the sins of presumption; don't let them control me." Let everyone, therefore, beware of presumptuous sins, for although God is full of mercy, He will show no mercy to those who presume upon His mercy. They will eventually learn, at their own cost, that justice is as much a part of God as mercy.

Philagathus

Let's move on to the third obstacle, which is the Example of the multitude.

Theologus:

This is proven in Exodus 23, where the Lord plainly says, "You shall

not follow the crowd in doing evil." In another place, the Lord says, "You must not live according to the practices of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Do not follow their customs."

The Children of Israel violated this law when they stubbornly told the prophet Jeremiah, "We will not listen to the word you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord. We will do whatever we want and follow our own desires, just as we and our ancestors, our kings, and our officials have always done in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem."

Take note of how they completely rejected the word of the Lord and chose to follow the example of the multitude. In our present time, we sadly witness thousands being carried away by this current. Some even defend it by saying, "Do what everyone else does, and few will speak against you." This is a truly wicked statement, for if we follow the majority, we will receive the reward of the majority, which is eternal damnation.

Therefore, let us be cautious of going along with the crowd. The influence of the world can overwhelm anything that goes against the Word of God and create a wide path into Hell.

Philagathus

Now, let us discuss the fourth gate into Hell, which is the Long custom of sin.

Theologus:

The Prophet Jeremiah notes this as a very dangerous thing. He asks, "Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you who are accustomed to doing evil do good." By this, he means that it is as difficult to abandon an old habit of sin as it is to change the skin color of an Ethiopian or the spots of a leopard, which are inherent and nearly impossible to change. So, when people have made swearing, lying, adultery, and drunkenness a natural part of their lives through long-standing habit, it becomes incredibly

challenging to leave them behind. Custom creates a new nature and dulls all sense and awareness of sin.

Philagathus

Now, let's discuss the fifth obstacle, which is the Long escaping of punishment.

Theologus:

This is affirmed by the wise man in the following words: "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the hearts of the children of men are fully set to do evil." Here, he shows that one reason why people become so hardened in their sins is that God overlooks their actions and allows them to go unpunished immediately after they have sinned. If God were to instantly strike down one person, rain fire and brimstone on another, and cause the earth to swallow up a third, then people would truly fear. However, as mentioned earlier, God does not take that approach. Although He may punish some in this life, He allows thousands to escape, which emboldens them, as they believe they will never have to answer for their actions. It's similar to an experienced thief who has evaded both prison and the gallows for a long time and thinks they will always get away with it, thus continuing to commit thefts without fear. But let people be cautious. As the proverb says, "Though the pitcher goes often to the well, it will eventually come back broken." Similarly, although people may escape punishment for a long time, they will not escape forever. There will be a day of reckoning, a day that will hold them accountable for everything. Thus, you can see how impunity leads many to their destruction, when people are left alone without being smitten by the hand of God or punished by the law of the Magistrate.

Philagathus

Let's move on to the sixth obstacle, which is the Hope of long life.

Theologus:

This is confirmed by our Lord Jesus in reference to the rich man

who, when overwhelmed by worldly abundance, decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He said to himself, "Soul, you have plenty of goods laid up for many years. Take it easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself." But our Saviour called him a fool for placing his confidence in security and expecting a long life. Moreover, He plainly told him that on that very night, his life would come to a dreadful and wretched end. Take note, I implore you, of how Jesus Christ, the source of all wisdom, called this man a fool and explained why: because he stored up riches for himself but was not rich towards God; he was greatly concerned about this life but had no concern for the life to come. Therefore, it follows that all such individuals are truly foolish and can be chronicled as fools (despite any worldly reputation for wisdom they may possess) because they greatly care for their bodies but have no care for their souls, they are greatly concerned about this life but little for the life to come. Let all such profane worldlings who dream and obsess over long life (and consequently postpone the day of their repentance and conversion to God) beware of the example of this man, that they not count without their host and be suddenly snatched away amidst all their pleasures and festivities, as Job says: "Some die in their full strength, being at ease and prosperous. Their breasts are full of milk, and their bones are moistened with marrow." We can see, therefore, how dangerous it is for people to flatter and deceive themselves with hope of long life.

Philagathus

Proceed to the seventh gate, which is Conceitedness.

Theologus:

Indeed, this is a very wide gate into hell. For the Scripture says: "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." And again, "The fool thinks he is wiser than seven men who can give sensible advice." The Holy Spirit affirms that those who are inflated with an exaggerated sense of their own gifts are the farthest from the kingdom of heaven. They despise the wisdom of God, leading to their own destruction. They disdain being taught.

They claim to know as much as all the preachers can tell them. After all, what more can the preachers say than this: "We are all sinners, we must be saved by Christ, we must treat others as we want to be treated"? There is nothing more than doing good and receiving good in return, etc. Alas, poor souls, they look up in pride, they are firmly trapped in conceitedness, unaware that they are poor, naked, blind, and miserable.

These individuals place their complete trust in their own intellect, education, cunning, wealth, and esteemed reputation in the world. And because everyone bows down to them and applauds them, they swell up like turkeys, raising their feathers and strutting with a certain arrogance and disdain for all others, as if they were the only important beings in the world. Furthermore, when others praise them for their abilities, flatter them, and applaud them, it is a sight to behold how they strut about, as if they were about to take flight and soar into the clouds. But let all insolent and conceited individuals pay attention to the woe pronounced against them by the eternal King of glory, who says, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight." They should also heed God's counsel, which advises, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear God and depart from evil."

These foolishly conceited people think that because they excel in this life and can cunningly navigate the affairs of the world with success, they can also secure heaven through their clever intellect and schemes. But alas, poor souls, they are greatly and gravely mistaken. For the wisdom of the world is foolishness in the eyes of God, and He catches the wise in their own cleverness. The Lord also declares, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Therefore, let these individuals not place too much confidence in their own abilities; let them not rely on their own strategies. For it is all as fleeting as ice that forms overnight, deceiving those who trust in it. Let them become fools in their own estimation so that God may make them truly wise. Let

them deny themselves so that God may acknowledge them. Let them humble themselves so that God may exalt them. Truly, there is no use for the most exquisite worldly wisdom after this life, as it all comes to an end with our own demise. As the Holy Spirit says, "How does the wise man die? Just like the fool." And where all earthly wisdom concludes, there heavenly wisdom begins. Thus, we see that conceitedness is a wide gate into hell, and many enter through it.

Philagathus

Now let us discuss the eighth gate into hell, which is keeping bad company.

Theologus:

The Spirit of God, foreseeing the great danger of this, and understanding how easily we are influenced by bad company, strongly warns us to be cautious of it as an extremely perilous thing. He says, "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it, turn away from it and pass by." The reason for this is given in another passage: "A companion of fools will suffer harm." Therefore, people should be cautious of keeping bad company. Many individuals have been led to the gallows by it, and upon the scaffold, they have confessed that bad company led them there. Thus, they have warned everyone through their example to be cautious and beware of wicked companions. Furthermore, the scripture says, "He who follows worthless companions will have poverty for his inheritance." And in the same chapter, it is said, "He who keeps company with gluttons shames his father." Therefore, let us, like David, say, "I am a companion of all who fear God and keep his commandments." On the contrary, let us say with him, "I have not associated with deceitful people or kept company with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers and have not associated with the wicked." Let us, therefore, follow David's example and avoid the company of the wicked, for a person is known by the company they keep. It is the surest way to discern a person's character. Just as dissimilar things are incompatible, similar things are compatible. Let us be cautious not to deceive ourselves with

empty words and the belief in our own strength, thinking that we are as strong as Christ and cannot be influenced by any company. No, no, we are more likely to be influenced than to influence, more likely to be drawn to evil by others than to draw others to goodness. Therefore, God says through His prophet, "Let them return to you, but you must not return to them." Undoubtedly, it is rare to find someone who is not corrupted by bad company. Can a person touch pitch and not be defiled? Can one carry coals in their bosom and not be burned? Daily and sorrowful experiences show that many who consider themselves strong are greatly tarnished by this. Therefore, let a person understand that they have not truly abandoned evil until they have abandoned bad company. For no good comes from such associations, as bad company is the outskirts of hell. Furthermore, it should be noted that some individuals, upon receiving warnings or experiencing inward convictions of their conscience, abandon their sins, but they return to their old ways and folly when they encounter their former companions in sin, succumbing to their old temptations. We witness how even those who have good natures and dispositions are pitifully and forcefully swayed by bad company. Just as green wood is not naturally inclined to burn, yet when placed in a fire alongside dry wood, it burns just as quickly as the rest. Similarly, many young people who are not inherently prone to evil are completely carried away by this powerful current and storm of bad company.

Philagathus

Let us now discuss the final gate, which is the evil example set by ministers.

Theologus:

It pains me and I am almost ashamed to discuss this matter. Isn't it woeful and lamentable that such individuals can be found among the sons of Levi? Isn't it a curse that the Ministers of Christ would engage in scandalous behavior? For if the eye is dark, how great is the darkness? If they become examples of all evil to the flock, instead of being patterns, lights, and examples of goodness, doesn't it

strengthen the hands of the wicked so they cannot turn away from their wickedness? But this is an old disease and evil sickness that has always plagued the church. The Prophet Jeremiah bitterly complained about it in his time and said, "From the prophets of Jerusalem, wickedness has spread throughout the land. Both the prophet and the priest act wickedly. I have seen filthiness in the prophets of Jerusalem. They commit adultery and walk in lies. They also strengthen the hands of the wicked, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah." In the ninth verse of the same chapter, he revealed that it was not a pleasurable or trivial matter for him to publicly rebuke them, but rather he did it with great grief, feeling compelled to do so for the sake of God's glory and the welfare of his Church. His words were, "My heart is broken within me because of the prophets, and all my bones shake." Furthermore, in the same chapter, it is stated how the Lord would feed them with wormwood and make them drink the water of gall, and in various other ways punish them for their flatteries, deceptions, corrupt teachings, and evil examples of life.

Philagathus

It is absolutely certain that the evil example of Ministers, especially Preachers, is very dangerous and offensive, as it hardens thousands of individuals in their sins. People will say, "If a Minister or a Preacher does this and that, why can't we do the same?" They are learned and know the word of God, so if it were evil, we hope they would not engage in it. They should be our guiding lights and set good examples for us. Therefore, since they engage in such behavior, we are at a loss as to what to think or say about the matter. They confuse and perplex simple folk like us.

Theologus:

Oh, if only I could tremble and be shaken like the Prophet Jeremiah when I think of these matters! Oh, if only I could mourn like a dove while writing about them! Oh, if only I had a cottage in the wilderness and could be like Job, a companion to dragons and

ostriches, as long as I have thoughts about these things. Oh, if only I could weep and mourn without sin before I give you an answer. For indeed, I may weep, but I cannot answer. Alas, with great sorrow I admit that everything you say is true. And in this regard, the people have an advantage over us, if I may call it an advantage. But let this be my answer: If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Blind guides and blind people shall perish together. If they want to become more wicked because we are wicked, then both they and we shall burn together in hellfire. Let them consider their gains and see what they have achieved. They have no reason to triumph over us. Their market is not improved in the least. Let them take this as my answer. And as for us, the Ministers of Christ and Preachers of the Gospel, let us examine ourselves closely and walk the straight path. For even the slightest deviation will be noticed by many eyes. Therefore, let us continually pray like David, "Order my steps, O Lord, and let my footsteps not slip. When my foot slips, they rejoice against me." And as for the people, let them follow the examples of those who walk blamelessly (thank God, there are some), and let them avoid the examples of those who are offensive. This way, God will receive more glory, and they will have more peace in their own hearts. Thus, we have heard how a wide gate is opened into hell through the evil example of Ministers, especially Preachers.

Philagathus

Well, since there are so many barriers out of heaven and so many gates into hell, it is exceedingly difficult to break through all these barriers and enter into life. It is equally challenging to avoid all these gates and escape hell. One is truly fortunate if they can accomplish it.

Theologus:

Indeed, that is true. Just as difficult as this task is, it is equally challenging for flesh and blood to enter the kingdom of heaven. Yet, most people underestimate it and think it is the easiest thing in the world.

Asunetus

As difficult as it is, I still hope, by the grace of God, that I will be one of those who enter. As long as I treat others as I would like to be treated and cause no harm to anyone, God will have mercy on my soul. I am confident that my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds, and I will reconcile with God in the end. I am grateful to God that I have always lived in fear of Him and served Him sincerely. Therefore, I believe that as long as I keep His commandments, live according to the ways of my neighbors, and behave as a Christian should, He will not condemn my soul.

Theologus:

Can you truly keep God's commandments?

Asunetus

I strive to keep them with the help of God's grace.

Theologus:

No, I am asking whether you actually keep them or not.

Asunetus

I do my best to keep them to the best of my ability and with a sincere intention. Though I may not keep all of them, I am certain that I keep some of them.

Theologus:

Because you claim to keep some of them, may I have the audacity to examine you further? You know that the first commandment is: "You shall have no other gods before Me." How do you say you keep this commandment?

Asunetus

I have no fear regarding this commandment. I have never worshipped any god other than the one true God. I am fully convinced that there is only one God.

Theologus:

What about the second commandment: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image..." and so on?

Asunetus

I have never worshipped any images in my life. I despise them. I know they cannot help me, as they are nothing more than lifeless objects.

Theologus:

What is your response to the third commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain," and so on?

Asunetus

No, certainly not. I have never been known as a person who swears. From my childhood, I have always feared God and had faith in Him. I would be sorry if it were otherwise.

Theologus:

And what about the fourth commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," and so on?

Asunetus

No, when it comes to that, I attend church as faithfully as any man in the parish where I live. I pay attention to my prayers when I am there. I thank God for it (although I say it myself), I have always been devout and have cherished God's word with all my heart. It brings me joy to hear the Epistles and Gospels read every Sunday by our Vicar.

Theologus:

Now tell me, how do you honour your father and mother, as commanded in the fifth commandment?

Asunetus

I have always loved and obeyed my father and mother from the depths of my heart. I believe there is no one who can accuse me

otherwise, and I am certain that if I keep any commandment, it is this one. When I was a child, everyone praised me for being well-mannered and obedient. Therefore, if I were to neglect this commandment, it would greatly grieve me, and it would deeply affect me like nothing else has in the past seven years.

Theologus:

And how do you follow the sixth commandment: "You shall not kill"?

Asunetus

It would be strange if I did not keep that commandment.

Theologus:

What is your response to the seventh commandment: "You shall not commit adultery"?

Asunetus

I thank God for it, I have never had any inclination towards women. God has always kept me from that, and I hope it will continue to be so.

Theologus:

And what about the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal"?

Asunetus

I am neither a womanizer nor a thief.

Theologus:

What is your response to the ninth commandment: "You shall not bear false witness," and so on?

Asunetus

I utterly reject all false testimony from the depths of my heart.

Theologus:

And how do you respond to the last commandment: "You shall not covet," and so on?

Asunetus

I thank God for it, I have never desired anyone else's possessions but my own.

Theologus:

Now I understand, you are an exceptional man. You claim to keep all the commandments. You are like that blind ruler who said to Christ, "All these things I have kept from my youth." Now I see why you make preaching seem so insignificant, for you have no need for it. You are whole, you do not require a physician. You do not feel any misery, and therefore, you do not care for mercy. For where there is no sense of misery, mercy is not valued. It appears that you do not need a saviour.

Asunetus

You are mistaken in that. I do need a Savior, and it is my Lord Jesus who must save me because He created me.

Theologus:

Why do you need a Savior if you are not a sinner?

Asunetus

Believe me, I am a sinner. We are all sinners; there is no person who does not sin.

Theologus:

How can you be a sinner if you keep all the commandments?

Asunetus

Yes, I am a sinner despite that.

Theologus:

Can you be both a sinner and without sin? For the one who keeps the commandments is without sin, and you claim to do so. But I understand the situation now; many ignorant and foolish men like you will generally admit to being sinners because their conscience tells them so. However, when it comes to specifics, you do not know

how you sin or in what ways. Therefore, allow me to go through the commandments again and discuss them in detail so that I can help you see your sins. Tell me plainly and honestly, do you kneel down every morning and evening to thank God for His specific mercies and numerous blessings upon you? And do you pray to Him privately and with your family? Give me a clear and simple answer.

Asunetus

I cannot say that I do.

Theologus:

In that case, you have broken the first commandment, which requires us to give God the worship He deserves, including prayer and thanksgiving. So, right from the start, you are found guilty. I further ask you, have you never had wandering thoughts during your prayers, where your mind was on other matters even while you were praying?

Asunetus

I cannot deny that. It is very difficult to pray without having wandering thoughts.

Theologus:

Then, by your own admission, you have broken the second commandment, which commands the right manner of worshiping God. It means that as we worship God, we should do so with faith, love, zeal, and pure affections. So here, you are also guilty because when you pray, your mind is focused on other matters, and you do not do it sincerely and truthfully. Furthermore, I ask you, have you never sworn by your faith, or by the name of the Virgin Mary, or used such oaths?

Asunetus

Yes, I have sworn by the name of the Virgin Mary. I must confess it.

Theologus:

We need no more witnesses. Your answer itself proves it, as your

answer is an oath. Therefore, here also you are guilty because you swear by idols. Additionally, I ask you, have you never traveled to fairs on the Sabbath day, or made business transactions on that day, or taken journeys, or talked about worldly matters while neglecting holy duties?

Asunetus

Yes, God forgive me, I have.

Theologus:

Then you are guilty of breaking the fourth commandment, which commands us, under the penalty of death, to spend the Sabbath day in holy and religious duties, both publicly and privately. Furthermore, I ask you, do you instruct your wife, children, and servants in the true knowledge of God and pray with them, or not?

Asunetus:

I am sure you want me to speak the truth. I must confess that I do not, and I am not able to do it.

Theologus:

Then you are guilty of breaking the fifth commandment, which commands all duties of superiors towards their inferiors, and of inferiors towards their superiors, including prayer and instruction. Moreover, I ask, have you never been angry?

Asunetus:

Yes, a hundred times in my life. And I believe there is nobody who hasn't been angry at some point, especially when they have a reason to be.

Theologus:

Then you have broken the sixth commandment, which instructs us to avoid wrath, anger, malice, and the desire for revenge—all of which are precursors to murder. Furthermore, I ask, have you never looked at a woman with lust in your heart?

Asunetus:

Yes, because I think there is no man free from such thoughts. I had thought that thoughts were free.

Theologus:

No, thoughts are not free before God. God knows our thoughts and will punish, judge, and condemn us for our thoughts. While people may not know our thoughts and cannot make laws against them, God, who knows all our most secret thoughts, has made laws against them and will condemn them. Therefore, I conclude that if you have entertained adulterous thoughts in your heart, you are guilty of breaking the seventh commandment, which forbids all secret thoughts and provocations related to adultery. But furthermore, I ask, have you never taken or stolen small things from your neighbour, such as pasture, poultry, rabbits, apples, and the like?

Then you have broken the eighth commandment and are guilty of eternal death. In this commandment, God charges us to have as much care for our neighbour's belongings as we do for our own, and not to harm them in any way, whether in thought, word, or deed. Therefore, all deceit, theft, oppression, and unjust dealings with our neighbour's possessions are condemned here. Furthermore, let me ask you, have you ever lied or deceived?

Asunetus:

Yes, indeed.

Theologus:

Then you have broken the ninth commandment, in which God charges us, in bearing witness and in all other matters, to speak the plain truth from our hearts, without lying or deceiving.

Lastly, I ask, have you ever desired something in your heart that did not belong to you, such as your neighbour's house, land, cattle, or sheep, thereby revealing the discontent in your heart?

Asunetus:

I am as guilty in this as in anything. Forgive me, for I have often desired and longed for things that were not my own, thus revealing my discontentment.

Theologus:

Then I understand (from your own admission) that you have broken all the commandments.

Asunetus:

I must confess it. I now understand more about this matter than ever before. I have never heard so much in my life, nor have I ever been asked such questions as you have asked me. I had thought that many of the things you asked me about were not sins at all.

Theologus:

I could have convicted you in countless other ways in which you daily and hourly break God's Law. But my intention was only to give you a glimpse of some specific transgressions and shed a little light along the way into the meaning of the law. This way, you can have a better understanding of yourself and grasp the state you are in before God. And through that small understanding, you may come to realize much more.

Asunetus:

Well, now I clearly see that I have been deceived and am not in as good a state before God as I thought I was. Moreover, I see that there are thousands who think they are in a good condition before God, but in reality, they are in blindness and in their sins. But Lord, have mercy on us. I now plainly see that I am far from keeping the commandments, and I believe no one can keep them.

Theologus:

You can swear to it, I assure you. Even Saint Paul, David, or the Virgin Mary couldn't keep any of the commandments. I'm glad you're starting to understand the law of God and have some insight in that

direction. Because as a person's knowledge and insight into the law increases, so does their knowledge and insight into themselves. Those who have a deep understanding of God's law also have a deep understanding of themselves. Those who have no understanding of the law cannot understand themselves. For the law is like a mirror in which we see the state of our souls before God. The Apostle says, "By the law comes the knowledge of sin." Therefore, those who are completely ignorant of the law, who have never seen themselves in this mirror, commit a hundred sins a day without even knowing it, and therefore they are not troubled by them. For how can a person be troubled by something they are unaware of? But now, if you allow me, I would like to ask you a few more questions about the principles of religion, so that you, realizing and feeling your ignorance, may humble yourself, repent in time, and seek true knowledge of God. But first, I will ask Antilegon a question or two to understand his knowledge of the foundations of religion. Tell me, Antilegon, what was the reason why Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit?

Antilegon:

I could answer you, but I will not. What authority do you have to examine me? Show me your commission. When I see your warrant, I will answer you. In the meantime, you have no business examining me. Focus on what you have to do.

Theologus:

I see that you are not only ignorant but also stubborn and obstinate, refusing all instruction. Therefore, I will leave you to God and your troubled conscience. But I ask you, Asunetus, to answer that question. What do you think is the reason why Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit?

Asunetus:

Believe me, sir, that is a difficult question. You may ask a wise man that question, for I cannot answer it.

Theologus:

What do you think about this: Who was the mother of Christ?

Asunetus:

Mary, sir, she was our blessed Lady.

Theologus:

Who was Pontius Pilate?

Asunetus:

I am somewhat ignorant, I am not well-read, but if you want my simple opinion, I think he was the devil. Because only the devil would put our sweet Savior to death.

Theologus:

What is the Holy Catholic Church that you say you believe in?

Asunetus:

The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins.

Theologus:

What do you pray for when you say, "Thy Kingdom come"?

Asunetus:

I pray that God would grant us His grace so that we may serve Him and do what we ought to do. I pray that He keeps us in a good mindset towards Him and that we think of Him often. Because some people (God bless us) have nothing but the devil in their thoughts and they do everything in the name of the devil.

Theologus:

What is a sacrament?

Asunetus:

The Holy Communion.

Theologus:
How many sacraments are there?

Asunetus:
Two?

Theologus:
Which are they?

Asunetus:
Bread and Wine.

Theologus:
What is the main purpose of your coming to receive the sacrament?

Asunetus:
To receive my Creator.

Theologus:
What is the primary use of a sacrament?

Asunetus:
The body and blood of Christ.

Theologus:
What benefit and comfort do you receive from a sacrament?

Asunetus:
As a sign that Christ died for us.

Theologus:
I can only feel sorry for your ignorance, for it is incredibly thick and evident. Your answers serve no purpose and reveal a remarkable blindness and lack of understanding in matters of religion. I regret that I do not have the time now to show you your foolishness and extreme ignorance, as well as to explain the meaning of the articles of

faith, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, and all the other foundations of Christian religion.

Asunetus:

What course of action would you suggest for me to escape ignorance and attain true knowledge of God?

Theologus:

Certainly, I would advise you to diligently listen to sermons and read the Scriptures with prayer and humility. Also, study catechisms and other good books, particularly the fundamental principles of religion and the works of the two esteemed servants of God, Master Giffard and Master Perkins, as well as other individuals who have greatly served the Church and for whom thousands are obliged to give thanks to God. If you follow this path, by God's grace, you will, in a short time, grow in your knowledge of the essential foundations of Christian religion.

Philagathus

I had not realized that anyone could be so ignorant, as I now see this man to be.

Theologus:

Certainly, there are thousands in his situation. And I know from experience that many will provide the very same answers, or at least, very similar ones.

Philagathus

I assure you, if you had questioned him about cattle or sheep, buying lands, leasing properties, or any other matter under the sun, you would have found him quite knowledgeable and ready with his answers.

Theologus:

I am inclined to agree. When it comes to worldly matters, if one talks to worldly people, their answers are never lacking. They can talk quite fluently about such matters all day long. They have a deep

understanding of earthly things and take great pleasure in discussing them, never growing weary. It is their joy, their sustenance, and their delight. But when it comes to discussing matters of God (such as faith, repentance, regeneration, etc.), you will find them to be the greatest dullards and ignoramuses in the world. When these subjects are brought up, they become so confused that they cannot comprehend where they are or what they are saying.

Phil.

In my opinion, the condition of such individuals is very pitiable and dangerous. This man's situation is no exception, unless God quickly rescues him from it.

Theologus:

Without a doubt. For God says, "My people perish for lack of knowledge." Our Lord Jesus says that ignorance is the cause of all errors. He says, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures." The Apostle says that ignorance separates us from the life of God. He says, "The Gentiles are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them." Therefore, it is evident that ignorance is not the mother of devotion, as the Catholics claim, but it is the mother of error, death, and destruction, as the Scriptures affirm. Our Lord, foreseeing the great danger of ignorance and how it leads thousands to plunge headlong into Hell, admonishes everyone to search the Scriptures, which testify about Him. By doing so, they can escape the perilous abyss of ignorance in which multitudes are submerged. Therefore, the noble men of Berea are commended by the Holy Spirit because they received the word with eagerness and searched the Scriptures daily to verify the truth of those things. Oh, if only people would earnestly seek after the knowledge of God in time and, as the Prophet says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near."

Philagathus

I see that all ignorance in matters of faith is dangerous, but I believe

that willful ignorance is the most dangerous of all.

Theologus:

Indeed, willful ignorance is a clear indication and undeniable proof of eternal death. It is a terrifying and dreadful thing for people to reject instructions, despise counsel, harden their hearts, block their ears, and close their eyes to God. This is the essence of our spiritual decay.

Philagathus

I beg you, what do you mean by "hardness of heart"?

Theologus:

A hardened heart is one that is unaffected by God's mercies and unmoved by His judgments. It does not fear His law or pay attention to the Gospel. It is not helped by threats nor softened by discipline. It is ungrateful for God's blessings and disobedient to His guidance. It becomes cruel under His discipline and dissolute in the face of His favors. It is shameless in wickedness and fearless in the face of danger. It is discourteous towards others and careless towards God. It forgets the past, neglects the present, and is unprepared for the future.

Philagathus

Explain in even clearer terms the condition of ignorant and hard-hearted individuals and demonstrate how lamentable it is.

Theologus:

If a person is outwardly blind, we pity them and say, "There goes a poor blind man." But if they are both blind and deaf, don't we feel even more pity for them and say, "Oh, how miserable is that person's condition!" And if they are not only blind and deaf but also mute, don't we pity them the most and say, "Oh, that person is in an incredibly woeful state and a truly pitiable plight!"

How much more, then, should we pity those who, concerning their souls, are both blind, deaf, and mute? For the diseases of the soul are

far more dangerous and deserving of pity than those of the body.

Wouldn't it break a person's heart to see a poor sheep in the mouth of a lion, as it tears him apart, rends him, and pulls out his guts? Such is the situation of ignorant individuals in the clutches of the devil. The devil has them under his control, rides them at his pleasure, and tears their souls apart. The groans of wounded soldiers and the mournful sighs and groans of many captains and colonels as they give up the ghost—isn't this a most woeful sight? Likewise, when we clearly see Satan wound and destroy thousands upon thousands of souls, isn't it a far more tragic and lamentable spectacle? Shouldn't it break our hearts to witness it? But alas, people have no eyes to see into these matters. Yet it is certain that Satan continually and in the most terrifying manner massacres innumerable souls. Thus, I have shown you the woeful state of profane and ignorant individuals.

Philagathus

If that is the case, you, who are ministers and preachers of the Gospel, and have taken upon yourselves the care and responsibility of souls, need to be vigilant and do everything in your power to save souls. As good shepherds, with great pity and compassion, labor to rescue them from the clutches of this roaring lion who constantly seeks whom he may devour.

Theologus:

Indeed, it is of utmost importance for us to carefully consider this, as we will be held accountable on the dreadful day of judgment. For it is no small task that we have undertaken, which is to care for the flock that Christ has redeemed with his blood. May we, therefore, leave behind our disputes about other matters and strive together in this, to see who can rescue the most from the kingdom of Satan, sin, and ignorance; who can win the most souls and serve the church most effectively. This would be a worthy competition. May we finally unite and with one heart and hand, work together to build up God's house. If our own foolishness has hindered the work or caused any divisions, let us, in wisdom and love, strive to mend it. If there has

been any decline and apathy, let us now revive. Let us stir ourselves up so that we may stir up others. Let us be zealous and fervent in spirit, so that through God's grace, we may bring life to others and awaken this dead, declining, and apathetic age in which we live. Thus, God will be glorified, his church will be strengthened, his saints will be comforted, his people will be saved, his throne will be established, and the kingdom of the Devil will be overthrown.

Philagathus

What do you think is the best approach to achieve what you're talking about?

Theologus:

This is something that requires immense effort on our part, as ministers and preachers of the Gospel. Diligence is absolutely necessary, and even more than that: for the people are generally very ignorant. Some are like stones, completely incapable of instruction. Others are stubborn and obstinate. Some will accept the doctrine but not put it into practice. Others are constantly argumentative and contentious. It would be easier to take on the task of taming wolves and bears than the responsibility of souls. It is the most difficult thing in the world to reform people's disorders and bring them into order, to rescue their souls from the kingdom of Satan and bring them to God. It is, as they say, an endless task, an infinite toil, the hardest labor of all. I shudder at the thought of it. Men are so obstinate and unyielding that they refuse to be brought into order or submit to any yoke. They will not be ruled by God or restrained by His word. They insist on following their own desires, pursuing their own pleasures. They kick and rebel when reproved. They rage and storm when you try to control and restrict them from their own wills, preferences, and liberties. They will have their way and cling to their old habits, no matter what you say or do.

Don't you think it's a demanding task to smooth and shape such timber logs that are full of knots and bumps? Isn't it a tedious and tiresome thing to contemplate? And wouldn't it crush a person's

spirit to undertake it? How difficult is it to bring those who are so far from being in order into a state of order?

Philagathus

Well, sir, you can only do your best and leave the outcome to God. You can only plant and water; let God bring the increase. You are ministers of the letter, not of the spirit. You baptize with water, not with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if you preach diligently, exhort, admonish, and reprove publicly and privately, striving to set a good example of life and making every effort with zeal, care, and conscience to the best of your ability to bring them back from their wicked ways, I believe you are fulfilling your duty, even if they remain stubborn and uncorrectable. For you know what the Lord says through His prophet: If you warn and give them advice, then you will be released from responsibility, and their blood will be on their own hands.

Theologus:

You have spoken the truth. And therefore, since some must take upon themselves this great responsibility, it will be best for us to work diligently with them through catechism and private instructions, using a familiar and simple approach. Much good has been done and continues to be done in this way. The ignorant ones require much effort through this method, and undoubtedly much good can be accomplished. For in all labor, there is profit. In this regard, we, as the ministers of Christ, must be willing to humble ourselves and teach the poor ignorant people in the simplest manner, asking them many easy questions and engaging with them in a plain and loving manner until they have grasped the basic principles of Christian religion. We must not hesitate to use repetition and redundancy, telling them the same thing over and over again, bit by bit, line by line, precept upon precept, as the Prophet has said. I am well aware that nothing is more distasteful and tedious for a scholar or someone who is truly learned than to do this. It is as burdensome as teaching the alphabet. Some simply cannot bear it. But truly, after much experience, I have found that if we want to do any good to

these simple and ignorant souls, we must adopt this approach and not be ashamed of it. For it will be our crown and our glory to win souls, no matter how lowly we may be. Let us therefore be willing to stoop down so that Christ may be exalted. Let us be humble so that God may be honored. Let us do everything out of great love for Christ, who has said, "If you love me, feed, feed, feed my flock." Let us therefore demonstrate our love for Him by feeding His flock. Let us do everything with great love and deep compassion for the poor souls who have gone astray. Just as it is said that our Lord Jesus was moved to pity and His compassion was stirred when He saw the people as sheep without a shepherd, let it also move us deeply and cause our hearts to ache when we see so many poor sheep of Christ wandering and straying in the mountains and wilderness of this world, caught in every thorny bush and ready to be devoured by the wolf. Thus, I have shown you the course that, in my opinion, is best to be taken to deliver poor ignorant souls from the captivity of Satan and sin.

Phil.

Now, as you have explained what course of action is best for your part as ministers and preachers of the Gospel, I pray you to show us what is best to be done from our part as the people of God.

Theologus:

The best advice I can give you, as if it were for my own life, is to immerse yourself in the Word of God—by listening to it, reading it, and meditating on it. Also, seek out the genuine ministry of the Gospel and conscientiously live under its influence. Consider yourself fortunate if you have access to it, even if you lack other things. Conversely, consider yourself unfortunate if you do not have it, even if you possess everything else. For the Word of God is an unmatched treasure, an incomparable jewel. To obtain it, we are advised by our Lord Jesus to sell everything we have rather than be without it. Furthermore, our Saviour Christ gives the same counsel to the church in Laodicea, saying: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried by the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that

thou mayest be clothed, and that thy filthy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." Here you see that the Word of God is compared to precious gold, which enriches us spiritually, and to radiant attire, which clothes our naked souls, and to an eye salve, which heals our spiritual blindness. Jesus Christ advises us to acquire these things, no matter the cost. Wise Solomon also gives the same counsel, saying, "Buy the truth, but sell it not." Therefore, you see that the counsel I give you in this matter is not my own, but the counsel of Jesus himself and the wise Solomon. Who can, or who dares, oppose their counsel?

Asunetus

Are you suggesting that it is necessary for people to attend preaching? Would reading alone not suffice?

Theologus:

I mentioned before that reading is good, beneficial, and necessary. However, it is not enough. We must not be content with reading alone; we must go further and seek out the sound preaching of the Gospel as the primary and most important means that God has ordained and sanctified for the salvation of people. It is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 1:21: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." The meaning of this is that when people were unable to attain a true knowledge of God through natural wisdom or contemplation of creation, the Lord, in His heavenly and infinite wisdom, devised another method: to save people through preaching, which the world considers foolishness. And by the way, note that the preaching of the Word is not a human invention; it is God's own plan, originating from His own mind, as the most direct and immediate way to save souls.

Wise Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, tells us that the preaching of God's word (which he refers to as "vision," using the terminology of the prophets who called their sermons visions) is not something that can be disregarded or left to choice. He emphasizes its absolute

necessity for eternal life, stating that where vision fails, the people are left naked. The old translation conveys the same meaning, saying that where the word of God is not preached, the people perish. Solomon makes it clear that those without the preaching of the word are in grave danger of losing their souls. Oh, if only men could be persuaded of this! Saint Paul also affirms that faith comes by hearing the preached word, for how can they hear without a preacher? If faith comes by hearing the word preached, then I reason thus: No preaching, no faith; no faith, no Christ; no Christ, no eternal life, for eternal life is found only in Him. Therefore, we can deduce that if the word is taken away, eternal life is taken away.

Or, we can reverse the sequence: If we desire heaven, we must have Christ; if we desire Christ, we must have faith; if we desire faith, we must have the word preached. Thus, it follows that if we desire heaven, we must have the word preached. I conclude, therefore, that preaching, in general and for the most part, is absolutely necessary for eternal life, just as food is necessary for the preservation of our bodies, grass and fodder are necessary for the sustenance of beasts, and water is necessary for the life of fish. Therefore, with great care and conscientiousness, men should listen to the Gospel preached, attend sermons, and frequent God's house, where His honor dwells. Like David, they should say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." Like godly Mary, they should acknowledge that "one thing is necessary" and choose the better part. Like the poor cripple at Bethesda, they should wait for the stirring of the waters by the angel, that their spiritual impotence may be healed. I mean that we should attach ourselves to the initial movement of the spiritual waters of life through the preachers of the Gospel, so that our spiritual weakness may be helped and relieved. For the ministry of the Gospel is the golden pipe through which all the goodness of God, the sweetness of Christ, and all heavenly graces are bestowed upon us. This was symbolized in the law by the pomegranates on the hem of Aaron's garments and the golden bells interspersed among them,

signifying the preaching of the Gospel and the sweet aroma of Christ's death. It indicates that the sweet aroma of Christ's death and all the benefits of His passion should be spread through the preaching of the Gospel. Thus, it is evident that if people truly intend to be saved, they must value the preaching of the Gospel more than they have done before and not think, as most people do, that they can do well enough without it. Some would rather be without it than have it, for it only disturbs and troubles their consciences. But woe to those who think this way.

Philagathus

Yet, we observe that even when the word is preached faithfully, there are still many wicked people. In my opinion, there are two reasons for this. Firstly, God withdraws His Holy Spirit from many who hear the word, rendering their hearing unfruitful. Secondly, the devil employs countless schemes to hinder the effective working of the word, rendering it useless and ineffective for multitudes of people. But you, Master Theologus:, can better explain this matter than I can. I implore you, therefore, to say something about it.

Theologus:

The tactics of Satan in this regard are more cunning and sly than I or any other person can possibly uncover. For who is capable of fully discerning or adequately exposing the deep subtleties and most hidden and sinful suggestions of the devil in the hearts of men? He is such a cunning craftsman in this regard that none can perfectly trace him. His workings in the hearts of men involve concealed and deceptive devices, implemented with the utmost methodical and crafty approaches that cannot be fully unraveled. However, despite this, I will reveal as much as I know or can conceive of his dealings with those who hear the word, how he steals it from their hearts and renders it fruitless and unprofitable. First and foremost, he endeavors and labours diligently to keep people fast asleep in their sins, so that they have no care for their salvation. Therefore, he dissuades them from hearing or reading the word at all, lest they should be awakened. If this tactic fails and they must inevitably hear

the word, then his craft is to render their hearing unfruitful through sleepiness, dullness, distractions, conceit, and countless other means. If this does not achieve the desired outcome and the word penetrates their hearts, working in them to attain some knowledge and understanding of the truth, then he employs another method, which is to make them rely solely on their bare knowledge and thus become completely conscienceless. If this is not sufficient, and individuals begin to take action by forsaking certain sins, especially the gross sins of the world, and perform some good deeds, he persuades them to trust in those actions without Christ and believe that they are good enough simply because they do some good and avoid some evil. If this is not enough, but people come to possess true justifying faith that apprehends Christ and relies on His merits, then he devises ways to tarnish the beauty of their faith and weaken their comfort through various weaknesses, shortcomings, and even grave falls and serious sins, so that they become nothing more than blemished and imperfect Christians. If this weapon fails to achieve its purpose and Christians manifest all good virtues in conjunction with their faith, shining abundantly in the fruits of righteousness, he resorts to another approach, which is to intimidate and discourage them through poverty, need, sickness, reproach, contempt, persecution, and so on. If none of these tactics succeed and individuals continue to believe in Christ unwaveringly, enduring afflictions patiently and joyfully, then his final refuge is to inflate them with pride over their gifts, graces, and strength, causing their ultimate downfall as they fail to walk humbly and give God the praise for His gifts.

Thus, you have a glimpse of Satan's cunning in rendering the word unfruitful among us.

Asunetus

I humbly ask you, good sir (since I am ignorant and unlearned), to provide me with specific directions from the word of God for the proper guidance and ordering of my individual actions, so that I may glorify God on earth and be glorified by Him forever after this life.

Theologus:

It would be an endless task to go into every particular, but I will give you a brief overview. Firstly, earnestly seek God in His word, pray abundantly, and give thanks in all things. Avoid evil and do good. Fear God and keep His commandments. Bring reform to yourself and your household. Love virtue and virtuous people, associate with the godly, and steer clear of the company of the wicked. Live a sober, just, and holy life in this present evil world. Speak graciously at all times and be cautious of using foul language. Do not repay evil with evil, but rather repay evil with good. Show kindness and compassion to all. Refrain from swearing, cursing, and blasphemy. Guard against anger, wrath, and bitterness. Praise your friend openly and reprove them privately. Do not speak ill of those who are absent or the deceased. Speak no evil of anyone; always speak the best or, at the very least, not the worst. Honour God's name and observe His Sabbaths. Avoid all signs of condemnation and strive for all signs of salvation. Above all, beware of sin, for it is the soul's executioner and the destroyer of all goodness. Tremble, therefore, and do not sin. For if you do sin, consider the consequences:

Six great dangers in sin:

- God sees.
- His angels bear witness.
- Conscience pricks.
- Death threatens.
- The devil accuses.
- Hell consumes.

You can see, then, that sin is no mere scarecrow or trivial matter. Every sin a person commits is like a thorn deeply embedded in the soul, not easily removed and causing many sighs and sorrowful cries. Every sin is engraved with an iron pen and the sharp point of a diamond upon the conscience. On the last day, when the books are opened, it will accuse us and serve as evidence against us. If a person sins with pleasure, that pleasure fades away, but the conscience and

the sting of sin remain, tormenting them greatly. On the other hand, if a person does good, even though it may require effort and hardship, the pain passes away, yet the conscience of doing good remains, bringing much comfort. However, the best outcome of sin is always repentance, whether in this life or, with regret and sorrow, when it is too late. Therefore, be cautious in time; I urge you to beware of sin.

- Six most detrimental effects of sin:
- Sin hardens the heart.
- Sin gnaws at the conscience.
- Sin fights against the soul.
- Sin leads to death.
- Sin causes shame.
- Sin brings about all kinds of afflictions for the body and soul.

Behold, therefore, the harmful effects of sin. For this reason, Zophar the Naamathite speaks wisely to Job, saying, "When you lift your face out of sin, you shall be strong and fearless. You shall forget all sorrow and remember it only as waters that are past." Here, Zophar plainly shows that avoiding sin strengthens us, while committing it weakens us. As Solomon said, "The way of the Lord is the strength of the upright." Therefore, walk in God's way and beware of the ways of sin. God punishes every sin in different ways; no sin can escape unpunished. Because God is just, He must punish sin in all people, though the manner of punishment may vary. The wicked are punished directly, while the righteous are punished in Christ. Beware, therefore, and do not flatter yourself in your sins. Remember that every act of disobedience and transgression receives its just reward. Throughout history, God has matched the cause with the effect, sin with the punishment of sin. The Israelites, for breaking the first commandment by worshiping other gods, were often struck by God's hand. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, were consumed by fire for offering strange fire upon God's altar, breaking the second commandment. Those who blasphemed and transgressed the third commandment were stoned to death. The one who gathered sticks on

the Sabbath, breaking the fourth commandment, was also stoned. Absalom, transgressing the fifth commandment, was hanged by his hair. Cain, transgressing the sixth commandment, by killing his brother Abel, was marked with God's wrath. Shechem, the son of Hamor, transgressing the seventh commandment by defiling Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was slain by Simeon and Levi, the sons of Jacob. Achan, sinning against the eighth commandment by stealing the wedge of gold and the Babylonian garment, was stoned to death. Ananias and Sapphira, sinning against the ninth commandment by lying and deceiving, were suddenly struck dead. Ahab, transgressing the tenth commandment through coveting and discontentment, was devoured by dogs. Or if you consider only original sin, infants are punished with death because of it.

Thus, we see that we cannot play games with God. If we sin, we are as certain to suffer the consequences as the coat is on our back. Let us not deceive ourselves or trivialise sin. Sin is no scarecrow, and one day we shall realize this. Although we may regard some sins lightly, in truth, all sin is detestable in God's eyes. All sin is grave and deserving of punishment because it is committed against a being of infinite worth—it is against God Himself, the highest Majesty. The greatness of the offended person enhances and magnifies the seriousness of the sin.

As an example, if a person insults a Justice of the Peace, they shall be punished with the stocks. If idle individuals, being sons of laziness, continue on their path, they will ultimately fall short of their desired outcomes. For it is said: "The sluggard desires, but his soul has nothing." We must therefore move beyond empty words and take action. As our Lord Jesus said: "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven." Here we see that Christ straightforwardly excludes from His kingdom all those whose religion consists merely of empty words and smooth speeches but lack a conscientious practice of God's commandments.

David, after making preparations for the building of the Temple and realizing that his son Solomon had enough materials and provisions to complete it, wisely encourages him to the task with these words: "Rise up and get to work, and the Lord will be with you." Oh, if only people would follow David's advice! If only they would rise up and take action instead of remaining idle and doing nothing. If only they would move beyond mere words and appearances and diligently practice God's law, striving to be obedient to His will. Then surely God would be with them and bless them, and much good would come from it. For Scripture says: "In all labor, there is profit or increase, but idle talk only leads to poverty."

Philagathus

Most people's minds are so consumed by love for this world that they have no inclination to obey God or find any delight in His commandments.

Theologus:

The majority of people are like the Gadarenes, who valued their swine more than Christ. Just as in our present times, we see how many hold their cattle and sheep in higher esteem than the glorious Gospel of Christ. They highly value dung and scorn pearls. They worry about trivial matters and pay no attention to things of greatest importance. Therefore, they can aptly be compared to a man who neglects his sick wife and children completely while being overly concerned with treating his pigs' ear infections.

Philagathus

We have slightly deviated from the matter at hand. I request that if you have any more good counsel to offer Asunetus, please share it now.

Theologus:

I have little more to say, except that I would advise him to frequently remember and deeply contemplate on these nine things:

- The sins he has committed.
- The good deeds he has neglected.
- The time he has wasted.
- The brevity of this life.
- The emptiness of this world.
- The excellence of the world to come.
- Death, which is more terrible than anything else.
- The day of judgment, which is more fearful than anything else.
- Hellfire, which is more intolerable than anything else.

Philagathus

This is indeed concise and meaningful. You have touched upon some of these points in our discussion. However, I am very eager to hear more about the last two, which have not yet been discussed.

Theologus:

Since you are eager to know, I will briefly share with you what I have received from the Lord. First, concerning the day of judgment, I find in the Scriptures that it will be exceedingly terrible and dreadful. It is written that the Son of Man will come in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory.

Saint Peter says that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. On that day, the heavens will pass away with a great noise, the elements will melt with heat, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up. The Apostle informs us that at the coming of Christ, the whole world will be engulfed in a consuming fire, reducing castles, towers, magnificent buildings, gold, silver, velvet, silk, and all the splendor, glory, and beauty of this world to ashes. For he clearly states that the present heavens and earth are being kept for fire, reserved for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. Furthermore, he strongly argues that just as the world was once destroyed by water, it will be destroyed by fire at its end. The Apostle Paul also testifies to the same truth, saying that Christ will come from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire. In another passage, he emphasizes the terror of Christ's coming for judgment,

proclaiming that he will come with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God. We observe in our experience that when mortal princes arrive at a place, it is with great pomp and glory. They have a retinue of nobles, lords, and noble ladies accompanying them. Sword-bearers, trumpeters, and messengers go before them, while many distinguished and dignified individuals follow behind. Now, if the arrival of mortal princes is so magnificent and glorious, how much more glorious will the coming of the Son of Man be, before whom all mortal princes are as dust? The Scriptures affirm that his second coming for judgment will be accompanied by resplendent and indescribable glory, causing even the most excellent creatures to pale in comparison. The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven. This signifies that the most splendid and radiant creations will be overshadowed and obscured by the unimaginable brightness of Christ's coming.

Moreover, it is noted that the terror of Christ's coming is evident in the fact that immediately before it, the sea itself will quake and tremble, crying out in its own way. It is said that the sea will roar with a mournful and mournful noise, causing people's hearts to fail them out of fear and anticipation of the events that will occur in the world. The powers of heaven will also be shaken. Oh, what will become of those who swear, get drunk, engage in promiscuity, and engage in similar sins on that day! They will try to hide their heads in a hole like a frightened animal. They will cry out in sorrow and regret, wishing that they had never been born or that their mothers had given birth to them as toads. As it is stated in the Book of Revelation, they will say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Therefore, we see that the coming of Christ will not be humble and insignificant, as it was during his first visitation. Instead, it will be most terrible, princely, and glorious. Just as the Scriptures affirm

that his coming will be accompanied by great terror and fear, they also indicate that it will be sudden and unexpected. For the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, like the pains that come upon a woman in labor. It will come upon all the inhabitants of the earth like a snare, suddenly catching and entangling them, regardless of their location in the world. Just as the earthquake that occurred about twenty years ago caught the world by surprise, as they were not expecting it, the coming of the Son of Man for judgment will catch the world off guard and unprepared. Only a few people think about such matters. Therefore, since the second coming of Christ will be so sudden, let us fear and tremble, for all sudden events are to be feared.

Philagathus

Well, sir, you have shown us the terror and suddenness of Christ's coming. Now, please show us the purpose and end of his coming.

Theologus:

The primary purpose of his coming shall be to conduct a general audit, to summon all individuals for an account, and to assess each person's specific actions, rewarding them accordingly. As it is written: "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels: and then he will reward every man according to his deeds." Similarly, the Apostle tells the Corinthians: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

Here we clearly see that the purpose of Christ's coming will be to judge each person based on their works, that is, as their works shall reveal and testify about them and their faith. In another passage, the Apostle states that the purpose of his coming will be to bring vengeance upon those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These individuals will be punished with everlasting destruction, banished from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Therefore, woe unto two types of

individuals: the ignorant and the disobedient. For the Apostle plainly declares that both shall be damned. It seems to me that both the ignorant and disobedient, as well as all other profane individuals, should tremble at the thought that Christ will come to bring vengeance upon them. If we were certain that the Spaniards would invade our nation, conquer it, shed our blood, and commit massacres before our eyes, causing the streets to flow with the blood of our loved ones, what immense fear and terror would it instill in us? We would tremble at the mere thought of it. Should we not then be even more afraid of the damnation of our souls? Should we not tremble at the realization that Christ will come to exact vengeance? When a lion roars, all the beasts of the field tremble, so should we not fear the roar of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah? But alas, we are so hard-hearted and deeply asleep in the cradle of security that nothing can move us, nothing can awaken us.

Philagathus

Now that you have shown us the terror and purpose of Christ's coming, please also explain the manner in which it will occur.

Theologus:

The manner of it is as follows: the entire world shall be summoned to appear personally at the general Assizes before the great Judge. No one will be allowed to appear through their attorney, but all must come in person. No one will be permitted to offer sureties, but everyone must come on their own, without bail or ransom, as it is written: "We must all appear, high and low, rich and poor, kings and beggars, one and all," as plainly stated in the 20th chapter of the Revelation. Here, the Spirit says, "I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God; and the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead that were in them." Thus, it is evident that everyone, without exception, shall make their appearance at the great and dreadful Assizes. Oh, what a momentous day it will be when the entire world gathers together at once! If a king invites other kings, emperors, dukes, and nobles to a wedding, along with all their pomp and retinue, we exclaim, "Oh, what a

wedding, what a gathering, what a spectacle, what a grand day it will be!" But when the entire world is assembled (not only all monarchs, kings, and princes, but all others who have ever lived from the beginning of the world, all who are and will be), what a day that will be! It is no wonder, therefore, that the Scriptures call it the day of God and the great day of the Lord. So, when all flesh has come together to make their personal appearance, the Son of God will ascend to his tribunal seat with great majesty and glory. A fiery stream will issue forth before him, thousands upon thousands of angels will accompany and minister to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand will stand before him. The judgment will be set, and the books will be opened. All the saints and true worshippers of God will also attend him and accompany him to his judgment seat. Not only that, but they will sit on the Bench and Throne with him, as it is written: "The saints shall judge the world; they shall judge the angels," meaning the devils, the angels of darkness. Our Lord Jesus himself affirms the same when he said to his disciples, and to all true Christians through them: "Truly I tell you, that when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me in the regeneration will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This means that the saints of God will testify that the judgment of Christ and the condemnation he passes against all unbelievers is just and fair. Thus, we see how Christ will be accompanied to his throne and the glory and majesty with which he will ascend to it. Experience teaches us that when mortal judges hold their sessions and general assizes, they are brought to the Bench and judgment seat with pomp and terror. The sheriff of the shire, halberdiers, many justices of the peace, and others accompany them to the Bench. So, with how much more glory and majesty will the Son of God be brought to his royal Throne! Therefore, when Christ is seated on his judgment seat, all the ungodly will be summoned before him, and he will stand over them with a naked sword in his hand. The devil will stand beside them on one side to accuse them, their own conscience on the other side, and the gaping abyss of hell beneath them, ready to devour them. Then the books will be opened, not books of paper and parchment, but the books of men's

consciences. For every person's sins are written and recorded in their conscience as if in a register. Then God will bring every deed to judgment, every secret thought, and present them in order before all the reprobates. Then God will illuminate the things that are hidden in darkness and make the counsels of the heart manifest. Then all the ungodly will be arraigned, convicted, and raise their hands at the bar of Christ's judgment seat, crying "guilty." Then that most dreadful sentence of death and condemnation will be pronounced against them by the most righteous Judge: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Oh, what a sorrowful sentence! Oh, what a heavy pronouncement! Whose heart does not tremble at these things? Whose hair does not stand on end? For then thousands who flourished in this world like the cedars of Lebanon will be cast down forevermore and drink (as just recompense for their iniquity) from the bitter cup of God's eternal wrath and indignation in the kingdom of darkness, in the fearful presence of Satan and all the accursed enemies of God's grace.

Phil.

Now that you have explained to us the terror, suddenness, end, and manner of Christ's coming to judgment, please finally show us the proper use of all these things.

Theologus:

Saint Peter tells and teaches us the proper use of all these things. He says, "Since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in holy conduct and godliness?" It is as if he is saying, "Since the heavens will pass away with a noise, the elements will melt with heat, and the earth and its works will be burnt up; since the coming of Christ will be with great terror, to a fearful end, and in a fearful manner, oh, how much more should we excel in goodness!" So, Saint Peter tells us that the true use of all these things is to bring us closer to God, to be more obedient to His will, and to walk in all His commandments, being conscientious in all our ways. We should strive to please God in all things, be fruitful in good works, live soberly, justly, and holily in this present evil world,

and display the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. This way, we will be prepared for the day of Christ's appearing, and it will not catch us unprepared. For our lives should be a continual meditation on death. We should always live as if we are about to die, or that our bed will be our grave. We must live as if Christ will come to judgment at any moment. There is a story about a godly man in the early church who, whether eating or drinking or whatever he did, always thought he heard the trumpet of the Lord with the words, "Arise, you dead, and come to judgment." Let's suppose it was certain that Christ would come to judgment on the next Midsummer's Day. Oh, what a change it would bring to the world! How people would change their minds and affections! Who would care about this world? Who would set their heart on riches? Who would be concerned about fine clothing? Who would dare to deceive or oppress? Who would dare to be drunk? Who would dare to swear, lie, or commit adultery? No, wouldn't everyone devote themselves to the obedience of God? Wouldn't they all serve Him diligently? Wouldn't men and women flock to sermons? Wouldn't they engage in prayer and reading? Wouldn't they repent of their sins? Wouldn't they cry out for mercy and forgiveness? You see, then, what the knowledge of an approaching day would accomplish. And shouldn't we do all these things with great care and zeal, since the day is uncertain? For who knows whether Christ will come this month or the next, this year or the next? He himself says, "Be ready, watch, for in the hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." We think he will not come this year, or next year, or even in the next hundred years. Therefore, it may be that he will come suddenly upon us; we do not know how soon. For in an hour that we least expect, he will come. Our Savior says in the 13th chapter of Mark, "Take heed, watch, and pray, for you do not know when the time is." And in the Gospel of Saint Luke, he says, "Take heed that your hearts are not weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the earth." Thus, we hear the many words of caution and warning our Savior gives us when he says, "Be ready, be awake, take heed, watch and pray, and be alert,

lest that day come suddenly upon you and find you unprepared." It is incumbent upon all of us to be ready at a moment's notice, on pain of death, and as we will be held accountable at our utmost peril.

Phil.

Continue to speak about the torments of hell.

Theologus:

Regarding the torments of hell, there are three aspects that I will briefly discuss: their extremity, perpetuity, and irreversibility. First, concerning their extremity, it can be seen in three main aspects. Firstly, it is a complete separation from all joy and comfort in the presence of God. Secondly, it entails an eternal association with the devil and his angels. Thirdly, it involves experiencing the dreadful wrath of God, which will seize both body and soul and consume them forever, like fire devouring pitch and brimstone. The Scriptures describe the extremity of these torments as a lake that burns with fire and brimstone forever, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm that gnaws their conscience does not die, and the fire never goes out. It is likened to Tophet, a deep and wide pit with burning fire and abundant wood, where the breath of the Lord, like a river of brimstone, ignites it. All these descriptions are terrifying to our senses, yet they cannot fully express the reality of hell as it truly is. No heart can grasp or tongue articulate the magnitude and extremity of the torments of hell. Just as the joys of heaven are beyond human comprehension, so too are the torments of hell. All the torments and afflictions experienced in this life are but tiny sparks compared to the furnace of God's total wrath. All earthly fires are mere images in comparison to the fire of hell. As one writes, hellfire is so intensely hot that it would burn a person for seven miles before they even reach it. Yet the reprobates, being forever in it, will never be consumed by it. Just as the Salamander remains in the fire without being consumed, so the wicked will remain in the fire of hell without ever being consumed. For hell is a perpetual death and an eternal beginning. It is grievous for a very sick person to lie on a featherbed, how much more so on a hot gridiron! But how much

more grievous is it to burn eternally in hellfire without ever being consumed! Another aspect of its extremity lies in the fact that the torments of hell are universal, affecting every part of the body simultaneously: the head, eyes, tongue, teeth, throat, stomach, back, belly, heart, sides, and so on. All the punishments in this earthly life are specific to certain body parts. Some may experience pain in their head, others in their back or stomach, and so forth. However, there are particular pains that a person would not endure even to gain the entire world. But to be tormented in all parts of the body simultaneously, what a lamentable sight! Who would not take pity on a dog in the street in such a state! Thus, we can see that the extremity of the torments in hell is beyond comprehension or expression. For how can one articulate that which is incomprehensible? We can only acknowledge that it is beyond our comprehension.

Philagathus

Now that you have described the extremity of the torments in hell, please continue to discuss their perpetuity.

Theologus:

The Scriptures clearly state the eternal nature of hell torments, declaring that they are forever. The wicked will be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone for all eternity, and the fire will never be extinguished. Even when hundreds of thousands of years have passed, as numerous as the stones by the seaside, there will still be countless more to come. That which has no end can never come to an end. If all the mathematicians in the world were tasked with numbering the days of their lives, even if they recorded the greatest numbers imaginable and added them all together, they could never come close to the length of time in which the wicked will be tormented. If the entire circumference of the heavens were filled with numerical figures, written from east to west and then from west to east again, it still would not be enough to encompass the infinite time and countless years in which unbelievers will suffer eternal torture. In the realm of infinity, time has no place, for time measures things that are subject to measurement. Therefore, because the torments of

hell are infinite, they cannot be measured by any time, and that which is infinite cannot be diminished. Even if you were to subtract ten thousand million millions from infinity, it would not be diminished or made smaller. Suppose a man were to take a spoonful of water from the vast ocean once every hundred thousand years, how long would it take for him to empty it? Yet, a person would sooner empty the sea by taking out a spoonful once every hundred thousand years than a damned soul would find any relief. Hence, a certain writer says, if a damned soul could be tormented in hell for only a thousand years and then find relief, there would be some comfort in it (as there would be hope it would eventually end). But, he says, the word "ever" crushes the heart. Oh, consider this, you who forget God! O you worldly pleasure-seekers, think about this while you still have time! If you are not moved by hearing these words now, you will be shattered when you experience them. What good does it do to live in all the possible pleasures and carnal delights of this world for around 60 years, only to suffer eternal torment afterwards? What will it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul? Those who are willing to risk their souls for a little profit and a few fleeting pleasures are more than mad. This is the nature of humanity; they desire immediate sweetness, regardless of the consequences, even if they have to pay a high price, even if they lose their souls for it. Oh, the indescribable blindness and madness of the people of this world! The devil has blinded their eyes and leads them wherever he pleases. For who cannot lead a blind man wherever he wishes to go? Nahash the Ammonite would not make a covenant with the Israelites unless he could gouge out all their right eyes. Likewise, the devil makes a covenant with all the wicked to blind both their eyes so that he can lead them straight into hell.

Philagathus

Now, sir, a few words about the hopelessness of hellfire.

Theologus:

The Scriptures affirm that just as the torments of hell are extreme,

they are also without any hope of remedy. As it is written: "A man can by no means redeem his brother, he cannot give his ransom unto God; so precious is the redemption of the soul, and it continues forever." In this regard, Abraham said to the rich man, who was in hell torments: "Between you and us, there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there cross over to us." Our Lord Jesus also says: "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Here, our Savior plainly affirms that no ransom or recompense, no matter how great, can be given for a damned soul. Once the soul is in hell, it can never be released; it is beyond remedy. No means whatsoever can bring any good. Neither gold, nor silver, nor friends, nor riches, nor power, nor strategy, nor flattery, nor bribery, nor any scheme or device can prevail in the least. Once a person is in hell, there is no remedy. They are in a tightly sealed prison, forever shut under the hatches; there is no way out. They must endure perpetual imprisonment. They cannot file a writ of false imprisonment because they are confined by the most righteous and just Judge, who cannot possibly do any wrong, and they must bear it. Once they are there, they are there forever. Even if all the angels of heaven were to plead for a damned soul, even if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to intercede fervently, even if all the prophets, apostles, and martyrs were to continually petition Christ for release, even if a father were to request freedom for his son or a mother for her daughter, none of them would be heard; they would all be rejected. The sentence of Christ cannot be reversed; his decree is irrevocable. Reflecting upon these things can make every heart tremble and every knee shake. In the troubles and afflictions of this life, even if a person faces great dangers, they may find a way out through money, friendship, rewards, or similar means. But in hellfire, it is this thought that grips the heart and causes despair—there is no remedy to be found at all. If we were to ask a damned soul or a troubled conscience what they would give for the ease and redemption of their souls, they would answer, "the whole world," regardless of how secure worldly people and wicked atheists (who see and feel nothing) make light of it.

Here, let us consider the magnitude of the loss of a person's soul, which we can better understand if we can properly value and cherish the soul. If it is asked, what is the worth of a soul or how much is it valued, our Lord Jesus answers that it is worth more than the entire world. For he says, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet loses his soul?" Therefore, even the soul of the poorest beggar is worth more than the entire world. Now, I reason in this way: if the soul is worth more than the whole world, then the loss of it is greater than the loss of the entire world. Indeed, it is a loss beyond all losses, an irreparable loss. If a person's house were burned down with all their possessions consumed in one night, it would be a great loss. If a merchant were to lose twenty thousand pounds in one business venture, in one ship, or, as they say, in one venture, it would be a very significant loss. If a king were to lose his crown and kingdom, it would be an exceedingly great loss. But the loss of the soul is a thousand times greater than all of these combined; it is a matter of infinite importance. If a tenant is expelled from the favor of their landlord, it is a cause for grief. If a nobleman's secretary falls out of favor with his lord and is dismissed, it is a matter of great sorrow. If a nobleman himself is disfavored and completely falls out of favor with his prince, after having enjoyed great favor, it is a curse, a heartache, and an immensely grievous matter. However, to be eternally separated from God, to be shut out from His favor, and to be cast away from His presence and the presence of His angels, is a matter of infinitely greater anguish and torment. Take note and see the significance of a person losing their soul. Oh, how I wish that people would be wise in the fear of God, that they would take heed in time and make provision for their souls. Now, to conclude this entire point, the summary of all that has been said is this: the torments of Hell are endless, without relief, and without remedy.

Asunetus

The exposition of these teachings about hellfire and the judgment to come makes me tremble and quake. I am greatly troubled by it, and I

feel immense fear in my conscience. I am afraid that I will be damned.

Antilegon:

Damned, man! Why do you speak of damnation? I am ashamed to hear you say such things. It is well known that you are an honest man, a law-abiding citizen, a good neighbor, and one of the best townspeople in the parish where you live. This is how you have always been regarded and seen. If you were to be damned, I don't know who would be saved.

Asunetus

I do not value your flattery; I believe in God. I believe His word. I believe the things that Mr. Theologus: has presented from the holy scriptures, pointing me to the specific chapter and verse. And whether it is more fitting for me to believe the Scriptures or your sweet words, you can judge. No, no. Now I clearly see through the lens of God's law that my condition is wretched and miserable. For I have lived in sin and ignorance all my life, completely lacking in religion and true knowledge of God. I am not the person that you and others think I am. Although outwardly I have lived an honest life in the eyes of the world, inwardly I have not lived a righteous life before God.

Antilegon:

Pshaw, pshaw, now I see you are in a melancholic mood. If you come home with me, I can provide you with a quick remedy. I have many pleasant and entertaining books which, if you were to hear them read, would quickly cure you of this melancholy state. I have "The Court of Venus," "The Palace of Pleasure," "Bevis of Southampton," "Ellen of Rummin," "The Merry Jest of the Friar and the Boy," "The Pleasant Story of Clem of the Clough, Adam Bell, and William of Cloudesley," "The Odd Tale of William Richard and Humphrey," and "The Pretty Conceit of John Splinter's Last Will and Testament." These are all excellent and unique books to alleviate heartaches and dispel the gloominess that I see has overcome you.

Asunetus

Your vain and trivial books of tales, jokes, and lies would only increase my sorrow and deepen the imprint of sadness in my heart.

Antilegon:

Well, if that's how you feel, then I'm done with you.

Philagathus

May I be so bold as to ask: How did you come to possess all these good books? Or rather, I should say, all this trash and rubbish.

Antilegon:

Why does it matter to you? What business do you have inquiring? But I beg you, sir, why do you call them trash and rubbish?

Philagathus

Because that's what they are. They are worthless items, useless stuff. They are good for kindling a fire or cleaning a hot oven. And shall I tell you my opinion of them? I believe that they were devised by the devil, approved by the Pope, printed in hell, bound by Hobgoblin, and first published and spread in Rome, Italy, and Spain. And all for the purpose of keeping people away from reading the Scriptures. Just as a lapwing with its busy cry distracts people from its nest, so the Popish generation, with these fictional devices, draw people away from the Scriptures.

Antilegon:

Ah, sir, now I see that a fool's arrow is quickly shot. You are more pious than wise. The Vicar of Saint Fools shall be your spiritual father. What do I care about your opinion? I want you to know that I neither value you nor your opinion. There are wiser men than you who both read and enjoy these books.

Theologus:

Leave him be, good Philagathus:. You can see what he is like. There is no end to his objections and arguments. But let the ignorant remain ignorant, and the filthy remain more filthy. Now let us turn

our conversation to Asunetus, for I see that he is heavy-hearted and troubled in his mind. How are you, Asunetus? How do you feel? It seems to me that you are very sad.

Asunetus

I am better now, sir, thanks be to God. I never truly understood the meaning of sin until today. God has now been pleased to give me some insight and awareness of it. I am greatly distressed in my conscience when I think about what I have been. The remembrance of my past sins fills me with horror, as I consider how ignorantly, profanely, and far away from God I have lived my entire life. It stings and grips my heart. I now see things that I never saw before and feel things that I never felt. I clearly see that if I had died in the state in which I have lived my entire life, I would surely have been condemned and perished forever in my sin and ignorance.

Theologus:

I am very glad that God has opened your eyes and given you the sight and feeling of your misery, which is indeed the very first step towards eternal life. It is a great favor and special mercy of God towards you that He has touched your heart. You can never be thankful enough for it. It is worth more than if you were given a million in gold. It is the rare privilege of God's chosen ones to have the eyes of their souls opened so they can see heavenly and spiritual things. As for the world, it is just for God to leave them in their blindness.

Asunetus

I feel the burden of my sins. I am greatly grieved by them, and I am weary of them. I am sorry that I ever sinned against God or that I should be such a wretch as to incur His displeasure and provoke His Majesty against me. But I pray to you, good Mr. Theologus:, since you are a spiritual physician and I am sick with sin, that you would minister to me some spiritual medicine and comfort from God's Word.

Theologus:

Truly, I must believe that the promises of mercy and forgiveness of sin, made in the Gospel, belong to you and that Jesus Christ is yours. You are truly connected to Him and have a rightful claim to Him. For He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. You now feel yourself to be a sinner, you grieve for your sins, and you are weary of them. Therefore, Jesus Christ is for you. All the benefits of His sacrifice belong to you. Furthermore, He says, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." And you acknowledge yourself to be sick with sin. Therefore, Christ Jesus will be your physician. He will comfort you, bind up your wounds, heal your sores, anoint them with the oil of His mercy, smile upon you, and show you a joyful countenance. He will say to you, "Your sins are forgiven."

In Him, you shall find rest and peace for your soul. Through Him, you shall experience ease and comfort. He has compassion for all who mourn for their sins, like you do. He invites you and everyone in your situation to come to Him, and He will help you. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." You are one of those who are called to come, for you are weary of your sins and feel the weight of them. Christ is entirely for people like you. He does not concern Himself with the world, that is, the profane and unregenerate individuals. He does not bid them to come; He does not pray for them. He says, "I do not pray for the world." They have no part or share in Him. They have no connection with Him or His merits and righteousness. He is only for the repentant sinner and those who mourn for their sins. He is a soft pillow for all weary heads and troubled consciences. Take courage, therefore, and fear nothing, for surely Christ and His righteousness are yours. He will clothe you with it. He will never charge you with your sins or hold them against you, no matter how numerous or grievous they may be. How fortunate you are to have such a Mediator and High Priest. Therefore, place your complete trust in Him and in that perfect, eternal, and propitiatory sacrifice He has made. Apply Christ, apply His merits, apply the promises to yourself and your

own conscience. Then they will do you good and bring great comfort to your soul. For imagine you had the most excellent and effective ointment that could heal any wound it was applied to, but if you were to keep it locked up in your chest and never apply it to your wound, what good would it do you? Similarly, the righteousness and merits of Christ are a spiritual balm that can heal any wound of the soul, but if we do not apply them to ourselves through faith, they cannot benefit us. Therefore, you must apply Christ and all the promises of the Gospel to yourself through faith and firmly believe that whatever He has done on the Cross, He has done specifically for you. For what is justifying faith but a complete assurance of God's particular love for us in Christ? General and vague knowledge of Christ and His Gospel does not lead to eternal life. Therefore, strive to have the true understanding of all these great and precious promises. Hold fast to Christ, for it is through Him alone that we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. All the prophets testify about Him, as S. Peter says, that through His name, all who believe will receive forgiveness of their sins. The Apostle tells us that if a grand jury of prophets were gathered to testify about the way and means to eternal life, they would all unanimously declare that forgiveness of sins and eternal life are found only in Christ. Let us listen to the foreman speak and one or two others, for every word is established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. The Prophet Isaiah says, "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His stripes, we are healed."

This great Prophet clearly affirms that Christ suffered for our sins, and through His suffering, we are saved. The Prophet Jeremiah testifies the same, saying, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" This Prophet agrees with the others, for he states that Christ is the righteous Branch and our

righteousness. This means that our sins are forgiven only through Him, and we are made righteous through Him. Moreover, he affirms that Judah and Israel, that is, the Church, will be saved through Him. The Prophet Zechariah, speaking with reverence, tells the same story word for word. He confirms the same message as the other two Prophets, saying, "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." The prophet's meaning is that in the days of Christ's kingdom, the fountain of God's mercy in Christ will be opened to wash away the sins and uncleanness of the Church. Thus, we see that these three great witnesses all agree that we are cleansed from our sins through Christ alone and made righteous through Him alone. Therefore, since eternal life is only found in the Son, he who has the Son has life. Take courage, Asunetus, for you undoubtedly have the Son and therefore eternal life. Do not fear your sins, for they cannot harm you. Just as all the righteousness of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the most righteous men who have ever lived on earth would be of no benefit to you without Christ, likewise all the sins in the world cannot harm you when you are in Christ. For there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Lift up your spirits, be no longer heavy and sad, for if you are found in Christ, clothed with His perfect righteousness, which is made yours through faith, what can the devil say to you? What can the Law do? They may hiss at you, but they cannot sting you; they may grimace at you, but they cannot harm you. For who can bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who can condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, and who intercedes for us. Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say, rejoice. For He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world; our Lord Jesus is stronger than all. No one can snatch you out of His hands. He is a mighty Mediator; He has conquered all our spiritual enemies; He has overcome hell, death, and damnation; He has led captivity captive; He has disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them on the cross. He has triumphantly declared, "O death, I will be your death; O grave, I will

be your destruction." Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O hell, is your victory?

Since you have such a Mediator and High Priest who has conquered the forces of hell and subdued all infernal power, why should you doubt? Why should you fear any longer? Furthermore, you must understand and be convinced that God's mercy is exceedingly great towards repentant sinners and all those who mourn for their transgressions. As He says, "Whenever a sinner repents from the depths of his heart, God will completely forget their sins." The Prophet David vividly and fully describes God's merciful nature in Psalm 103, where he says, "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy towards those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." The Parable of the Lost Son wonderfully portrays God's mercy towards repentant sinners. It reveals how the Lord embraces, cherishes, and esteems those poor sinners who have broken and contrite hearts for their sins. It is said that when the father saw his repentant son from a distance, he had compassion on him, ran to him, embraced him, kissed him, and clothed him with the finest robe, put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet, and arranged a feast for him. In the same way, the everlasting Father rejoices at the conversion of any of His lost children. Indeed, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Moreover, the Lord openly expresses His merciful nature and disposition by being reluctant for us to perish and willingly casting ourselves away. Therefore, in the Holy Scriptures, He often mourns for us, laments our wretchedness, and utters many pitiful complaints, saying, "Oh, if my people had only listened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" And again, "Oh, if only you had

listened to my commandments; then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." He mournfully laments through His Prophet Hosea, saying, "Oh, Ephraim, what shall I do with you? Oh, Judah, how shall I treat you?" And in another place, "What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done?"

Take notice of how compassionately the Almighty God yearns over us and, as it were, applies His own blood to our wounds. The Apostle also highlights the rich mercy and marvelous love of God towards mankind, as he beseeches and implores us through the ministers of the Gospel to be reconciled to Him. The words are as follows: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you through us, we pray you in Christ's place, be reconciled to God." Isn't it strange that the omnipotent God would stoop to entreat us poor wretches? It is as if a King were to plead with a beggar, whom he could command at will. But the abundant mercy of God towards mankind is most evident in this: He gave His only Son for us when we were His enemies. As it is written, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Again, it is stated, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." In all this, we can clearly see the infinite mercy of God towards us poor sinners. Isn't it a remarkable thing that the Son of God should take on our nature, humble Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross? Just as the shadow on the sundial went back ten degrees so that Hezekiah might receive length of days and great happiness, Christ, the Son of Righteousness, has gone back many degrees so that we might have eternal life. His humiliation, therefore, is our exaltation; His sufferings, our joy; His death, our life. For we have no other remedy or refuge but His merits and righteousness. He is our city of refuge where we must flee and find

sanctuary. He is the balm of Gilead that cures our souls. He is the pool of Bethesda where anyone with any disease may be healed. He is the River Jordan where Naaman can wash away all his leprosy. He is like the pelican that restores its young to life again by pecking a hole in its own breast and shedding its blood. However, we must note one thing along the way, which has been partially mentioned before: all the mercy of God and the merits of Christ are to be limited only to the elect, only to the true members of the Church, as clearly evident in Psalm 103.

Where the mercies of God, as described there at length, are limited only to those who fear Him, keep His covenant, and remember His commandments to follow them. And concerning Christ, it is stated that He is a prince and a Savior to Israel, and that He shall redeem Israel from all their iniquities. It is also written that Christ, being consecrated, became the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him. None can or do obey Him except the Elect, so He is the author of salvation only to the Elect. Consequently, the profane world, no matter what they say or boast, have no true right or claim in Him. This was foreshadowed in the law by the fact that the mercy seat, which symbolised God's mercy in Christ, and the Ark, which represented the Church, were expressly commanded by God to be perfectly fitted to each other in terms of length and breadth. Just as the Ark was two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide, so was the mercy seat. This signifies that the mercy of God in Christ should only be suited to His church and belong exclusively to the Church, so that no one outside the Church can be saved. For he who does not have the Church as his mother cannot have God as his father. Finally, we must observe that just as God is infinite in mercy and great in compassion towards repentant sinners, He is also most constant in the course of His mercies towards His children. Thus, one of the Psalms repeats the refrain: "His mercy endures forever; His mercy endures forever; His mercy endures forever," indicating both the constancy and eternity of God's mercy. In the same vein, it is written: "It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed; it is because His compassions fail not." Let us therefore understand that

God, in terms of His mercy towards His children, possesses a most constant and unchangeable nature. As He says, "I am the Lord, I do not change." For if God were as changeable as we are and subject to passions, then we would be in a most miserable state. He would need to strike us down and take vengeance on us every day and every hour of the day, as we provoke Him daily and every hour of the day. But the God of heaven is not like a human, prone to passions and affections. He has a most constant and unchanging nature. Though we provoke Him with new sins every day, He is far from seeking revenge. Instead, the next day He rewards us with new mercies, surpassing all our unkindness to show kindness to us, and despite our wickedness, He does us good. All our weaknesses cannot make Him break off with us or cease to love us. He is willing to accept us with all our faults and loves us dearly, even though we have great faults.

He does not consider our weaknesses; even though we are often stubborn and foolish, yet despite all that, He still loves us. Just like a loving mother, even if her young baby cries all night and is extremely fussy and difficult, to the point where she cannot rest for an hour during the night, and even if she endures much discomfort and trouble, in the morning when she wakes up, she still loves the baby nonetheless. She cuddles it, plays with it, smiles and laughs at it. In the same way, the God of all mercies, whose love towards us surpasses the love of mothers, even though we continually grieve Him with our weaknesses, still loves us and is willing to endure all, to forget and forgive all. He is an unwavering lover. Once He sets and settles His love, He loves most steadfastly. Nothing can change Him, nothing can remove Him. Just like a father, when his little child takes a fall, breaks their shins, and hurts their face, he is far from being offended or displeased with them. Instead, he pities them, sympathizes with them, and seeks remedies for their injuries. In the same way, our merciful Father is so far from being angry or displeased with us for some slips and falls that He even pities us more and laments our situation. Similarly, a loving and wise husband, even though his wife has many weaknesses, knowing that

she loves him dearly and her heart is with him, is willing to overlook all her faults, hide them, bear with them, and make nothing of them. He loves her nonetheless because of them. Similarly, our dear husband and Spouse, Jesus Christ, because He knows we love Him and He has our hearts, is willing to bear with all our weaknesses and make light of them. For this reason, He says to His Spouse in the Song of Solomon: "Though she was black and full of weaknesses, behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful; you are altogether beautiful, my love, there is no flaw in you." Notice that He calls His Church beautiful, altogether beautiful, and without flaw, not because she is inherently so, but because she is made so in Him. And certainly, the eternal God, looking at her in His son, esteems and regards her as such. Just as someone who sees something through a red glass perceives it to be red, according to the color of the glass, similarly, God the Father, beholding us in His son, considers us to have the same nature and quality that He has: that is, perfectly righteous.

For this reason, He loves us, sets His heart upon us, and will not be separated from us. His love for His children is always constant and unchanging, even though we may not always perceive or feel it in the same way. Just as the Moon remains the same in substance and size, even though at times it appears to us as a thin sliver. Let us know, then, to our great comfort, that God's love towards us in His beloved son is constant and consistent. He will not turn His face away from us or cast us aside because of our weaknesses, not even for many weaknesses. The merciful God accepts His children because their overall care is good, and the general course of their lives tends towards righteousness, even though they may greatly fail in specific actions. Two or three episodes of fever do not indicate a diseased body, nor do two or three good days make a healthy body. Similarly, a few weaknesses do not prove someone to be wicked, nor do two or three good deeds make a person entirely good. We must consider the certain and established course of a person's life. Just as people are said to walk in a path when they are on it, even though they may stumble and trip at times, God's children walk in the path of

righteousness, even though they may stumble and temporarily step out of it, or even be forcibly pulled out of it by thieves. Satan and the overpowering force of our desires often pull us away from the path, but we must return to it as soon as we escape. Now, in conclusion, since God is infinitely merciful and unwavering in His mercy, since great and precious promises are made to us in Christ, and since the Lord does not consider our weaknesses when our hearts are devoted to Him, therefore, O Asunetus, be of good cheer, let nothing trouble you, do not fear the attacks of the Devil, do not pay attention to his temptations, for your sins are undoubtedly forgiven. Christ belongs to you, heaven belongs to you, and all the promises of life and salvation are yours. So, you have no reason to doubt, you cannot fail, and your name is written in the book of life.

Asunetus:

Your words have greatly comforted and uplifted me. Your preaching of the Gospel and your exposition of God's abundant mercy in Christ and the promises have revived me immensely, almost as if giving me new life. They are like a sweet and refreshing drink to my soul, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. They serve as medicine for my ailing soul and as ointment for my spiritual wounds. I now begin to understand the misery within humanity and the mercy of God. Through my own woeful experiences, I have come to realize that without feeling our own misery, we do not appreciate mercy. But now, God has graciously allowed me to feel my own wretchedness and misery, yet with comforting assurance in His mercy. I am grateful to God for it, and I am starting to believe that the promises belong to me, that my sins are forgiven, and that I am one of those who will be saved.

Theologus:

I rejoice greatly that God, according to His abundant mercy, has worked this good transformation in you. From the depths of my heart, I give Him all the praise and glory for it. You are truly blessed to have been born into whom God has performed such a gracious work. It is a manifestation of His special favor and mercy towards

you, for it is the exclusive privilege and royal prerogative of God's own children to truly repent and believe. I pray to God, therefore, to strengthen your faith and fill you with joy and peace in your belief, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Antilegon:

Asunetus, the sun is setting, and it is time for you and me to leave.

Philagathus

Indeed, night will soon fall, and we must necessarily conclude our conversation.

Theologus:

Since that is the case, we will now cease our discussion and go no further.

Asunetus:

Sir, I will now take my leave of you. I can never express enough gratitude for all the good teachings and comforts I have received from you today. I hope to remember some of them throughout my life. I give praise to God for you, your counsel, and for this day, which I believe will mark the beginning of my repentance and true conversion to God.

Theologus:

May the Lord, out of His infinite mercy, grant it. I earnestly pray that the Almighty God establishes you with His free spirit, so that you may continue and progress in your Christian journey until the end.

Philagathus:

I ask for your forgiveness, good Theologus, for my audacity. As you can see, I have been bold in presenting many questions to you, and you have fully satisfied me, bringing great joy and comfort to my soul. I also give thanks to God for you, and I hope I will never forget some of the things you have shared. But now, I entrust you to God and to the word of His grace, which has the power to further build us up.

Theologus:

Farewell, good Philagathus:. May the Lord bless you and keep you in all your ways. May the God of Heaven preserve us all and continue to guide us in His fear until the end.

All glory be given to God.

FINIS.

A Morning Prayer, to be Used in Private Families.

O Lord our God and heavenly Father, we, your unworthy children, come into your most holy and heavenly presence to offer you praise and glory for all your great mercies and abundant blessings towards us. We especially thank you for preserving us throughout the past night, keeping us safe from its dangers and fears. You have granted us peaceful rest for our bodies and brought us safely to the beginning of this day. Now you renew your mercies upon us, providing us with all things abundantly to enjoy: food, clothing, health, peace, liberty, and freedom from the many miseries, diseases, accidents, and calamities that we are susceptible to every moment of our lives. Moreover, you have bestowed upon us many good things, not only for our necessities but also for our delight.

But above all, dear Father, we praise your name for the blessings of a better life, especially for your holy word and sacraments and all the good we receive through them. We are grateful for the continued presence of the Gospel among us and for the death of your Son, which brings us true happiness. We acknowledge that you chose us for life before we even existed, out of your pure goodness and undeserved favor towards us. You called us in your appointed time, justified us by your grace, sanctified us by your Spirit, and adopted us as your own children and heirs to the great crown.

O Lord, open our eyes more and more each day to see and consider your great and marvelous love for us in all these things. May our hearts be drawn closer to you through the contemplation of your blessings, leading us to love, fear, and obey you even more. As you abound in mercy towards us, may we abound in thanksgiving towards you. As you pour out goodness upon us, may we overflow with obedience and love towards you. And since, dear Father, you never tire of doing us good despite our unworthiness and faults, let

the awareness of your great mercy and fatherly kindness compel us to enter your glorious presence with new songs of thanksgiving on our lips.

We pray to you, O most merciful God, to forgive us for all our ingratitude, unkindness, profaneness, and great misuse of all your mercies. We acknowledge our abuse and contempt of your Gospel, along with countless other sins in our lives. We confess that the sins we have committed and the good deeds we have neglected are too numerous to count. We humbly ask you to transfer them all to the account that your Son Christ settled on his cross, never holding any of them against us, but freely forgetting and forgiving all. Nail all our sins and iniquities to the Cross of Christ, bury them in his death, cleanse them in his blood, and hide them in his wounds. May they never rise up as a judgment against us. Free us from the miseries brought upon us by sin and hold back the future judgments of soul, body, possessions, and reputation. Be reconciled to us through your dear Son, concerning all past matters, never remembering or bringing up our old and abominable iniquities. Accept us as righteous in him, attributing his righteousness to us and our sins to him. Let his righteousness satisfy your justice for all our unrighteousness, his obedience for our disobedience, and his perfection for our imperfection.

Furthermore, we humbly beseech your gracious Majesty to grant us a true perception and feeling of our many sins, so that we may not be blinded by delight or hardened by habit, like the reprobate. Rather, may we grow weary of our sins and grieve greatly over them, striving and making every effort to escape from them. Good Father, touch our hearts with genuine repentance for all sin. May we not find pleasure or delight in any sin. Even though we may stumble due to our frailty (as we often do), may we never fall finally or remain in sin. Instead, may we rise to our feet again, turn to you with all our hearts, and seek you while you offer us grace and mercy.

O Lord, increase in us that true and living faith by which we can firmly grasp your Son Christ and rely completely on his merits. Grant us unwavering faith to believe in all the great and precious promises made in the Gospel, and empower us from above to walk and abound in the genuine and fruitful expressions of faith. May we not live according to the flesh but according to the spirit. Let us experience the power of your Son's death, which kills sin in our mortal bodies, and the power of his resurrection, which raises us to newness of life. May we daily grow in the sanctification of the Spirit and the putting to death of the flesh.

Let us strive to live a holy, just, and temperate life in this present evil world, manifesting your virtues through all our actions. May we adorn our holy profession and shine as beacons of light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom we reside, benefiting all through our lives and conduct, and causing no offense to anyone. To achieve this, we pray that you fill us with your Spirit and grant us all spiritual graces such as love, wisdom, patience, contentment, meekness, humility, self-control, chastity, kindness, and friendliness. Stir us to engage in prayer, watchfulness, reading, meditation on your Word, and all other good practices that enable us to grow and abound in heavenly virtues. Bless us daily in the use of these means, shaping us into the individuals you desire us to be and those we aspire to be. Work within us to align our wills, actions, intentions, and abilities with your purpose and power. For you, O Lord, are everything, and you show mercy to whom you choose and harden whom you will. Have mercy on us, dear Father, and never abandon us to ourselves or to our own wills, lusts, and desires. Instead, assist us with your Holy Spirit so that we may persevere in a righteous path until the end. In doing so, may we ultimately be received into glory and partake in the immortal crown that you have prepared for all who love you and sincerely call upon your name.

Furthermore, we earnestly request, O heavenly Father, that you provide us with all the necessary things for this life: food, clothing, health, peace, liberty, and deliverance from the various hardships to

which we are exposed daily, as you see fit. Bless the means you have placed in our hands to sustain this fragile life. Bless our resources, crops, livestock, trades, occupations, and all our endeavors, for it is only your blessing that enriches without bringing sorrow. Grant us, therefore, a sufficient portion of these outward blessings as you, in your divine wisdom, deem most necessary for us.

Moreover, we humbly implore you, most loving Father, to look down from heaven upon your entire Church and every member of it. Show favor to Zion and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Look upon the great ruins and desolation of your Church with compassionate eyes. Heal its wounds and repair its brokenness in all nations. Regard it as your own flock, tend to it as your own family, cultivate it as your own vineyard, and love it as your own spouse. Think thoughts of peace towards it and always view it with deep compassion. Bless it with your grace, guide it with your Spirit, and always defend it with your mighty power. Scatter the plans, confound the schemes, and overthrow the forces of all who oppose it. Specifically, we implore you, dear Father, to oppose that antichrist of Rome, the man of perdition who opposes you and your people. In your appointed time, bring about his downfall. Weaken his power and authority day by day, and allow your Gospel to spread freely in all nations, causing Babylon to fall and never rise again. The more the supporters and followers of Rome strive to uphold their idolatrous kingdom, the more let it crumble, just as Dagon fell before the presence of your Ark. Pour out the fullness of your wrath upon the kingdom of the beast, causing their riches, wealth, influence, and authority to diminish day by day, like the drying up of the river Euphrates.

May it move you with compassion, O Father, to see your own spouse sitting here below as a disfigured and desolate woman, weeping and mourning with her hair dishevelled, having lost all her beauty and charm. Comfort her (dear Father), fill her with the joy of your presence, and adorn her so that you may delight in her, like a bridegroom in his bride. We especially implore you to have mercy on your Church in this land. Intend good for us and not evil; do not

deliver us into the hands of the cruel Spaniard, as our sins deserve. We pray, Lord, scatter the schemes and thwart the plots of all those who have conspired to overthrow and completely subvert this church and commonwealth. Bless this Church more and more with the preservation of true religion among us. For the sake of your great name and infinite mercy, deal graciously and favourably with us and our descendants. Turn away from us the punishment that is due to us for our sins. For you see how iniquity prevails and the wicked seem to triumph. Atheism spreads everywhere, and Popery appears to be gaining influence again. Therefore, dear Father, we humbly beseech you to quickly address and suppress these numerous disorders and grievous offenses that exist among us. We implore you, out of the desperation of your poor children, to show kindness to this English nation. Hear the cries of your chosen ones; hear the mourning of those who mourn in Zion. Let the cries of your children drown out all the cries of sin in the land, and be reconciled to us in the abundance of your compassion, so that you may continue to be a most merciful protector of your English vineyard. We pray, good Father, show special mercy to our most noble and gracious King James, your anointed servant. Bless him and keep him in all his ways. Bless his leadership for us. Let your angels encamp around him, and let your holy hand always be upon him. Protect him from treason and deliver him from the treacheries of his enemies. Grant him understanding of what leads to peace, and give him a heart earnestly inclined to pursue it. Provide him with all the necessary graces for his peace and salvation. May his government remain peaceful and prosperous among us. Just as you have made him the breath of our nostrils and a gracious instrument for the salvation of many thousand souls, let his own soul be saved on the day of your Son Christ.

Bless His Majesty's most honourable privy counsellors and grant success to all their counsels and policies in matters of state, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Bless all the nobility, instill in them a desire to glorify Your name in their positions, make them faithful to You and faithful to the land. Guide with Your Holy Spirit all those who bear the sword of justice,

that they may wield it to punish the wicked and defend the righteous, and may they fulfill the duties of their positions with care and integrity. Increase the number of faithful and zealous ministers in this church. Send Your Gospel to places where it is not yet known, and bless it where it is present. Remember, O Lord, all those who are under any cross or affliction; bring them comfort, heal their wounds, and collect their tears in Your bottle. Provide solace in all their sorrows and bring an end to their troubles in a manner that brings glory to You and advances their own salvation. In the meantime, grant them patience and steadfastness to endure whatever Your merciful hand may lay upon them. Lastly, we pray for Your blessings upon the government, the ministry, and the people. Bless all Your people and show favour to those who are true and upright in their hearts. And so, dear Father, we entrust ourselves, our souls, and our bodies into Your hands for this day and for the rest of our lives. We ask You to take care of us, keep us from all evil, watch over us for our well-being, and let Your angels encamp around us. Let Your holy hand be upon us and guide us in all our ways, so that we may live to Your praise and glory here on earth, maintaining faith and a good conscience in all our actions. May we be crowned by You in Your kingdom after this life. Grant these things, good Father, to us who are present here and to all those who are absent. We also pray, in Your special favour, that You remember our friends and relatives in the flesh, our good neighbours and well-wishers, and all those for whom we are obligated to pray by nature, by deserving, or by any duty whatsoever, for the sake of Jesus Christ our only mediator, to whom, along with You and the Holy Spirit, all praise and glory is given, both now and forevermore.

An Evening Prayer, to be Used in Private Families.

O Eternal God, and our most loving and dear Father, we, your unworthy children, humbly bow down before your great Majesty, acknowledging from our hearts that we are entirely unworthy to approach you or even to look towards you. You are a God of infinite glory, and we are vile and abominable sinners. We were conceived and born in sin and corruption, inheriting the corruptions of our forefathers, and we have willfully transgressed your holy statutes and laws in our thoughts, words, and actions. We have sinned both privately and openly, with ourselves and with others. Our specific sins are numerous, for who truly knows how often we offend? Yet, we must confess against ourselves that our hearts are filled with pride, covetousness, and the love of this world. We are filled with wrath, anger, and impatience. We are filled with lying, hypocrisy, and deceit. We are filled with vanity, hardness of heart, and profanity. We are filled with unbelief, distrust, and self-love. We are filled with lust, uncleanness, and all abominable desires. Our hearts are the very cesspools of sin, the refuse bins of all filthiness. Furthermore, we fail to do the good we ought to do. We lack faith, love, zeal, patience, contentment, and every good virtue. Therefore, you have just cause to pronounce judgment upon us as damned transgressors of all your holy commandments. We are sunk in rebellion and have committed high treason against your majesty on numerous occasions. You would be justified in casting us all into the fires of hell, to be tormented with Satan and his angels for eternity. We have no defense against your majesty for such action, as it would be just and in accordance with our deserving. Therefore, dear Father, we appeal from your justice to your mercy, humbly entreating you to have mercy on us and freely forgive us all our past sins, both new and old, hidden and open, known and unknown, for the sake of Jesus Christ our only mediator. We ask you to touch our hearts with true sorrow

and genuine repentance for our sins, so that they may continually bring us sorrow and heartfelt remorse. May nothing grieve us more than the fact that we have offended you, our special friend and Father.

Give us, dear Father, a daily increasing awareness and deep understanding of our sins, accompanied by true humility under their weight. Grant us the gift of true and vibrant faith, through which we can firmly grasp your Son Christ and all his merits, applying them to our own souls. Help us firmly believe, O good Father, in all the sweet promises of the Gospel concerning the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, made in your Son Christ. Lord, strengthen our faith so that we may fully rely on your promises, which are all trustworthy and certain. May we place our entire selves and all that we possess upon them: our souls, bodies, possessions, reputation, spouses, children, and our entire state of being. May we acknowledge that all things depend on your promises, power, and providence, and that your Word upholds and sustains the entire order of nature.

Furthermore, we beseech you, Lord, to strengthen us from above, enabling us to walk in every good path and produce the fruits of true faith in all our actions. Help us strive to please you in all things and be fruitful in good works, so that our conduct may reveal to all people our identity as your children. May we adorn and magnify our most holy profession by walking in a Christian manner, exhibiting the sound fruits and practices of godliness and true religion. To this end, we pray that you sanctify our hearts even more by your Spirit. Sanctify our souls and bodies, as well as our inherently corrupt faculties such as reason, understanding, will, and affections, so that they may be suited for your worship and service, bringing us joy and satisfaction. Stir us to engage in prayer, vigilance, reading, and meditation on your law, as well as all other beneficial means by which we may grow in grace and goodness day by day. Bless us in the use of these means so that we may daily die to sin and live for righteousness. Draw us even closer to you, aid us in addressing our numerous needs, mend our significant imperfections, renew us

inwardly more and more, restore the brokenness within our hearts, and assist us in overcoming the remnants of sin. Expand our hearts to willingly walk in accordance with your commandments, guide our every step in your Word, and do not allow iniquity to have dominion over us. Support us in overcoming our specific weaknesses and prevailing sins, so that we may gain victory over them all, to the glory of your name and the immense peace and comfort of our own consciences.

Strengthen us, good Father, by your grace and Holy Spirit, against the common corruptions of the world such as pride, immorality, greed, contempt for your Gospel, swearing, lying, hypocrisy, and deception. Dear Father, do not allow us to be overcome by these vile vices or any other sinful pleasures and foolish delights that lead thousands to their downfall. Equip our souls to resist the temptations of this world, the flesh, and the devil, so that with your help, we may overcome them all and remain on the path to life. Grant us a life lived in reverence to you and a death met with your favour, so that our last days may be our best, and we may find great peace of conscience in the end.

Furthermore, dear Father, we not only pray for ourselves but also for all our fellow believers, your dear children scattered throughout the earth. We humbly beseech you to bless them all, to fill them with joy through the radiance of your presence, both now and forever. Guide them all in your fear and protect them from evil, so that they may praise your name. In these perilous times and declining days, we implore you, O Lord, to raise up nurturing fathers and mothers for your Church. Raise up faithful pastors so that your cause may advance, truth may prevail, religion may prosper, your name alone may be exalted on earth, your Son's kingdom may be advanced, and your will may be accomplished. Oppose all opposing powers, especially those of Rome, Antichrist, idolatry, and atheism. Curse and thwart their plans, scatter their forces, and overthrow their armies. Let them be rendered foolish when they think themselves wise and weakened when they believe themselves strong. May they

know that no wisdom, counsel, power, or strategy can prevail against you, the Lord of hosts. Let them acknowledge that Israel has a God and that you, who are called Jehovah, are the sole ruler over the entire world.

Therefore, arise, O mighty God, and uphold your own cause against all your enemies. Strike at their core and humble them, turning them back who bear ill will towards Zion. May the patient endurance of the righteous bring joy, and may the wicked be disappointed in their hopes. Above all, we implore you, O Lord, to show special mercy to your Church in this Land where we reside. Sustain the presence of your Gospel among us, with even greater success. Purify your house day by day, removing all stumbling blocks.

May this nation continue to be a place where your name is called upon, and a sanctuary for your saints. Show mercy to our future generations, dear Father, and take care of them so that your Gospel may be passed down to them as a sacred inheritance. Protect us from foreign invasions and keep idolatry and Popery away from our midst. Turn away from us the plagues that our sins cry out for. The sins of this land are exceedingly great, horrendous, and outrageous, giving you just cause to make us examples of your wrath to all nations. By lifting us up in great mercy and long-lasting peace, you should press us down in great anger and prolonged war. Therefore, dear Father, for the sake of your great name and your boundless mercies, we humbly implore you to be reconciled with this land and rid it of all its heinous sins. Submerge them, O Lord, in your infinite mercy through Christ, as if in a bottomless abyss, so that they may never rise up in judgment against us. Although our sins are numerous and fearful, your mercy is far greater. For you are infinite in mercy, while we cannot be infinite in sinning. Do not deliver us into the hands of idolaters, lest they blaspheme your name and say, "Where is their God in whom they trusted?" Instead, dear Father, take us into your own hands and discipline us according to your wisdom, for with you there is mercy and deep compassion.

Furthermore, we earnestly beseech your gracious Majesty to bless our most noble King James and show him abundant mercy in all things. Guide him in your fear and protect him in all his ways. Work in his soul a genuine sorrow for sin, true faith in your promises, and a strong desire to please you in all things and fulfill the duties of his exalted position with zeal for your glory and faithfulness to your Majesty. As you have crowned him on earth, may he, spending his days in reverence to you, be crowned by you forever in heaven after this life.

We beseech you also to bless His Majesty's most honourable privy Counsellors. Guide them from above, let them seek advice from you in all matters, so that they may consult and make decisions that are most for your glory, the good of the Church, and the peace of our Commonwealth. Bless the nobility and all the magistrates in the land, granting them the grace to administer judgment and justice, and to uphold truth and fairness. Bless all the faithful ministers of the Gospel, increase their number, and enhance your gifts within them. Bless their labours in their respective positions and congregations, so that they may all be instruments of your hand to expand your Son's kingdom and bring many people to you. Comfort the afflicted with all necessary consolations. Do not forget any of your children who are in trouble; let the joys and comforts of your Spirit be with them as their afflictions are, and sanctify their afflictions and troubles for the glory of your name and their own well-being. Give us grateful hearts for all your mercies, both spiritual and physical. You are exceedingly merciful to us in the things of this life, and infinitely more merciful in the things of the eternal life. Let us deeply contemplate and appreciate all your specific favors toward us, so that through proper consideration, our hearts may draw even closer to you. Therefore, may we both love and obey you because of your kindness and love towards us, and may your love for us evoke our love for you. Because mercy is found with you, let you be revered. Grant these things, dear Father, and all other necessary graces for our souls or bodies, and for all your children throughout the entire world, for the sake of Jesus Christ. In His name, we also call upon

you as He has taught us in His Gospel, saying, "Our Father who art in Heaven, etc."

A Prayer to be Used at Any Time, by One Alone Privately.

O Lord my God, and heavenly Father, I, your most unworthy child, freely confess in your presence that I am a sinful creature and a transgressor of all your holy laws and commandments. From the moment of my birth, I have been tainted by sin and have continuously manifested the corrupt and unpleasant fruits of that infection in my thoughts, words, and actions. If I were to attempt to enumerate my specific offenses, I do not know where to begin or end. They are more numerous than the hairs on my head, far more than I can feel or comprehend. For who truly knows the extent of their corruption? Who knows how often they offend? You alone, O Lord, know my sins, for you know my heart. Nothing is hidden from you; you know what I have been and what I am. My conscience accuses me of many grievous evils, and through woeful experience, I daily feel my frailty, inclination towards evil, and aversion to goodness. My mind is filled with vanity, my heart with profaneness, and my affections with lifelessness, apathy, and laziness in matters of worship and service to you. Indeed, my entire soul is plagued by spiritual blindness, hardness, unfruitfulness, indifference, and complacency. I am, in reality, nothing more than a bundle of sin and a mass of misery. Therefore, I have forfeited your favor and incurred your deep displeasure, giving you just cause to frown upon me, abandon me, and leave me to my own corrupt will and desires. But, O my dear Father, I have learned from your teachings that you are a God abounding in mercy, slow to anger, and rich in compassion and kindness towards all who groan under the burden of their sins.

Therefore, extend your great mercy to me, a poor sinner, and grant me a general pardon for all my offenses. Seal this pardon in the blood of your Son and affirm it to my conscience through your Spirit, assuring me more and more of your love and favor towards me, and that you are a reconciled Father to me. Grant that from this moment forward, I may love you greatly because much has been given to me, and out of sincere love, fear and obey you in all times to come.

O Lord, increase my faith so that I may steadfastly believe in all the promises of the Gospel made in your Son Christ and rely on them completely. Empower me to produce the genuine fruits of faith and repentance in all my actions. Fill my soul with joy and peace through my belief. Grant me inner comfort and spiritual strength against all temptations. Give me an even greater awareness of your love and abundant mercies towards me. Work in my soul a love for your Majesty, a zeal for your glory, a hatred of evil, and a desire for all good things. Grant me victory over the sins that you know are most powerful in me. Let me finally conquer the world and the flesh. Purify in me anything that is worldly, sanctify me entirely through your Spirit, bind my heart to you forever so that I may fear your name. Renew in me the image of your Son Christ daily, more and more. Instill in me a delight in reading and meditating on your word. Let me rejoice in the public preaching of it. Help me love and respect all faithful Ministers of your Gospel. Sanctify their teachings in my conscience, seal them within my soul, inscribe them upon my heart. Give me a soft and tender heart, so that I may tremble at your words and be deeply moved by godly sermons. May my sins not hinder your mercies from reaching me, nor my unworthiness block the flow of your grace. Open my eyes to see the great wonders of your law. Reveal your secrets to me; be open-hearted towards me, your unworthy servant. Conceal nothing from me that may contribute to your glory and the well-being of my soul. Bless all the means you employ for my good. Bless all holy teachings and instructions for my soul. Bless me at all times, whether in hearing or reading your word. Grant me the proper use of all your mercies and corrections, so that I may grow from them. Let my love for your children abound. May my

heart be closely knit to them, so that where you love most, there I may also love most. Help me watch and pray, so that I do not fall into temptation. Grant me patience and contentment in all things. Let my love for you increase while my love for the world diminishes. Draw my mind upward, so that I may disregard all fleeting things. May I be so captivated and enraptured by the sight and experience of heavenly things that I consider all earthly things as insignificant.

Allow me to use this world as if I did not fully depend on it. Let me only use it for necessities like food and drink. May I not be swayed by empty pleasures and superficial delights. Good Father, carry out your good work within me and never abandon or forsake me until you have brought me to true happiness. Oh dear Father, make me faithful in my vocation so that I may serve you in it and always strive to do good in everything. Bless my external circumstances. Bless my soul, body, possessions, and reputation. Bless all that is associated with me. Bless my entrances and exits. May your favor always shine upon me. Uplift me with the joys and comforts of your spirit. Fill me with gratitude for all your mercies. I must confess that you are truly kind to me in all things. In you I live, move, and exist. My well-being and prosperity come from you. You are a constant friend and a generous benefactor to me. I live at your expense. I acknowledge that everything I have comes from you, and I recognize that you never tire of doing good for me. Your goodness towards me is boundless. Oh, I can never express enough gratitude to you for all your mercies, both spiritual and material. But to the best of my ability, I praise your name for all of them. I implore you to accept my thanksgiving through your Son Christ and grant me the ability to make profitable use of all your blessings, so that my heart may be wholly devoted to you. Father, grant me a good nature and disposition that can be won over by gentleness and fair treatment, as if you were giving me many rewards. Forgive all my ingratitude, unkindness, and abuse of your mercies, and give me the grace to use them more for your glory in the future. Dear Father, strengthen me to continue praising and glorifying your name here on earth, so that after this life, I may be eternally crowned by you in your kingdom. Grant these requests,

most merciful God, not only to me but to all your dear children throughout the world, for the sake of Jesus Christ. In his name, I further call upon you, saying as he has taught me: Our Father, who art in Heaven, etc.

FINIS.

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ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions. May 2023. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068