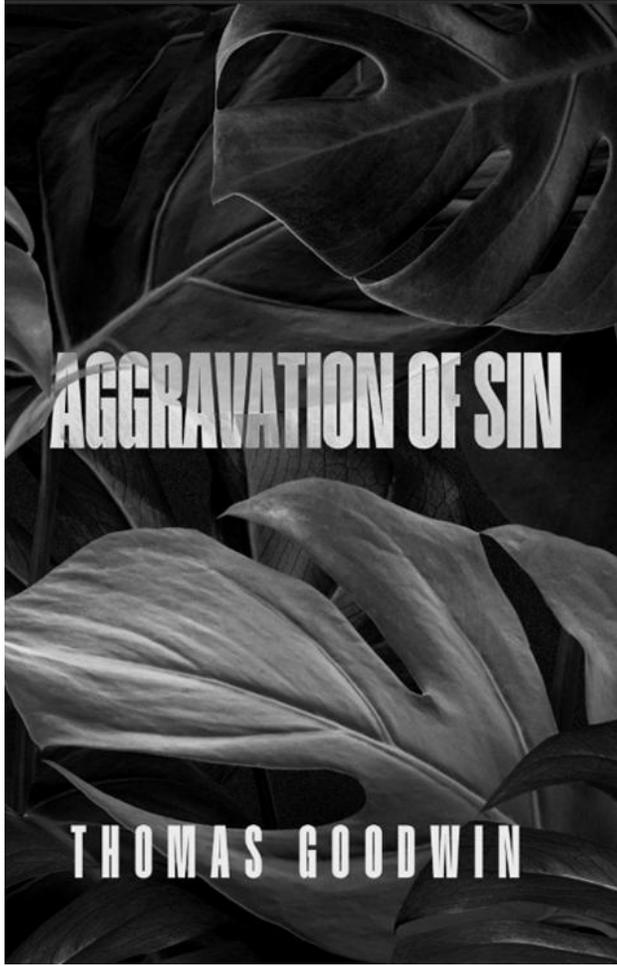


# AGGRAVATION OF SIN

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# **Aggravation of Sin**

**by Thomas Goodwin**

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## **Aggravation of Sin**

Did the good thing then cause death in me? Absolutely not. But sin, in order to reveal its true nature, brought about death in me through something good. So, by the commandment, sin might become exceedingly sinful. - Romans 7:13

We find our apostle, in the 9th verse, having been alive but suddenly struck dead by an apparition reflected in the mirror of the law—a revelation of 'the sinfulness of sin.' Sin revived, as he says in the 9th verse, and appeared to be sin, as he says in the 13th verse. It looked just like itself, but even more sinful than ever. At the sight of it, he fell down dead. "I died," he declares in the 9th verse. "It wrought death in me," he proclaims in the 13th verse. That is to say, he apprehended the looming presence of death and hell as a

consequence of the state he was in. However, just as the life of sin was the death of Paul, his demise served as a preparation for a new life. "Through the law, I am dead to the law, so that I may live for God," he states in Galatians 2:19. In this passage, he also refers to God's work on him during his initial conversion. It was then that sin became, in his estimation, so undeniably and greatly sinful.

The subject to be discussed, then, is the sinfulness of sin—an essential topic because, if we are to be saved, sin must first appear to us, as it did to Paul, as exceedingly sinful.

Firstly, knowledge begins with observable effects, which serve as interpreters of the nature of things. Therefore, we shall commence this demonstration of the evil of sin by considering the destructive effects it has wrought upon the world. Since its advent, sin has done nothing but cause harm, and all the mischief that has been done can be attributed solely to sin, particularly with regards to the wretched state of the human soul.

First and foremost, sin has debased the soul of man, which is the noblest creature on earth and the one most closely associated with divinity. It was created to be a fitting companion for God Himself. However, sin has stripped it of its original excellence, just as Reuben was deprived of his privilege in Genesis 49:4. The soul, which is worth more than the entire world, has been reduced to a servant and slave of every creature it was meant to govern. Therefore, the prodigal son, as a symbol, is said to serve swine and feed on husks, allowing every vanity to dominate him. Thus, we find in Scripture that men are described as being servants to wine, servants to wealth, and servants to various lusts.

Consequently, shame accompanies this debasement, as stated in Romans 4:21. Shame arises from the perception of a debased

excellence. The greater the excellence, the greater the shame. Therefore, immeasurable confusion will befall sinners since sin debases an invaluable excellence.

Secondly, sin not only debases the soul, but it also defiles it. In fact, there is nothing else that can defile it, as stated in Matthew 15:20. The soul is a most pure beam, bearing the image of the Father of lights, far surpassing the sun in purity just as the sun surpasses a clod of earth. Yet, all the filth in the world cannot defile the sun; it scatters any clouds that attempt to obscure it. However, sin has defiled the soul. Even the smallest sin instantly, completely, and eternally defiles it.

Firstly, the fall of Adam resulted in the defilement of the soul through one sin, as mentioned in Romans 5:17. "One offence" polluted Adam and the entire world. Consider this: if you were to witness a single blot of darkness seizing the sun, extinguishing its heavenly light, causing it to detach from its orbit, and making it descend as a mass of darkness, you would deem it a remarkable darkness. That is what sin did to the soul, making the sun itself pale in comparison.

Secondly, sin defiles the soul instantly. If the most glorious angel in heaven were to be affected by even the slightest sin, he would instantaneously fall from heaven, stripped of all his glory, becoming the ugliest creature imaginable. Such sin would be considered the deadliest poison, similar to the poison that Nero once concocted, which killed Germanicus immediately upon ingestion. That is the nature of sin.

Thirdly, sin defiles the soul completely. It does not affect only one aspect; it begins with the understanding, penetrates the will and affections, and permeates every part. The diseases we consider most

severe are those that do not merely affect a single joint or limb but spread decay throughout the entire body.

Fourthly, sin defiles the soul eternally. It does not confine itself to one moment but endures forever. It is an everlasting stain that cannot be washed away by any nitre, soap, or creature, as stated in Jeremiah 2:22. Once, the world was flooded with water, washing away sinners but not a single sin. At the end of days, the world will be set ablaze, and all the fires and flames in hell will not purge a single sin.

Thirdly, sin has robbed the soul of the "image of God" and deprived us of "the glory of God," as mentioned in Romans 3:23. This image refers to God's holiness, which constitutes His beauty and ours. We were once beautiful and glorious within, which, though accidental, is more valuable than all the souls of men lacking it. This image is a likeness to God, a divine nature that no one can see God without. While man in his state of innocence possessed all the perfections found in other creatures, this aspect was worth more than all the rest. Even with all the blessings of paradise, Adam could not be truly happy without it. When he lost it, he was left naked, though his other perfections remained intact, as the apostle states that they are "profitable for all things." Even the entire world, when weighed against the least fraction of this divine image, is found wanting. Without it, the glorious angels would be damned devils, and the saints in heaven would be damned spirits. This is what sin has stolen from mankind.

Fourthly, sin has even robbed man of God Himself. "Your sins separate," says God, "between you and me." Thus, sinners are said to "live without God in the world." By robbing man of God, sin robs him of all things because "all things are ours" only to the extent that God

is ours. God, whose countenance constitutes heaven, is everything. His lovingkindness is better than life itself and encompasses beauty, honor, riches—everything. In comparison, they are but a drop.

However, the mischief caused by sin does not end there. Just as the leprosy of old infected the houses and garments of lepers, sin has cast confusion over the entire world. It has brought vanity and a curse upon creation, as stated in Romans 8:20. If Christ had not intervened to support the shattered state of the world, it would have crumbled around Adam.

Though the old walls and dilapidated palace of the world still stand today, the beauty, luster, and glory of the adornments have been marred and tarnished by numerous imperfections that have befallen every creature.

If not for Christ's intervention, the world would have returned to its original nothingness. You might say that sin is a potent carcass that not only contains infection within itself but also infects the surrounding air. It affects not only the soul but the entire world.

Lastly, sin was the first creator of hell and laid its foundational cornerstone. Sin alone brought forth and filled that bottomless abyss with all the fire, brimstone, and wrath that will never be consumed by flames. It crucified and pierced Christ Himself, who endured His Father's wrath, an endurance that would have caused all the angels in heaven to crack and collapse beneath its weight.

But yet this evaluation is merely based on its effects; the essence of sin, which is the cause of all these evils, must surely possess much greater mischief. Shall I speak of the least evil that I can say about it? It encompasses all other evils within it. Hence, in James 1:21, the apostle refers to it as "filthiness and an abundance of wickedness," or

an excess of wickedness, as if it were so extraordinary that if all evils were to have an excrement, a scum, an excess, sin would be it. It is the abstract essence of all evil—an evil that, in its nature and essence, virtually and eminently contains all kinds of evils that exist in the world. In the Scriptures, you will find that all the evils in the world serve to account for it and give it names. Sin is called poison, and sinners are called serpents. Sin is called vomit, and sinners are called dogs. Sin is the stench of graves, and sinners are rotten sepulchers. Sin is mire, sinners are sows. Sin is darkness, blindness, shame, nakedness, folly, madness, death, and all that is filthy, defective, infectious, and painful. Just as the Holy Spirit said of Nabal, "As is his name, so is he," we may say the same of sin. If Adam gave names to all things according to their nature, how much more so did God, "who calls things as they are." Surely God would not slander sin, even though it is His only enemy. Moreover, there is a reason for this, as sin is the cause of all evils. God sowed nothing but good seed in the world; "He beheld, and saw that all things were very good." It is sin that sowed the tares, all the sorrows and diseases that have arisen for both men and animals. Therefore, whatever is found in the effect exists in the cause to a greater degree. Surely, therefore, sin is to the soul of man, the wretched vessel and subject of it, what poison, death, and sickness are to other creatures and to the body. In being all these things to the soul, it is even more than all of them, for "corruptio optimi pessima"; sin, which is the corruption, poison, death, and sickness of the soul, must exceed all other evils in proportion to how much the soul surpasses all other creatures.

But yet this is the least evil that can be said about it. There is, secondly, a further transcendent and unique mischief in it that cannot be found in all other evils, as will become evident through various examples.

Firstly, God proclaims Himself as the author of all other evils and claims ownership of them all. Although sin is the meritorious cause of all, God is the efficient and guiding cause. "There is no evil in the city that the Lord has not done," He declares. He disowns sin alone, as stated in James 1:13, as if it were a bastard offspring of someone else, for He is "the Father of lights" (verse 17).

Secondly, God the Son underwent the utmost extremity of punishment for evil. He drank from a cup mingled by His Father, more bitter than if all the evils in the world were concentrated within it, and He drank it to the very dregs. However, not a drop of sin, even when sweetened with the offer of the entire world, could be tolerated.

Thirdly, the saints have chosen and embraced other evils as good and rejected the greatest worldly blessings as evil when they came into conflict with sin. Thus, "Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:24–28). Similarly, Chrysostom, when threatened by Empress Eudoxia, responded, "Go tell her, I fear nothing but sin."

Fourthly, consider the devil himself, whom you all perceive as more full of mischief than all the evils in the world. He is referred to in the abstract as "spiritual wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). Yet, it was sin alone that first corrupted him, and it is sin that possesses even the devils. He was once a glorious angel until he became acquainted with it. If a separation could be made between him and sin, he would be restored to a nature as good, sweet, and amiable as any creature on earth or in heaven.

Fifthly, although other things may be evil, it is only sin that renders a creature accursed. Just as all the good things in the world do not make a person blessed, not all the evils make them accursed. God does not say, "Blessed are the honorable and the rich," nor does He

say, "Accursed are the poor." Instead, He declares, "Cursed is the one who does not continue in all things" (Galatians 3:10)—cursed even for the smallest sin. Conversely, "Blessed is the one whose iniquities are forgiven" (Romans 4:7).

Sixthly, God hates nothing but sin. Even if all the evils were consolidated in one person, God would not simply hate them for that reason. He does not hate them because they are poor and disgraced but only because they are sinful. It is sin that He hates, as stated in Revelation 2:15 and Isaiah 27:11. Indeed, He hates sin alone. While other attributes are manifested in various effects towards different things—His love and goodness towards Himself, His Son, and His children—His hatred, which is as vast as His love, is poured out solely upon sin and limited entirely to it.

The question that remains is: What is the transcendence of evil present in its essence that makes sin surpass all other evils and causes God, Christ, the saints, and others to hate it more than any other evil?

The answer lies in the fact that sin is enmity with God (Romans 8:7). Abstracts, as we know, speak of essences. The meaning is that sin is directly contrary to God and all that belongs to Him.

Firstly, it is contrary to His essence, to His existence, and to Him being God. Sin causes man to hate Him, as stated in Romans 1:30. Just as "he who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15), one who hates God may be said to be a murderer of Him, wishing that He did not exist. "Peccatum est Deicidium" (Sin is deicide).

Secondly, sin is contrary to all His attributes, which define His name. People are protective of their names, and God's name is Himself. Sin causes a person to disregard God's goodness and seek happiness in

creatures, as if they could be happy without Him. It deposes His sovereignty and elevates other gods before Him. It scorns His truth, power, and justice, and it perverts His grace into licentiousness.

Sin is also contrary to whatever belongs to God or is dear to Him. Moreover, a king holds three things especially dear to him: his laws, his favorites, and his image stamped on his currency. Likewise, God has these three things.

Firstly, His laws and ordinances: Sin has always violated every law that God has given. It is defined as "lawlessness" and "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). It is even described as "destroying the law" (Psalm 119:126). Know that the least bit of God's law is more precious to Him than the entire world. Before the smallest detail of His law is broken, heaven and earth will pass away. Thus, the smallest sin, which is a violation of the least law, is worse than the destruction of the world. In relation to His worship (as if God could be envious of anything), sin perverts His ordinances into sin.

Secondly, concerning His favorites, God has only a few poor ones whom He loves. Sin has set its hatred upon them.

Lastly, in regard to His image, even within a person's own breast, the law of the members fights against the law of the mind and endeavors to expel it, even if a person should be damned for it (Galatians 5:17). "The flesh," namely sin, "lusts against the Spirit" because they are contrary to one another. Indeed, sin, though it hates that image in others, still seeks to expel it within oneself. Such is the deadly hatred that a person hates themselves insofar as they are holy and sinful.

The magnitude of sin has now reached such heights that our thoughts can no longer follow it. Theologians say that it aspires to

infinity, its object of enmity being God, who is infinite. They tell us that sin itself is objectively infinite. I am certain that the worth of the offended party intensifies the offense; an offensive word against a king is high treason, surpassing even the greatest indignity toward another person. I am also certain that God was so offended by sin that, although He loves His Son as Himself, when Christ, who was without sin, was made sin by imputation, God "spared Him not." Even though the creatures were incapable of delivering a blow severe enough, God Himself was "pleased to bruise Him" (Isaiah 53:10). He did not spare His own Son (Romans 8:32). His love could have overpowered Him and caused Him to overlook sin for the sake of His Son. At the very least, a word from God could have appeased Him. Yet, His hatred of sin and offense at it were so great that He poured out the vials of His wrath upon Him. Neither would entreaty suffice, for although He cried out with strong cries for it to pass from Him, God would not relent until sin had been overcome.

And just as the offended party intensifies the offense, as mentioned earlier, the suffering party, being both God and man, confirms the abounding sinfulness of it. For what crime have you ever heard of a king being put to death? Their persons are considered to be of greater worth than any crime committed against them in a civil sense. Christ was the King of kings.

Yet, there is another consideration to fully comprehend the extent of its iniquity, and that is this: even the smallest sin, in its nature, virtually contains all sin to a greater or lesser degree. I do not mean to say that all sins are equal, hence the addition of "more or less." I prove it in this way: When Adam committed one offense, he contracted the stain of all sins. As soon as one sin seized upon his heart, he had all sins within him.

Thus, every sin in us, through a miraculous multiplication, inclines our nature more towards every sin than it was before. It deepens the pollution of our nature, not only regarding the specific type of sin it represents, but all others as well. Just as bringing one candle into a room causes the light to spread everywhere, and when another is brought in, the light increases even more, so it is with sin. The slightest sin cuts off the soul from God, and then it becomes ready to pursue every enticing vanity.

This demonstrates the fullness of its evil, for it contains not only all other evils in the world within itself but also all evils of its own kind. It would be considered a strange poison if the smallest drop of it possessed the potency of all poisons. It would be a strange disease if the slightest infection caused the body to be susceptible to all diseases. Similarly, sin, even in its smallest form, makes the soul more inclined and susceptible to all sins.

And now you see that it is a perfect evil. Although it cannot be said to be the greatest evil in the full sense in which God is called the greatest good, because if it were as bad as God is good, how could He pardon it, subdue it, and reduce it to nothingness as He does? Then, how could it be subject to addition, when one sin is more sinful than another (Ezekiel 8:15, John 19:11)? However, it does bear some analogy to being the greatest evil, just as God is the greatest good.

Firstly, just as God is the greatest good to be loved for Himself, with other things being loved for His sake, sin is the greatest evil because it is to be avoided simply for itself. Other evils become good or even desirable when compared to sin.

Secondly, just as God is the greatest good because He is the greatest happiness to Himself, sin is the greatest evil to itself. There can be no worse punishment for sin than itself. When God delivers someone

over as an enemy with whom He will no longer deal, He hands them over to sin.

Thirdly, it is so evil that it cannot be given a worse epithet than itself. Therefore, when the apostle wants to speak of it in the harshest terms and reach the highest level of expression, to the point of hyperbole, he calls it by its own name, "sinful sin" (Romans 7:13). Just as in God, being the greatest good, "whatever is in God is God Himself" and His attributes and names are simply Himself, the same applies to sin. Whatever is in sin is sin itself, and so forth. It can be called no worse than by its own name, "sinful sin."

Now, what have I been speaking of all this time? Why, only about one sin in its general nature. There is not a person here who does not have millions of them, as numerous as the sands upon the seashore or as the atoms that would exist if the entire world were pulverized to dust. It surpasses even that in number. Therefore, before we proceed any further, let our thoughts pause here and marvel at the abundance of sin above all other things. Other things, if they are great, are but few in number, and if they are many, they are but small. The world is indeed immense, but there is only one of it. Though the sands are innumerable, they are still small. Yet your sinfulness exceeds both.

Next, let our thoughts be directed towards deep and profound contemplation of our condition. If one sin abounds in this manner, what tongue can express or heart conceive the misery of those who, to use the apostle's phrase in 1 Corinthians 15, "are yet in their sins"? They stand bound to God solely by their own individual bond, to answer for all their sins themselves. In their current state of impenitence and unbelief, they cannot plead the benefit of Christ's death to alleviate or remove the guilt of even one sin. All their sins

are still entirely their own, unlike those who are in Christ. Their own bonds have been canceled and handed in, and Christ has taken them upon Himself.

To properly characterize their condition, which is consistent with this expression:

Firstly, a person's sins can be said to be their own when they commit sin willingly, that is, with the complete disposition and inclination of their heart. In this way, the devil is said to sin (John 8:44), "out of his own," meaning that his entire being is involved. A person in Christ cannot be said to do this to the same extent, for they have a new creature within them that does not sin (1 John 3:1, 9). They can even say, even when they sin, "It is not I, but sin."

Secondly, sin is a person's own when they do not hate it but rather love it. As Christ said, "The world loves its own" (John 15:19), and likewise, a wicked person loves their sin "more than any good," as David described (Psalm 52:3).

Thirdly, a person nourishes and cherishes what is their own. Therefore, Ephesians 5:29 states, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." Similarly, when people have caterers and planners for their lusts and their chief concern every morning is what pleasures of sin they will indulge in that day, it is a sign that their sins are their own.

In short, when people live in sin, as expressed in 1 Timothy 5:6, "She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." When the comforts of their lives are derived from the pleasures of sin, providing them with all the necessities of life, when they "drink it in like water," consume the "bread of wickedness" without it troubling them, when they cannot sleep until they have engaged in or plotted mischief, when

violence and oppression cover them like a garment and pride adorns them like a chain, when doing wickedly becomes a pastime and a source of boasting, and when their health deteriorates and they become discontented when their lusts are unsatisfied, just as Ahab was for Naboth's vineyard, or when Amnon grew lean because he could not enjoy his paramour—all these things, as they live in their sins here, render them dead while they live and bring about misery, making the greatest evil their chiefest good. And when they come to die, as we all must one day, without knowing how soon or sudden it may be, we carry our souls—our precious souls, like precious water in a fragile glass that can easily shatter, and we are "spilled like water, which none can gather up again" (2 Samuel 14:14). Or we are like a candle in a paper lantern, surrounded by clay walls full of cracks, where a little cold breeze enters and extinguishes the candle. Without a thorough change of heart beforehand, a transformation from all sin to all godliness, they will die in their sins. The word "sins" encompasses all the utmost miseries, and that is why when Christ wanted to sum up all miseries in one expression, He told the Pharisees that they would "die in their sins" (John 8:28).

Now, let us further consider that if sin is so exceedingly sinful, then hell, which follows death, is likewise extraordinarily dreadful. It is implied to be a punishment without measure (Jeremiah 30:11, compared with Isaiah 27), "I will punish them as I punished you," says God to His own, "but I will punish you in measure." Indeed, since sin is committed against God, the King of kings, it can never be punished enough. Just as regicide is a crime so heinous among humans that no amount of torture can match its deserved punishment—we often say that all torments are too little and death is too good for such a crime—peccatum est Deicidium, as I said before, it is a destruction of God as much as lies within us. Therefore, only God Himself can fully punish it. Thus, it is referred to as "falling into

the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31), which, as stated there, is "a fearful thing." For if His breath blows us to destruction (Job 4:9), as we are but dust heaps, and if His nod causes destruction (Psalm 80:16), for when He nods, it leads to destruction, then what is the weight of His hands—the hands that span the heavens and hold the earth in the hollow of them (Isaiah 40:12)? And if God takes it upon Himself to punish, He will undoubtedly do so to the fullest extent. Sin is the work of man, and punishment is the work of God. God will display perfection in His work just as man does in his.

If sin is the all-encompassing evil, as I have said, containing all other evils within it, then the punishment God will inflict will also be the all-encompassing evil, containing within it all miseries. It is referred to as "a cup full of mixture," as mentioned in Psalm 75:8, into which God has poured the essence of all miseries. "The wicked of the earth must drink the dregs of it," even if it lasts for eternity. If one sin deserves a hell, a punishment beyond measure, what will millions upon millions of sins do? We read that "every sin shall receive a just recompense" (Hebrews 2:2). Therefore, let us be cautious not to die in our sins, and therefore not to live in them, for we will remain imprisoned until we have fully paid the price.

If all that I have said about sin does not instill in you a corresponding apprehension of its true nature, then I wish that, without danger, you could listen closely to the conversations about sin in hell. Stand behind the veil and hear sin being spoken of in its own language by the eldest sons of perdition. Listen to what Cain says about murdering his brother Abel, what Saul says about persecuting David and the priests of Jehovah, what Balaam and Ahithophel say about their cursed counsel and schemes, what Ahab says about oppressing Naboth, what Judas says about betrayal. Hear the expressions they use, the horrors, the screams, the groans, the distractions when even

the slightest sin is discussed. If God were to take a person's soul and transport it to the third heavens, where they could witness grace in its fullest brilliance, and then lead them through the chambers of death, as Solomon calls them, showing them visions of darkness, and let them hear all those tormented souls cry out, one about this sin, another about that sin, and see sin as it appears in hell! But there is one more aggravation of the evil and misery that sin brings upon humanity, which I have not yet mentioned. It blinds their eyes and hardens their hearts so that they do not see or lament their misery until they are in hell, and then it is too late.

But wait, does sin exceed in sinfulness to such a degree that there is no name in heaven or earth capable of grappling with it and destroying it? Is there no antidote, no healing balm in Gilead that is more powerful than its deadly nature? Surely, there is. God would never have allowed such a potent and malicious enemy to set foot in His dominion if He did not know how to conquer it. And He does so not only by punishing it in hell but by destroying it. However, it can only be vanquished by Christ. Only He can bring about its demise, and in doing so, He receives the glory. This victory is the pinnacle of His glory as the mediator and His highest title, as indicated by the name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). The apostle Paul, His chief herald, proclaims this victory with great solemnity and triumph: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55). This victory further demonstrates the sinfulness of sin, for its strength was such that, like Goliath, it defied the entire host of heaven and earth. "It was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin" (Hebrews 10:4), nor would the wealth of the world or the blood of humans be sufficient ransom. "Will the Lord be pleased with rivers of

oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?" No, for there is no proportion. Your firstborn is but the fruit of your body, while sin is the "sin of the soul" (Micah 6:7). Redeeming a soul requires a greater cost (Psalm 49:7). Even if you were to bring rivers of tears instead of rivers of oil—which, if anything could pacify God, would still be but the product of your emotions—sin is the sin of your heart. Moreover, all the righteousness we could ever achieve cannot atone for a single sin. Even if it were perfect, it would still be "dung" (Malachi 2:3) and a "menstruous cloth." You already owe it, for you are a creature, and one debt cannot cancel out another. If we were to beg all the angels who have never sinned, if they were to pool together all their resources, it would bankrupt them to pay for one sin. No, the merit of angels will not suffice, for sin is a transgression, a violation of the law, and even the smallest iota is worth more than heaven and all that it contains.

However, though sin is unconquerably sinful by all created powers, it has not surpassed the price that Christ has paid for it. The apostle compares sin and Christ's righteousness for this very reason (Romans 5:15, 20). Yes, sin abounds, and it points to the sin of Adam, which stains the nature of all humanity until the end of time. But the "gift of righteousness by Christ abounds much more," surpassing all bounds. Therefore, even though it would bankrupt all the angels, Christ's riches are unfathomable. He possesses such merit that He can pay off all your debts on the very first day of your union with Him, even if you had been a sinner for millions of years before the creation up until this day. And when that is done, there is still enough left to acquire for you more grace and glory than all the angels possess in heaven. In short, He is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25), regardless of the magnitude of their sins.

But we must come to Him, to God through Him, and accept Him as our Lord, King, Head, and Husband, as He is freely offered. We must become one with Him, and our hearts must be forever divorced from all our sins. And why not now? Are we still expecting another Christ? To allude to Naomi's words to Ruth, are there still more sons in my womb who can be your husbands? So I say, does God have any more such sons? Or is this Christ not good enough? Or are we afraid of being too soon in our happiness by being united with Him?

Yet, if we truly want Christ, without whom we are undone, "how then shall we continue in sin" (Romans 6), which is so exceedingly sinful? Not even in one sin. The apostle speaks there with a language of impossibility and inconsistency. Christ and the reign of even a single sin cannot coexist.

Indeed, we will not even accept Christ until we have seen sin, to a greater or lesser degree, in this light—as He sees it—exceedingly sinful. Naturally, we disregard it, mock it, and consider it excessive piety to adhere to a conscientious attitude towards it. However, once sin is perceived by anyone in its true colors, that person will view even the slightest sin as equivalent to hell itself. They will be like a person frightened, fearing to encounter sin in all their ways, startled at its mere presence. They will weep if sin merely sees them and if they see it within themselves and others. They will cry out, as Joseph did, "How can I do this and sin?" Then that person will desperately seek after Christ, like a condemned man seeking life, as someone who can no longer live, exclaiming, "Give me Christ, or else I die." If, upon this plea, Christ reveals Himself to them and "manifests Himself," as He promised to those who seek Him (John 14:21), their hearts will detest and abhor sin even more. They recognized its evil before, but now it takes on a new hue, making it infinitely more sinful in their eyes, for they now see every sin as guilty of Christ's

blood, tainted by it, though "covered by it." "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Titus 2:11-12). The love of Christ compels them. They think, "Shall I continue in that for which Christ died? Shall that be my life which was His death? Did He, who never knew sin, endure torment for it? And shall I be so ungrateful as to enjoy its pleasures?" No, just as David, when he was very thirsty and water from the well of Bethlehem was brought to him at the risk of men's lives, poured it out on the ground, saying, "Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this! Is this not the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?" Similarly, even when the cup of pleasures is at their very lips, they think, "It cost the blood of Christ," and pour it out on the ground. The love of Christ compels them, and the power of Christ transforms them. Kings may pardon traitors, but they cannot change their hearts. However, Christ pardons none whom He does not make new creatures. "The old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17), for He makes them friends, His favored ones, to live with and find delight in. If a person puts on Christ, and has learned Him, as the truth is in Jesus, they put off, concerning their former conduct, the old man with its deceitful lusts (Ephesians 4:21-22), and they cease from sin, that is, from the course of any known sin. These are the words of the apostle, and they will judge us. If we expect salvation from Him on any other terms, we are deceived, for Christ is "the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

# **AGGRAVATIONS OF SINNING AGAINST KNOWLEDGE**

Because when they knew God, they did not give Him the glory and gratitude He deserves. Instead, their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.—ROM. 1:21.

The apostle emphasizes two general aggravations of the Gentiles' sinfulness in these chapters. Firstly, their lack of gratitude (verse 21), in which they "despised the riches of God's goodness" (chapter 2:4). Secondly, their rebellion in sinning against knowledge, for "when they knew Him, they did not glorify Him as God." Among all the other sins mentioned, the apostle stresses that sinning against knowledge is the greatest. He presents a detailed indictment listing various sins, such as idolatry (verse 23), unnatural uncleanness (verse 26), and all forms of unrighteousness (verse 29). Both at the beginning and end of this list, he highlights the aggravation that they sinned against knowledge in all these instances. In verse 18, he begins the indictment by proclaiming God's wrath, primarily because "they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness," which was equivalent to committing all that unrighteousness in itself. And again, towards the end, when he pronounces judgment, he states that they knew the judgment of God against those who engage in such acts, yet they still committed them.

From this, it is evident that to sin against knowledge, whether by neglecting good deeds we know we should perform or committing sins we know we should avoid, is the most serious aggravation of sinfulness.

I include both sins of omission and commission, as the specific sins attributed to the Gentiles here encompass both categories. Failing to

glorify or worship God, as well as distorting His glory, constitutes sins against knowledge, just as telling a lie, stealing, perjury, murder, or drunkenness does.

Now, when I say that it is an aggravation to commit these sins, I mean that if you take any sin you consider the most heinous and examine it solely in its act, placing that act alone on one side of the scale—whether it be a sin of impurity or drunkenness—and on the other side, add this circumstance: that you knew it was a sin before and during the act itself. This alone outweighs, and even surpasses, the sin itself. Just as it is said of Herod that "he added this to all his other sins, that he imprisoned John" who exposed his relationship with Herodias, thereby making it equivalent to all his previous sins, the same applies here. In their unrighteousness, this was added—they suppressed the truth, the light of their consciences (which is like a prophet from God), in their unrighteousness (verse 18). Therefore, when Daniel wanted to convince Belshazzar that he deserved to lose his kingdom and that he could not "measure up" (Dan. 5:22), he placed something in the other scale to weigh him down and demonstrate his insignificance. In verses 21 and 22, he tells him how his father knew the God of heaven and how his knowledge resulted in seven years spent learning among wild beasts. Furthermore, he informs Belshazzar, "And you, his son, knew all this, yet you did not humble yourself." This aggravation outweighs everything else: he knew the God of heaven against whom he sinned, as well as the judgment upon his father for his pride. Additionally, Daniel tells him that he failed to glorify "this God, in whose hand is your life and all your ways."

I mention this passage, among many others, because it aligns with the theme in the text. I won't cite any more examples but will instead provide reasons and evidence to support it.

## I. First, demonstrations.

The magnitude of this type of sinning can be demonstrated in various ways. We will illustrate it by comparing it to other forms of sinning.

To sin out of mere ignorance, where that ignorance is the sole cause of the sinning—meaning that if a person had known it to be a sin, they would not have committed it—does not make the act not a sin, although it diminishes it. As mentioned in Luke 12:48, "The one who did not know his master's will and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating," even though the action itself was deserving of punishment. This is because the act warrants it. The reason behind this is that once the law has been promulgated, as it was initially given to Adam and placed within his heart as the common inheritance of mankind (even though the tablets are lost), our ignorance does not render the law ineffective. The law of nature, which encompasses everything written in Adam's heart, remains binding because it was published within him and for us. However, positive laws, as I would call them, such as the command to believe in Christ, etc., which were newly delivered, only bind where they have been promulgated. When the book of the law was found, Josiah tore his clothes, for the ordinances had not been observed, even though they had been unaware of the law for many years. Yet, because they ought to have known it, he feared that wrath would come upon all Israel due to their ignorance. Leviticus 5:17 also indicates that sacrifices were required for sins committed in ignorance, although they lessen the severity of the sin, resulting in "fewer stripes."

Certainly, if ignorance lessens the guilt, knowledge aggravates it. *Contrariorum eadem est ratio*—therefore, "the one who knows will

be beaten with many stripes." In fact, there is such a distinction that sins committed in ignorance are said to be overlooked by God. Acts 17:30 states, "The times of ignorance God overlooked." When they lacked knowledge, God did not take notice. Moreover, some leniency is granted for such sins because the person has a cloak or something to offer as a defense (as Christ said in John 15:22). However, when sins are committed against knowledge, there is no cloak. Furthermore, Christ considers a sin of ignorance to be no sin in comparison. In John, He declares, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin." There is no shelter to shield them from the stripes, nor any plea to mitigate their severity.

1. To comprehend the basis for this vast difference between sins of ignorance and sins against knowledge, consider that if a person sins (suppose the act remains the same) solely out of ignorance, there is a supposition that if they had known it was a sin, they would not have committed it, and once they become aware, they would or might repent. For instance, 1 Corinthians 2:8 states, "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Likewise, Christ mentioned that if the same works performed in Tyre, Sodom, and Gomorrah had been done in other cities, they would have repented. However, when a person knows beforehand and contemplates the sin while committing it, there is no room for such a supposition and less hope for repentance. What could possibly lead this person to repent? Is it not their knowledge? If their knowledge had no power to prevent them from sinning, it is likely that it will not have the power to bring them to repentance. By sinning, the heart becomes hardened, and the knowledge and authority of it weaken and diminish, just as all power does when it is despised and resisted, as stated in

Romans 1:21, "Their foolish hearts become darkened." Aristotle himself touched upon this notion in the third book of his Ethics, stating that if a person sins out of ignorance, they repent once they know, and if they sin out of passion, they regret their actions once the passion subsides. However, when a person sins deliberately and knowingly, it is a sign that they are entrenched in wickedness, and it is deemed as wickedness and malice. This is why those who have been enlightened by the highest form of light, except for saving grace (Hebrews 6:4-5), and those who sin willfully after having a knowledge of the truth, are considered by God as unlikely to repent. Similarly, the school of thought offers the explanation that the devils sin obstinately and cannot repent due to their complete knowledge. They possess full knowledge in its entirety, and yet they continue on their path.

2. Secondly, the vast difference in God's perspective between sins committed with knowledge and those committed in ignorance is evident in the distinct respect and regard God shows towards them in terms of the repentance He requires and accepts. This is true not only in the acts of repentance but also in the state of grace and repentance that determines whether God accepts or rejects a person.

First, when a person engages in the acts of repentance, humbles themselves for their sins, and turns away from them, God does not demand that sins committed in ignorance be individually repented of. Repenting of them in a general sense, no matter how numerous they may be, is sufficient for God's acceptance. This is implied in Psalm 19:12, "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults." This confession is enough. However, sins committed with knowledge must be specifically repented of and confessed, repeatedly if necessary, just as David was compelled to do for his

murder and adultery. Without doing so, a person will not receive pardon. Moreover, a greater difference can be observed in terms of the state of grace and repentance. A person may persist in a sin they do not know to be a sin and yet be in a state of grace, as was the case with the patriarchs who practiced polygamy and divorced their wives. However, continuing in a sin of knowledge is incompatible with grace. Unless a person wages a constant battle against it, hates it, confesses it, and forsakes it, they cannot receive mercy. Such a stance cannot coexist with a sincere and upright heart. A friend may maintain a relationship with someone they do not suspect of being an enemy to their friend and remain loyal to their friendship. However, if they become aware that the person is indeed an enemy, they must sever ties with one in order to align themselves with the other.

3. Furthermore, the vast difference between sins of knowledge and sins of ignorance is highlighted by the fact that certain sins committed with knowledge completely exclude a person from receiving mercy in the future. On the other hand, sins committed out of ignorance, which are capable of receiving mercy, may obtain it. Examples of such sins that exclude a person from mercy when committed with knowledge include persecuting the saints and blaspheming Christ. In those acts, Paul's will was just as resolute and sincere as that of those who commit the sin against the Holy Spirit. He was passionately opposed to the Church and, in these sins, acted with the same fervor as the Pharisees who committed that sin. However, Paul explains, "I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me." Although he committed the sins unknowingly, mercy was still necessary. Yet, because he did it in ignorance, there was room and opportunity for mercy that otherwise would not have existed. However, to sin "after

receiving the knowledge of the truth" shuts a person out from mercy (Hebrews 10), and "there is no longer any sacrifice for sins." This applies to sins such as those directly against the gospel, committed with knowledge. While sacrifices could atone for sins against the law, even when committed with knowledge, there is no more sacrifice for sins committed with malice against the saints and the truth of Christ. It is not the sin itself that is simply so great in the act of persecution, for Paul committed it out of ignorance. However, the sin is great because it is committed with knowledge. Such is the vast difference that knowledge and ignorance create in the guilt of the same sin.

4. In conclusion, this is the highest step on the ladder, just below the point of no return—the highest but sinning against the Holy Spirit. This undoubtedly signifies the greatest aggravation of sinning, as it brings a person to the brink, just before falling into the bottomless pit from which there is no recovery. Therefore, to "sin presumptuously" (which is the same as sinning against knowledge), as depicted in Numbers 15:26-30, is the highest step. David also acknowledges this distinction in Psalm 19:12-13. He begins by praying, "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults," which he considers sins of ignorance. Then he prays against "presumptuous sins," which, as the opposition indicates, are sins committed with knowledge. For David states, "Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression," referring to the unforgivable sin that will never be pardoned. Thus, these sins are the closest to it among all others, but not every person who commits such sins actually commits the unforgivable sin. They are on the verge of it, one step away. To commit that sin, only two things are required: understanding in the mind and malice in the heart. Malice alone is insufficient, unless there is knowledge, for the apostle would

have committed it. Thus, knowledge is the source of it—committed "after receiving the knowledge of the truth" (Hebrews 10:27-28).

II. These are the demonstrations of it; here are the reasons:

1. Firstly, because knowledge of God and His ways is the greatest mercy after saving grace. "He hath not dealt so with every nation." In what way? By "giving the knowledge of His ways." And just as this applies to nations, it applies to individuals as well. Therefore, when Christ speaks of the gift of knowledge and gives the reason why it condemns greatly, He says, "For to whom much is given, much is required." In other words, knowing His master's will is the greatest talent of all. There is great value in that. This was also recognized by the pagans. They acknowledged the foolish wisdom of moral and natural philosophy as their greatest excellence. Plato, for example, expressed gratitude to God for three things: being a man, an Athenian, and a philosopher. The apostle refers to this excellence they professed in Romans 1:22. Even Solomon, amidst all vanities, states that this is the best vanity, surpassing folly as light surpasses darkness (Ecclesiastes 2:13). Certainly, the knowledge of the law and of God as revealed to us must be much more excellent. The Jews also held their knowledge in high regard, as demonstrated by the apostle in Romans 2. They boasted in the law and their form of knowledge, approving what is excellent. All other means, including the two great books—the creation and the word—serve to increase knowledge. If everything leads to this, then knowledge is the greatest mercy of all.

2. Secondly, God has appointed knowledge as the immediate guide for individuals in all their ways, leading them to salvation and repentance. It is what the philosopher called τὸ ἡγημόνικον—the governing principle. Thus, the law in Romans 7:1-2 is compared to a husband, serving as the guide for the heart when it is written or revealed within. Just as a husband guides his wife in her youth, knowledge guides the heart. While beasts are controlled by a bit and bridle, God rules over men through knowledge. Therefore, if men continue to be wicked despite this light, they must sin greatly because there is no other restraint for them as human beings. If God deals with them as human beings, this is the only way. Hence, if this fails to produce the desired effect, nothing is expected to do so.

It is knowledge that enables men to be capable of sin, which beasts are not. Therefore, the more knowledge they possess, the more sin must necessarily be attributed to them if they are wicked. Consequently, God does not simply consider men's actions and affections but primarily focuses on their knowledge, judging them to be more or less wicked accordingly. I can illustrate this with a comparison: Just as in kingdoms, God measures and punishes their wickedness mainly by considering their guides—the rulers—and their actions, as seen in Jeremiah 5:4. Initially, God looks at the poor people, but He excuses them, saying, "They are foolish and do not know the way of the Lord." Therefore, God would have been inclined to spare the kingdom despite their sins. However, He then turns to the rulers in verse 5, saying, "I will get me to the great men, for they have known the way of the Lord." When He saw that "they had broken the bonds," He asked, "How can I pardon you for this?" The same principle applies to God's judgments concerning an individual. When God looks down upon a man and sees him engaging in loose and wicked behavior, He first examines the base affections within

him—unclean, profane, debauched, and inclined toward all wickedness. However, He says, "These base affections are foolish in themselves, but I will examine his understanding and superior faculties—the guides of these unruly affections—and see what they instruct these affections to do in order to restrain them." When He discovers that the guides themselves are enlightened and have known the way of the Lord, yet the will and affections, despite being informed with much knowledge, "break all bonds," He questions, "How can I pardon you?" How can I pardon someone who knowingly indulges in drunkenness, impurity, and the like? Thus, to sin in this manner aggravates and magnifies sin beyond measure.

Moreover, it is evident that knowledge and reason are a person's guides because even erroneous knowledge imposes an obligation, a bond, and a tie upon an individual. This can only be the case because knowledge is appointed as a person's guide. For example, if a person considers something that is inherently common and indifferent to be a sin and forbidden, although the law does not prohibit it, "to him it is unclean," even though it is not unclean in Christ according to the law of Christ (Romans 14:14). In this case, the person's knowledge and judgment of the matter have the force of law for them since it presents itself as a law from God. Reason, which God has appointed as the immediate guide, leads the will to refrain from anything that is evil and presents it as evil. This is the law of human nature in all circumstances. Therefore, if a person were to perform an action that is inherently good but considers it evil, they would sin. Conversely, if they were to perform an action that is inherently evil but consider it good, they would also sin because they go against the dictates of nature. Thus, erroneous knowledge, even though it contradicts the law, becomes a law to me—not in itself but incidentally. Therefore, if it is a sin to go against a false light of conscience, even when it

becomes evident that the commandment allows the action and is in favor of it, then how sinful is it to go against the true light of the law!

3. Furthermore, the more a person knows the law, the more it binds them to obedience. Therefore, while it is a sin to transgress the law when one is unaware of it, it is an even greater sin when one knows it. It is true that conscience and the law, when combined, form a single law, not two distinct laws. Hence, sinning against knowledge does not entail committing two distinct sins, yet knowledge of the law adds a further degree of sinfulness to it. It is like a cloth that remains the same cloth whether it is white or dyed with scarlet, but with the dye, it acquires a color that surpasses the worth of the cloth itself. Similarly, when you sin without knowledge of the law, the sin remains essentially the same as it would be if you had known it. However, knowledge dyes it, turning it into a "scarlet sin," as Isaiah describes it, greatly increasing its demerit. The reason behind this is that laws only become effective when they are promulgated and made known. Therefore, the more they are promulgated and made known, the stronger their binding force and thus the greater the guilt. Deuteronomy 12:3, 8 exemplifies this as God tightens the cords, intensifying the binding force of the law on the consciences of the Jews to whom He personally and majestically promulgated it in the beginning. This binding force is greater on them than on their children, although it still applies to the latter. Now, if all of God's laws, although unknown to us, bind us and are in force, then when we do know them or could know them, they bind even more. The clearer our knowledge of them, the greater the obligation and ensuing guilt. Moreover, when we come to know them, they are republished as a special act of mercy, considering that we have lost the knowledge of them due to the Fall.

4. Fourthly, when the known law is broken, it implies a higher degree of sin as it shows contempt for the law and the lawgiver. Thus, those who sin with knowledge are said to reproach the Lord and despise His word (Numbers 15:30). Therefore, when Saul sinned against knowledge, Samuel called it rebellion and equated it with witchcraft, even though it was a minor offense. Likewise, in Job 24:13, those who sin against light are referred to as rebels because rebellion is added to disobedience. Knowledge serves as an officer appointed to ensure the execution and fulfillment of the law, making God present in the conscience. That is why it is referred to as a witness in Romans 2:14. Consequently, when people sin against knowledge, they are said to sin in the presence of the Lord Himself. This is an act of great contempt. In Psalm 50:17, the hypocrite who sins against knowledge is said to cast the law of God behind his back, displaying a contempt that is absent in other sins.
5. Fifthly, the more knowledge a person sins against, the more their will is revealed to be inclined towards sin as sin. Now, *voluntarium est regula et mensura actionum moralium*, willingness in sinning is the standard and measure of sins. The less the will, the lesser the sin. When something is cut off, the will is less inclined towards it. On the other hand, the more the will is involved, the greater the sin. This is why the highest degree of sinning is described as sinning willingly, especially after having knowledge of it, as stated in Hebrews 10. While an ignorant person may commit an act as willingly as when Paul persecuted the church, it is not considered a sin until they have knowledge of it. However, once it is recognized as a sin, and the more clearly it is recognized as such, the will may be said to join with it as sin. Thus, the apostle says, "To him that knows to do well and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17) because,

through their knowledge, the matter is presented as sin, and they align themselves with it under that notion and understanding.

6. Sixthly, when sinning against knowledge, a person condemns themselves. However, when sinning out of ignorance alone, only the law condemns them. Therefore, as stated in Romans 2:1, when a person has knowledge in a matter they judge others for, they condemn themselves. Similarly, in Romans 14, just as self-murder is the highest degree of murder and an aggravation of it, self-condemnation must also be regarded. God considered it a significant advantage over the servant who hid his talent, declaring, "Out of your own mouth, I will condemn you, you wicked servant."

Having established the doctrine, I will now proceed to explain what it means to sin against knowledge.

Firstly, I will clarify this:

(1.) It is one thing to sin with knowledge and another to sin against knowledge.

Many sins are committed by a person with their knowledge, but they are not sins against knowledge. This distinction is important to address any concerns that may arise among the godly, who might otherwise be troubled by this doctrine due to a misunderstanding.

A regenerate person is, and must be, presumed to be guilty of more known sins than an unregenerate person. However, they commit fewer sins against knowledge than the unregenerate.

[1.] Firstly, I say that they are guilty of more known sins. They are aware of every sinful inclination that stirs within them, every improper motive, every opposition to holiness, every negligence of duty, and every reluctance towards spiritual duties. When a person is regenerated, they begin to see and know more of their own evil than ever before. They recognize, as the apostle describes himself in Romans 7:8, "all manner of concupiscence." The holier a person becomes, the more they discern and understand their sins. The apostle confesses in Romans 7:18, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." And in verse 21, he declares, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." And in verse 23, he acknowledges, "I see another law in my members." He perceives and experiences all these things daily within himself, and the more he grows in holiness, the more he becomes aware of them. As a person is illuminated by the light of God's Spirit, they see their lusts rising and stirring in their hearts like specks in the sunlight or sparks from a furnace, which they would not have seen otherwise. The clearer the beam of sunlight that enters the heart, the more they will perceive them.

[2.] However, I add, in the second place, that they sin less against knowledge. For true sins against knowledge occur when a person considers the fulfillment of a lust, the performance of an action, or the neglect of a duty, among other things, and deliberates upon them. They weigh the motives against the sin or in favor of the duty. Yet, despite this knowledge and opposition presented by knowledge, they still commit the sin, yield to it, nurture the lust, or neglect the duty. In such cases, they not only sin with knowledge but also sin against knowledge because knowledge interposes, interrupts, and opposes them. However, in the aforementioned shortcomings in duty and stirrings of lust in the regenerate, the situation is different. These sins are indeed committed with knowledge but not against it.

It is beyond the power of knowledge to prevent them because *motus primi non cadunt sub libertatem* (the first movements do not fall under the domain of liberty). Although such sins may arise repeatedly, a good heart does not allow them to pass unnoticed and uncontrolled. Therefore, let not troubled souls misunderstand me, thinking that I am referring to all sins known to be sins throughout this discourse. I specifically refer to sins committed against knowledge, that is, when knowledge examines a sin before or during its commission, brings it under the scrutiny of the law, argues against it, condemns it, and yet the person approves and consents to it. When a duty and a sin are presented before knowledge, akin to Barabbas and Christ before Pilate, and knowledge repeatedly tells you that such a sin is grave and ought to be crucified, yet you cry out, "Let it go!" Similarly, when knowledge repeatedly tells you that a duty should be embraced, yet you neglect it and commit the sin, choosing Barabbas over Christ, these are sins against knowledge. Such sins against knowledge disrupt a person's peace, and the more premeditation there was, the more the peace is shattered.

(2.) The second distinction is that people sin against knowledge either directly or collaterally, objectively or circumstantially.

[1.] Firstly, directly sinning against knowledge itself occurs when knowledge becomes the object that individuals abuse or fight against. Knowledge becomes the target, the endpoint, the mark they aim at, and this is to sin directly against knowledge itself.

[2.] Secondly, collateral sinning occurs when knowledge is merely a circumstance in our sins. In this case, the pleasure of a known sin is the desired objective, and knowledge stands in the way, yet the sin is committed despite knowing it. Here, knowledge is indeed sinned against but collaterally, as a bystander or mere circumstance that is

incidentally affected. It is like someone stepping in to intervene in a fight and getting hit. The quarrelsome Sodomites and Lot are both mentioned in this chapter and are therefore fitting examples for this discussion.

The collateral kind of sinning against knowledge is mentioned in verse 21, where it says, "They knew God, yet they glorified him not." Here, knowledge is regarded as a mere circumstance in their sinning; they sinned against it collaterally. But in verse 28, the other kind of sinning directly against knowledge is mentioned: "They liked not to retain God in their knowledge." This means they not only loved the sins they knew to be sins, but they also did not love the knowledge itself. Since both types are clearly exemplified, we will discuss both in more detail.

Now, there are many sins directly against knowledge itself. I will categorize the main types into two branches:

Firstly, regarding ourselves.

Secondly, regarding others.

(1.) Firstly, in regard to ourselves, there are five ways in which we can sin against knowledge itself.

[1.] Firstly, when we abuse knowledge to aid us in sinning. For example, plotting and contriving a sin, as Judas plotted to betray his Master when it was convenient for him. The text in Mark 14:11 states that he would do it wisely. Similarly, those who sought to trap Christ with cunning questions sinned, as did those who plotted against the righteous in Psalm 37:12.

[2.] Secondly, when people use their wisdom to tell crafty lies to cover up a sin. Plato said that people with knowledge are more powerful and wiser in lying, whereas fools, although they may intend to lie, often unintentionally speak the truth.

[3.] Moreover, when individuals abuse moral knowledge, which, as Aristotle says, is least prone to be (and should be) abused. They make a show of good pretences to conceal and dissemble their sins, not only by finding clever artifices to cover them up, as David did in the matter of Uriah, saying, "The chances of war fall to all alike," but also when they shamelessly employ religious pretexts, as the devil sometimes does. Saul, for instance, pretends to have done the will of the Lord when Samuel confronts him, but when Samuel mentions the cattle, Saul claims they are for sacrifice, even though God had explicitly commanded their slaughter. This deceptive maneuver cost Saul his kingdom, and Samuel pronounced him a rebel. Rebellion is a sin against knowledge, and Saul knew it. Jezebel also tried to justify the stoning of Naboth with a solemn fast. Judas, too, fished for money using a charitable pretense, saying, "This could have been sold and given to the poor." In sins against knowledge, the mind often seeks a pretext, and this provokes God more than the sin itself because it amounts to mocking Him. Just as people cannot tolerate deceit, much less can the all-knowing God be mocked. Convincing such individuals is challenging. David needed to be confronted harshly before confessing when he had a deceitful plan. People employ such deceits primarily in the case of sinning against conscience, for otherwise there would be no need, and they would surely plead ignorance, as Abimelech did.\*

Secondly, when people neglect the acquisition and pursuit of knowledge, which could prevent and hinder them from sinning and make them proficient in their duties. This is tantamount to sinning

against knowledge, even though the sins are committed out of ignorance. However, since that ignorance is a result of their own negligence, it is all the same. It is similar to what the apostle says about the Hebrews in Hebrews 5:12, that given the time they had to learn, they should have become teachers, yet they still needed to be taught the basics again. If a person had an apprentice who, due to negligence and lack of attention to observing and learning from daily experiences in their trade, could have acquired significant knowledge in their trade, which would have saved their master much trouble, but instead, they have caused the master losses and spoiled the work, such careless and ignorant behavior would rightly be corrected by the master, and all the waste and loss would be charged to the apprentice because they could have done better if they had known how. Even those who thought ignorance itself was not a sin (in which they erred) believed that neglecting knowledge was a grave sin. They believed it would not excuse sins but rather aggravate them. Therefore, we see that these Gentiles will be held accountable not only for the actual knowledge they attained and sinned against, but also for the knowledge they could have obtained from observing the creation. The apostle introduces this concept in verse 20, where he mentions that God's power is clearly seen in the created world, and yet these individuals neglected to understand and learn from it. God will reckon this neglect as additional knowledge they could have acquired and will use it to amplify their sins.

Thirdly, and even worse, is when people refuse knowledge so that they can sin more freely, stopping their ears to avoid being persuaded. For example, they may be reluctant or afraid to read a book that would expose or could expose the truth to them, submission to which would be detrimental to their desires. This is done with the intention of pleading ignorance of their sin. Similarly, those who do not assent to the truth when it confronts them strongly

but seek to evade it. In 1 Corinthians 14:37, when the apostle had clearly revealed the truth in the disputed matters, such that anyone who was spiritual or not entirely blind could see and acknowledge the truth, he concluded his discourse by stating, "If any is ignorant, let him be ignorant." This means that their ignorance is willful and intentional. It is like what is said elsewhere in Revelation 22:11, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still." It means that those who choose to be unjust and refuse to turn away will continue down that path. This is a great sin, as God gives up on such individuals. God will make efforts to teach and bear with someone who is merely negligent or lacks understanding, as Christ did with His disciples. However, if a person is willfully ignorant, God will leave them in their ignorance, and yet He will hold them accountable as if all their sins were committed against knowledge because they refused to know.

[4.] The fourth way is hating the light and seeking to extinguish it. It is even worse when people hate the Word and its ministers, the examples set by God's people, and the light they carry with them, shining as lights in a crooked generation (Philippians 2:15). Yet, they hate these sources of light, just as thieves hate a torch in the night, and they recoil from the light like bats. This is what the Jews did, as mentioned in John 3:20. Christ declares that this is the greatest condemning sin of all. Similarly, the Gentiles put Socrates to death for reproving them. Furthermore, individuals sin when they strive to extinguish the light in their own consciences and "like not to retain God in their knowledge" (verse 28). They pursue the art of forgetfulness, blowing out the candle and drawing the curtains, so they can freely and securely continue in sin. Moreover, those who have had a clear conviction that they should be strict in their conduct and sanctify the Lord's day and engage in private prayer, but have lost that light and believe they no longer need to be so strict, sin against their knowledge and are the worst of sinners. Aristotle

himself considered this state a malignant one, wherein the sparks of light are extinguished or hated. When someone's light is lost and darkness takes its place due to sinning, as Christ says, "How great is that darkness!" When good laws are not only not enacted and embraced but also repealed (as Aristotle uses the analogy to distinguish between an incontinent person and a wicked person), it is a high form of sinning. Thus, of these Gentiles, it is said, "Their foolish heart was darkened"; they had extinguished some of the light given to them. Just as some drink away their wits, some sin away their consciences, gradually eroding the remaining spark of natural light. Furthermore, in verse 10, it is mentioned that they corrupt themselves in what they know naturally.

[5.] Fifthly, people sin against knowledge in an even worse manner when they hold opinions that contradict their knowledge. Many are said to do so. In 1 Timothy 4:2, it is foretold that they would "speak lies in hypocrisy" and invent lies that have a pretense of holiness, which they know to be false. Otherwise, they would not be said to "speak lies in hypocrisy." They do it to preserve their honor and greatness, which would be undermined if their doctrine were proven false. Although many are given over to believe their lies (2 Thessalonians 2:11) as a punishment for not loving the truth, there are others who know that they are lies and yet present them as truths. These are individuals who tailor their opinions to fit the times, to please those in power, or to maintain a certain image. They stubbornly cling to an error they have introduced, even if removing that one tile would cause the entire house to collapse. These are the two causes identified for distorting the truth in 1 Timothy 6:4-5: pride and covetousness. They assume that gain is godliness and shape their religion accordingly. They become "hired guns" who write or speak anything that will bring them profit and advancement.

(2.) Secondly, people sin against knowledge in regard to others.

[1.] First, by concealing it. The apostle does indeed say in a particular case, "Do you have knowledge? Keep it to yourself." This refers to opinions or practices concerning indifferent matters that could scandalize the weak. However, if you have knowledge that can edify your brother, you ought to share it. Socrates, who knew that there was only one God, said in his defense of his life that if they offered him life on the condition that he kept that truth to himself and did not teach it to others, he would not accept life under such conditions. I recall that he expressed his resolution in words very similar to the words used by the apostles in Acts 4:20: "Whether it is better to obey God than men, you be the judge." And Christ says, "We cannot but teach the things we have heard and seen." Knowledge is something that boils within a person, seeking an outlet, and cannot be contained. It is light, and light is meant to be displayed and provide illumination. Christ argues from an apparent absurdity, questioning why someone would hide a light under a bushel when it can illuminate the entire house. If you have knowledge of God and His ways, you cannot help but speak about it (assuming you also have a good heart), sharing it with your family, your spouse, and so on. God assumed that Abraham would teach his children what he knew, and the same disposition is found in all the children of Abraham.

[2.] Secondly, when people strive to suppress knowledge. Like the Pharisees, who kept the keys of knowledge in their hands and refused to open its treasures themselves or allow others to do so. In Acts 4:16, they admitted that a great miracle had been done by the apostles but declared, "That it spread no further, let us threaten them, and charge them, that they speak no more in his name." They acted against their consciences, as they themselves acknowledged, "We cannot deny it." It was evident that it was the truth, and if they

could deny it, they would. Similarly, when masters prevent their servants from accessing sources of knowledge, they are guilty of this sin.

[3.] Thirdly, when we try to make others sin against their consciences. The Pharisees cast out the blind man when he would not say what they wanted him to say. They wanted him to declare that Christ was a sinner, even though, based on the little light he had, he judged it evident that a sinner could not perform such a miraculous deed as had never been done before. Jezebel made the judges and witnesses sin against their consciences when accusing Naboth. Similarly, some Gentiles who wanted to maintain a relationship with the Jews tried to compel the Galatians to be circumcised (Galatians 6:12). Although they knew that circumcision was to be abolished, they used coercive arguments based on avoiding persecution rather than evidence of the truth or convincing reasons. Therefore, it is said that they "constrained them." The persuaders may have gloried in strengthening their cause and position, but they gained little credibility for their cause. Just as their arguments appealed to fleshly desires, the yielding of the Galatians was driven by the flesh as well. Therefore, Paul says, "They glory in your flesh" and weakness. It is like when the papists urged Cranmer to recant, using threats and promises rather than arguments. This is the greatest cruelty in the world: causing someone to murder themselves and stab their conscience. Offending a weak conscience is a sin, even if done passively, by doing something in front of them that their conscience is against. But it is much worse to make someone wound their own conscience and perform an act that their conscience opposes. For example, if you are a master and have a servant who, due to conscience, refuses to lie for your benefit in your shop or who will not engage in unlawful business on the Sabbath day, and you strike and whip them, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall."

How dare you strike them and cause them to commit an act for which God will punish them more severely? Show mercy to those under your authority, enlighten their consciences, do not oppress them, as you may end up breaking the locks.

2. Now, regarding sins committed collaterally or incidentally against knowledge (to use that expression), they occur either when specific acts of sin are committed or duties are neglected against one's own knowledge, and in this way, even the saints can and often do sin against knowledge. Or,

Secondly, in regard to a known state of sin and persistent impenitence, when individuals continue and persist in such a state despite their conscience convicting them of their condition.

(1.) For the first case, because there are countless particular acts of sin committed against knowledge, and it would be endless to provide specific instances, I will not dwell on that. However, I will briefly mention a distinction regarding these acts, which may be useful: some acts of sin against knowledge are merely transient, meaning they occur and end at once. Although the guilt of such acts is eternal, the extent of the act is completed with its commission and does not extend further. Examples include taking a vain oath or breaking the Sabbath. These acts cannot be repealed, although they can be repented of. On the other hand, there are acts that, although outwardly and professedly done only once, have an ongoing and continuous existence. Until a person repents of these acts, they can be said to continually renew and be guilty of them every day, maintaining them as habitual actions. It is like laws that, once made, continue to govern as long as they are in force and not repealed. The same applies to certain sins. For instance, if a person unjustly takes goods from their neighbor, the act is committed only once, but until

they restore what was taken, they can be said to continue stealing, doing so habitually every day and every hour. Similarly, if a person has subscribed to falsehood or publicly recanted the truth, even if those sinful acts were done only once, they continue in that state until a retraction is made, and thus, they are daily guilty of those acts. If a person marries someone they are prohibited from marrying, as Herod did, the act of entering into that sinful union may be quickly done, but until a divorce takes place, they continue to live in ongoing sin. Acts of this latter kind (persistent sins against knowledge) are the most dangerous to commit because continuing in them, even if done only once, jeopardizes a person's spiritual condition. Therefore, when individuals come to repentance, they often face the greatest snare, trouble, and difficulty in extricating themselves from such sins through genuine and proper repentance.

Regarding the first branch of this distinction, namely, particular acts committed against knowledge, besides the aforementioned brief distinction, I will later provide several aggravations and guidelines by which to measure the sinful nature of such acts. However, in the meantime, let us focus on the second branch of this distinction.

(2.) Secondly, those who persist in a state of sin and impenitence, knowing it to be damnable, sin against knowledge. For example, Pharaoh (Exodus 9:27) confessed that he and his people were wicked, yet he dangerously hardened himself in sin. There are three apparent types of individuals who can be convicted of sinning in this way.

First, those who refrain from professing Christ and His ways, and from fearing His name, out of shame, fear of others, or the desire for worldly gains. They are convinced that these are God's ways and should be professed by them. I do not claim that everyone who does

not come to profess Christ or join His people is sinning against knowledge, as many are ignorant or mistaken. However, when individuals are convinced of the truth and necessity of professing and confessing Christ "unto salvation" (as the apostle says in Romans 10) and yet, out of fear or shame, choose to remain on the other side, withdrawing completely, they are persisting in a state of impenitence against knowledge. If we consider all these factors together, it becomes evident. Firstly, they are convinced that this is the truth and that salvation and the power of religion can only be found in these ways and individuals. Secondly, they acknowledge that these ways are to be practiced and professed. Yet, thirdly, out of shame, etc., they continue to distance themselves and go in the opposite direction. They must be aware that they are persisting in a state of impenitence against knowledge. Many of the Pharisees fell into this category, and their sin was great. They believed and were convinced that Christ was the Messiah, and therefore should have been confessed, followed, and adhered to. Yet, in John 12:42, it is said that although they believed in Him, they did not dare to confess Him for fear of the Jews and the Pharisees, afraid of being expelled from the synagogues. At the end times, Christ will not need to separate them from the rest as He will do with the sheep and goats since they willingly remain among those they know to be goats. They reject the company, fold, food, and marks of the sheep, which they know to be genuine. They may try to make amends and appear friendly to the saints, claiming their hearts are with them, but they will be ranked on Judgment Day as they ranked themselves here, with the "workers of iniquity." The psalmist speaks of such individuals in Psalm 125:5, "As for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them away with evildoers."

Another group that sins in this way includes those who know the terms and conditions of salvation and that they must surrender

everything for Christ, yet refuse to pay the price. They continue in a bad state against knowledge and consider themselves unworthy of eternal life. For example, the young man in the Gospel was told to sell all his possessions, and he knew that was the condition. He understood that heaven was worth it and was convinced of the truth that he should do so. However, he went away sorrowful. If he didn't know that he would be left without happiness, he would not have felt sorrow. But he knew that the deal of salvation was not struck, and he understood what it entailed. Yet, he remained in his former condition, choosing to enjoy his possessions instead. This man persisted in a state of impenitence against knowledge.

Secondly, those who, on similar grounds, postpone their repentance are also persisting in a bad state and must be aware of it. By promising to repent later and making plans to do so after indulging a little longer in sin, they admit that a work of grace is necessary for them to be in a state of grace. Otherwise, they would not promise to repent in the future because they would believe they could be saved without such a work. As long as they refrain from actively seeking it, they judge themselves to be in a bad state at present. When people know the curses that their present state deserves and still say, as in Deuteronomy 29:19, "I will go on in the stubbornness of my heart; I shall have peace," they commit a grave sin. God's wrath "smokes against that man," and He declares that He will not show mercy to him in that place.

Thirdly, fallen and hypocritical believers also persist in a bad state against knowledge. Some have fallen from practicing and professing what they once considered necessary for salvation, while others continue to profess their faith hypocritically. Both groups go against knowledge. Some who have escaped the corruption of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ have returned to their former

sinful ways. Some of these individuals are honest and admit their fall, acknowledging their miserable present condition, yet they persist in it. They should be pitied, but they are in a dangerous state. Saul, even after falling away, displayed some honesty for a while and asked Samuel to pray to God for him. He even admitted to David that David was more righteous than he. Yet, he continued in his sinful ways and, according to some, eventually sinned against the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, there are those who have abandoned all inward, powerful, and sincere acts of faith that they once practiced and lost all conscience of sinning, but they maintain their external profession, knowing it to be superficial. They, above all others, persist against knowledge. In Revelation 22:15, they are described as "liars," not only in their words but in their actions. A lie is a sin that goes directly against knowledge, violating both factual and legal knowledge. In this case, it involves: [1.] Professing to be something they know they are not, and [2.] Refusing to strive for the state they know they ought to attain for salvation. Many find themselves in this condition, convinced of the power of religion and publicly professing it, but their inward zeal has diminished, their conscience of sin has vanished. Yet, for the sake of appearances, they still fly their flag high, just like merchants who are bankrupt but maintain an illusion of prosperity, even going so far as to acquire more properties. Judas was such a professor. He started sincerely, believing he would go to heaven and earnestly engaged in good works at first. However, as mentioned in 2 Peter 2:18, he eventually became a blatant hypocrite, pretending to care for the poor while loving money, and betrayed his Master suddenly, catching even his fellow disciples by surprise. The outcome for such individuals, as stated in that aforementioned passage, is said to be "worse than their beginning." Because they sin so highly against knowledge, their punishment becomes the standard

for all other wicked individuals. Similar to how other sinners will "have their portion with hypocrites," the punishment of the wicked angels serves as a measure for human beings: "Go, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Therefore, among people, the punishment of such gross hypocrites becomes the rule and the chief form of torment that sinners will experience.

Application: Now, let me speak a word to all those who persist in a state of impenitence against knowledge. This is a severe form of sin, the most desperate of all, demonstrating a hardened heart and a "despising of the riches of God's kindness." In Romans 2:4, it is considered a sign and effect of an exceedingly hardened heart, treasuring up wrath, to continue in sin without considering that "God's kindness is intended to lead to repentance." Consequently, when you know and understand that you are in an impenitent state and have many prompts leading you towards repentance, your heart can be deemed hard. When an individual commits a particular act against knowledge, they may still believe their state could be good, thinking that they won't completely lose God or risk losing Him. They may steal away for a moment of pleasure when their spirit is empty of communion with Him. However, when someone knows their state is bad and that they are "without God in the world" but continues on that path, they are effectively rejecting the Lord and professing that they do not care for Him or the communion that can be experienced through Him, just as Esau did with his birthright.

David, although he despised the Lord, did not completely abandon Him like Saul did. Saul willingly risked losing God, fully aware of his wicked state. On the other hand, when David sinned, he believed that God's eternal favor would still endure, even if he temporarily lost the sense of it.

However, when someone continues in a state of sin, they risk losing God's eternal love and disregard it, fully aware of their actions. When a person knows that they are already condemned for being unrepentant, and that their eternal destiny depends on fulfilling the duties of repentance, and that the guilt of all their sins will be held against them, and yet they persist, it goes beyond committing a single act against knowledge. They think that by committing that one sin, they only incur the guilt associated with it, not realizing that it encompasses all sins and deserves condemnation. In this way, people reveal their desperation.

Next, I will discuss the rules by which you can measure and evaluate sinning against knowledge in specific acts of sinning. There are three rules before committing the sin, and three rules during the act itself, which I will explain under a separate heading.

(1.) First, before committing the sin:

[1.] The first rule is that the more you knew and considered the consequences and outcomes of the sin you committed, the greater your sin against conscience. For instance, in Romans 1:32, the apostle states that you know those who commit such things are deserving of death. In other words, you are fully aware that the consequence is hell and damnation, and yet you still commit the sin. Even when the fires of hell are right before your eyes, you persist. In this case, you are said to choose death and love it, as stated in Proverbs 8:36. Similarly, when you, as a professing believer, consider beforehand that a certain sin will bring scandal, ruin, and hinder your service, distancing you from the hearts of good people, and yet you proceed with it, you are acting against knowledge. Jeremiah repeatedly warned a foolish king, as recorded in Jeremiah 38:17–19, that if he surrendered to the king of Babylon, his life, city, and

kingdom would be saved, and he would continue to live there. However, if he resisted, he would not escape, as Jeremiah told him in verse 23. The king was well aware of this message but, being influenced by his nobles, he refused to heed the advice. Likewise, Judas knew the consequences of betraying Christ. Jesus had repeatedly said, "Woe to the man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed," yet Judas carried on with his plan.

[2.] The second rule is that the more you entertained thoughts, debates, and motives against committing the sin, the more serious and heinous it becomes. How many times did mercy remind you that if you expect any hope or part in it, you should not commit such an evil? How many times did the thought arise, "Should I do this and sin against God?" Did any Scripture testify against you at that critical moment? Did God bring to mind past mercies to persuade you or remind you of future mercies on which you rely? These internal debates should leave an impression on your heart, countermanding the impulses of sin. When you commit the sin despite these debates and opposing motives, it is a significant act against knowledge and extremely grave. Therefore, the Pharisees, as mentioned in Luke 7:30, are said to have rejected the counsel of God either "in themselves" because they were aware of it and considered it, yet rejected it, or "against themselves" because it led to their destruction.

[3.] The third rule is that the more confirmation and testimonies against the sin a person has received, the greater the sin against knowledge. When someone has observed a multitude of witnesses speaking out against a particular sin, and yet they commit it and persist, it is even more dreadful. It is one thing to go against a solitary witness, the voice of natural conscience alone, but when that witness is reinforced by the written Word, which the person has read and encountered passages condemning such practices, and they have

heard sermons reproofing that sin, as well as private conversations warning against it, and they have witnessed numerous examples of others committing similar sins and facing punishment, perhaps even experiencing it themselves, to go against all these is exceedingly heinous. Sometimes God orchestrates circumstances in such a way that a sin becomes even more significant due to forewarnings. For example, Judas committed a great sin because he knew beforehand that Christ was the Savior of the world. He knew this from the miracles he had witnessed, Christ's gracious words and interactions, and his own profession of following Him. He also had the written word against it: "You shall not murder the innocent." Furthermore, God intensified his sin to the highest degree by arranging for Christ to tell him of his betrayal just before it happened, pronouncing a woe upon him in Luke 22:22 and saying in Mark 14:21, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Even the disciples were saddened by Christ's words when He suspected one of them, expressing their abhorrence and detestation of such an act. There was a jury of eleven men, witnesses against him. Judas himself inquired if it was him, and Christ gave him a sop, saying, "You have said it; do what you are going to do quickly." These circumstances would have caused his conscience to recognize that Christ was God, searching and knowing his heart, yet Judas went out immediately and carried out his plan. He sinned against all odds, and these circumstances greatly aggravated his sin.

Another clear example of this is Pilate, whom God tried to deter in various ways from condemning Christ. When examined before the Pharisees, Pilate found no fault in Him, as stated in Luke 23:14, regarding the accusations brought against Jesus. Yet, to appease their malice, he unjustly had Him scourged, as mentioned in verse 16. Furthermore, when he sent Jesus to Herod in an attempt to rid himself of the matter, even Herod found nothing worthy of death in

Him, according to verse 15. This should have further convinced Pilate of Christ's innocence. Moreover, to intensify the act, the life of a notorious murderer, Barabbas, was placed in the balance against Christ's. When the people chose Barabbas, Pilate asked, "What evil has he done?" (verse 22). Pilate clearly knew and considered that Jesus was handed over due to envy. Furthermore, when he was about to pass sentence, God cautioned him through his wife, who had been warned in a dream. She sent him word that she had "suffered much because of Him" that night and advised him to have nothing to do with "that just man" (Matthew 27:19). Pilate even washed his hands when he condemned Jesus. This pattern repeats itself in many sinful situations when God repeatedly and in various ways tries to dissuade people, intervening in their paths. He reproves them, as He did with Balaam through a donkey (2 Peter 2:16). Similarly, through silent passages of providence and His Spirit standing in their way, with threatening judgments at hand, just as the angel brandished a drawn sword before Balaam, God tries to hinder them. Yet, they persist, which is truly fearful.

(2.) There are three rules also by which the sinfulness of sin, particularly in its opposition to knowledge, can be measured. These rules can be observed in the very act of sinning.

[1.] Firstly, the less passion, inward violence, or temptation there is in a sin committed against knowledge, the greater the sin against knowledge becomes. When there is less passion involved, the knowledge becomes clearer, as passion or temptation is like a mist. Therefore, to sin when one is not in a state of passion is like stumbling in broad daylight. Just as drunkenness impairs reason, so does passion, which is a temporary form of drunkenness, cloud and obscure one's knowledge. Thus, Aristotle compares the knowledge of an incontinent person to the knowledge of a drunkard. For example,

when Peter denied his Master, he had received prior warning, so it was a sin against knowledge. It involved lying, swearing, and perjury, which are sins directly contrary to knowledge. However, he was caught off guard and faced with unexpected circumstances. He was in the judgment hall where his Master, standing before him, was being accused for His life. Peter believed that he, too, could be brought to the judgment seat if his discipleship was discovered. In such a state of passion, his soul was disturbed, and reason had little time to regain control. Therefore, although it was a sin against knowledge, it was less severe because knowledge did not have its full effect on his heart. On the other hand, Judas, in betraying his Master, not only received prior warning but was not tempted to do it. He acted of his own accord, made the offer to the Pharisees, and carefully planned it. He had his wits about him and had ample time to contemplate his actions. Therefore, besides the heinousness of the act itself, it was also a greater sin against knowledge. Similarly, when David intended to kill Uriah, he did so in a state of calmness and composure. When he committed adultery with Bathsheba, he was intoxicated, but when he made Uriah drunk, he was sober. He proceeded quietly and deliberately. In this case, we find David criticized specifically for the matter involving Uriah, rather than the incident with Bathsheba.

[2.] Secondly, the more sorrow, reluctance, and regret there is in one's mind against a sin, the stronger and quicker the knowledge opposing it becomes, and thus the greater the sin against knowledge. This opposition and displeasure arise from the strength and intense stirring of conscience, resisting and opposing the sin. It stems from a greater and deeper understanding of the sin's evil in the very act of committing it. Although this reluctance is a better sign of a person's condition than having no remorse at all, as is the case with those who are "past feeling" and commit sin greedily, indicating a worse state

and a greater incapability of repentance, the sin itself becomes more heinous because it reveals a strong, active, and awakening knowledge. Herod's sin provides a clear example of this. In Mark 6:26, it is said that he was "exceedingly sorrowful." This level of sorrow could only have arisen if he had a deep understanding of how great a sin it was to behead John, whom he knew to be "a just and holy man" and whom he esteemed highly. Herod was greatly influenced by John's ministry. He realized that he was sacrificing John to satisfy the wicked woman's malice. In such a case, the sin becomes even more significant because conscience stirs up a contrary passionate response against the temptation. Therefore, to commit the sin in defiance of such opposition, breaking through the barriers that could have resisted it, demonstrates a severe violation of knowledge. Such a sin greatly undermines conscience.

[3.] Thirdly, on the contrary, the more hardness of heart and lack of tenderness there is in committing a sin that one knows to be a sin, the greater the sin against knowledge. Hardness of heart in sinning is the consequence of having previously sinned greatly against knowledge. Just as the light of the sun hardens clay, the beams of knowledge and conscience, when they illuminate a person's heart, often harden it, making it unfeeling in the end. Therefore, in 1 Timothy 4:2, sinning against knowledge is identified as the cause of a seared conscience. They "speak lies in hypocrisy," knowingly uttering falsehoods that damn not only themselves but also others who believe them (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). Consequently, it is not surprising that their consciences become seared with a burning and shining light. It is not a cold iron that sears their consciences and renders them insensitive, but a hot iron—a burning and shining light. Once this light has taken root in their consciences but is rejected, their hearts begin to harden and become seared. Knowledge makes sins and their apprehension familiar, reducing their terror and dread

over time, just as bears and lions become accustomed to their keepers through familiarity. Judas had a hardened heart when he came to betray his Master. Surely, his conscience troubled him more initially for pilfering from the money bag than it did later for the act of murder. He could not have developed such a hardened heart without having possessed significant knowledge. His heart was callous when confronted face to face, and he asked, like the others, "Is it I?" Even when Christ cursed him in His presence and the other disciples were repulsed by his plan, Judas, having lived under blessed and glorious means, sinned for a long time against knowledge. All of this should have startled him and shaken his resolve, but he proceeded as if it were of no consequence, although his conscience was awakened too late. When a person is less troubled by a gross lie committed now than by a previous minor sin, which they cannot tolerate as well as the latter, or when they used to be disturbed by neglecting prayer but can now go a week without it without feeling any remorse, it indicates that their knowledge has hardened them.

III. Having provided these rules by which you can evaluate the sinfulness of particular acts, I will now proceed to other ways of aggravation based on the kind of knowledge against which one sins. To sin against a particular kind of knowledge is both highly heinous and dangerous. There are five rules derived from the different qualities of knowledge and the light that individuals sin against. The greater, stronger, and more effective the light and knowledge are, the greater the sin of knowledge that one commits. I will use this as a third general point to clarify this doctrine. All five rules are applicable to specific acts against knowledge, as well as to a state of impenitence against knowledge and other particulars mentioned.

1. Firstly, to sin against the innate light of nature—that is, to commit sins that one would know to be wrong even without the knowledge of the Word—is an elevated form of sinning. The apostle speaks of such sins in Jude 10, stating that those who commit them "know naturally, in these they corrupt themselves, as brute beasts." They treat all actions without any distinction, just like animals, without even recognizing what nature teaches them. Therefore, these sins are similar to the punishments inflicted on other sins committed against the light of nature, although those sins were also against nature. For example, the apostle mentions three specific instances of unnatural uncleanness in this chapter. First, self-uncleanness (verse 24), which refers to defiling oneself alone. Beza and Theophilact understand it this way, making it the first degree of unnatural uncleanness. This type of uncleanness is unnatural because it destroys what nature has provided for propagation. Second, the unclean love between men, described as "burning in lust with men" (verse 27), even if it does not involve the act of sodomy but includes unseemly behavior. The apostle emphasizes that this perverts the purpose and use of nature and is therefore a sin against nature by abandoning the natural use of women. "I am ashamed to speak of such things as are done in secret," he adds. These sins, ranked by the apostle, are even more unnatural than others, as they are the punishments for sins committed against the light of nature. Disobedience to parents, stubbornness, and lack of natural affection are further examples (verse 30-31). Such behavior goes against the instinct of nature. Ungratefulness and repaying good with evil are contrary to a common principle present in the minds of all people. People naturally object to cruelty and tyranny, as one person preying upon and tyrannizing over another is akin to how fish treat smaller fish, as complained by Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:14).

Covenant-breaking, lying, perjury, inventing evil, breaking truces, and trampling upon treaties are all sins against nature and natural light. Lying is against a double light, both moral and legal. It tells us that such an act ought not to be done, both in terms of the law and in terms of fact, as we affirm something that is not true, and our knowledge contradicts it, even if there is no specific law prohibiting it. Therefore, lying and malice are the two primary lusts of the devil, one corrupting the understanding and the other corrupting the will (John 8:44).

[2.] Secondly, to sin against the light of one's upbringing, against the knowledge acquired during youth, is an aggravation and a significant one. There is a blessed mother's catechism preserved in the sacred scriptures, taught by Bathsheba to Solomon when he was a child. It is found in Proverbs 31, where she advises him early on not to give his strength to women. She forewarned him about that particular sin, which tends to affect kings the most, given their access to all pleasures. She specifically warned him that it destroys kings. Likewise, he was advised not to drink wine. Solomon's transgressions were greatly aggravated by this, as we see in Ecclesiastes chapter 2. He was most guilty of the excessive love of women and the misuse of wine, but he had not been brought up in such a manner. His good mother had not instructed him in this way. Furthermore, when God wished to emphasize His people's sin to them, He reminded them of their education in the wilderness during their youth. Jeremiah 2:2 says, "Go and cry to them, I remember the kindness and towardliness of thy youth." God reminded them of their tutelage under Moses and their eagerness during that time. Similarly, in Hosea 12, God says, "When he was a child, I loved him." At that time, God received their firstfruits, and this is brought up to intensify their backsliding. Therefore, the apostle urges Timothy to persevere in grace and goodness by reminding him that he had known the

Scriptures from childhood. Consequently, for him to fall would be even more heinous. The reason behind this is that the light instilled during childhood is the first light—a pristine light, so to speak—that God, in His great mercy, bestowed upon the mind before it could be tainted with corrupt principles from the world. This light was given to keep the mind pure and chaste. It was placed there when the mind was most pliable and tender, making it more receptive to profound impressions. Generally, the light acquired during this time influences individuals for the rest of their lives, whether for good or evil. It predetermines their thoughts and biases, even if they acquire more knowledge and reasoning later in life. The limited light received during their upbringing, if it conflicts with subsequent principles, biases and fixes their minds in that direction. This is often observed in religious opinions. The initial light received during childhood cannot be easily countered through debate. The same holds true for one's actions and behavior. "Train up a child in his way, and he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Therefore, to sin against this light, to extinguish its radiance, defile it, or erase its impressions, is utterly wicked.

Many of you young scholars have received wise guidance, similar to that of Bathsheba, who instructed you not to indulge in excessive drinking or promiscuity but to engage in private prayer and to fear and love God. And when you come here, you also have good tutors who teach you to pray, ministers who impart blessed truths to you, which you would think would prevent you from straying. Yet, you do.

Consider how grievous this is. If it is considered an excuse for many people that their sinful behavior aligns with their upbringing, that they never knew or saw better, as you say of many papists, then it must be an even greater aggravation of sinfulness to know better and still rebel against that knowledge.

Thirdly, the more real and experiential the light is that people sin against, the greater the sin. This refers to when individuals learn from the examples of godly people they have lived among or from observing God's dealings with themselves or others, rather than just acquiring knowledge notionally from the Scriptures. To sin against such light adds another degree of sinfulness. It is not only sinning against the basic light of nature but also sinning against the light of Scripture and the real-life examples and observations of God's dealings. This significantly increases the severity of one's sinfulness because experiential knowledge obtained through personal examples or observations carries more weight and evidence. Knowledge gained through experience is the most effective. Even Christ Himself, who already knew all things, learned from His own suffering in the school of experience. Knowledge derived from personal observation is precious and valuable. Thus, the apostle urges Timothy to continue in what he has learned and been assured of, knowing from whom he has learned them. There are two emphatic motives: first, Timothy's personal assurance, and second, the example of the holy apostle and his godly parents who instructed him. This is also emphasized in the apostle's own example, as he reminds Timothy that he has fully known his doctrine and manner of life, as well as the education received from his godly parents. Sinning against the knowledge gained from personal observation of God's judgments upon others adds further weight to one's sinfulness. Belshazzar, for instance, was held accountable for his knowledge of how God dealt with his father Nebuchadnezzar. Similarly, when individuals witness their colleagues or even roommates turning to Christ in a religious community, yet they persist in their sinful ways, it is a sinning against great light.

Fourthly, the greater and more powerful the light within a person, the greater the accountability for sins committed against it. The more

one has tasted the bitterness of sin and God's wrath and experienced the goodness of God in prayer and in the ordinances, the worse the sins committed against that knowledge are considered. Christ Himself, in John 5:35, highlights the Jews' unbelief and hardness of heart, emphasizing that John the Baptist was not just a shining light but also a burning light. This means that the knowledge imparted through John's ministry brought not only illumination but also joy and conviction. Therefore, it is said that the Jews rejoiced in this light for a season. Thus, falling into sin after having experienced such light is a further degree of sinfulness, not common to all wicked individuals. To sin against such light, which is accompanied by a personal taste and experience, is a significant offense. It is comparable to a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, akin to a miracle, and sinning against this light brings one closer to the degree of sinning against the Holy Spirit.

Fifthly, sinning against one's professed knowledge is also an aggravation, especially when a person sins against their own principles, which they teach or condemn in others. Those who profess to know God but deny Him are considered abominable and liars. They sin against knowledge both in falsely claiming to possess it and in contradicting their own profession through their actions. Such sinning is scandalous. Likewise, the Jews, who boasted in the law and claimed to have knowledge, caused the Gentiles to blaspheme when they observed that their lives contradicted their profession. Sinning against one's own principles, which they teach others or reproach in others, brings great condemnation. This is exemplified in the case of Saul, who persecuted witches as part of his religious pretense but ultimately sought a witch in his time of need. God deals similarly with all those who are hypocritical and secretly sin against their knowledge. He allows them to continue in their most professed principles.

These are general aggravations that apply to any act of sinning or to remaining in a known state of sinning.

The practical implication of all that has been said is to urge those who possess knowledge to be more cautious in sinning than others and to prompt those who are still in their natural state to turn swiftly and wholeheartedly to God. For if sinning against knowledge is such a significant aggravation of sin, then having knowledge is the strongest motivation for repentance.

Firstly, if you have knowledge, sinning will come at a greater cost than it would for an ignorant person. Your wickedness will be ten times more expensive for you. Places abundant in knowledge and the means of grace are not conducive environments for living in sin. Engaging in drunkenness or promiscuity after receiving enlightenment, experiencing the motions of the Spirit, and hearing powerful sermons is far worse than before. Committing sins in the face of the knowledge of the consequences will cost you dearly. An informed conscience stings during the act of sinning and subjects you to bondage and the fear of death. Knowing the high price you must pay creates fear and torment. The Gentiles sinned with more pleasure because they lacked knowledge and were not aware of the evils that accompany their actions.

Secondly, sinning against knowledge will lead to greater hardness of heart. If the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness, as Christ said. The more light a person possesses and yet continues in works of darkness, the deeper the darkness they will be abandoned to, even to a reprobate mind eventually.

Thirdly, sinning against knowledge will result in being given up to worse sins than others. When God abandons individuals, one sin becomes the punishment for another, and the worst sins are reserved

for those who sin against knowledge. For instance, when the Gentiles knew God but did not worship Him, God gave them up to the worst sins they were capable of, such as unnatural uncleanness. However, such sins are not severe enough for a Christian who sins against knowledge. In your case, the punishment may be inward profanity of the heart, not just neglecting holy duties but despising them, hating godliness and showing contempt for God's ways and ordinances. You may be given over to disdain God and His judgments, to trample underfoot the blood of the covenant, or to adopt devilish opinions. These sins go beyond what you previously engaged in and are manifestations of your rottenness. God will deal with all those who are insincere and secretly sin against knowledge by allowing them to continue in their most professed principles.

Fourthly, when you reach the end of your life and seek mercy, your knowledge will lead you to greater despair than others. Knowledge, if not utilized, turns against the soul, causing wounds and despair. This happens because you have sinned against the means that should have saved you, and also because sinning against knowledge is accompanied by greater presumption. The more presumptuous your life, the more prone you are to despair at death. Thus, you may lie on your deathbed, roaring in agony, and the fact that you knew better will be an argument against receiving mercy. While ignorance can be a plea for mercy, claiming that you did it unknowingly, confessing that you did it knowingly will act as a barrier, suggesting that you do not deserve mercy.

Fifthly, both in this life and in hell, sinning against knowledge becomes the greatest executioner and tormentor. In this sense, the adage "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" holds true, as Solomon said. Knowledge expands our understanding of guilt, which leads to more fear and torment. David speaks of the fear

caused by sins testifying to our faces when we commit them. Sins themselves will testify to our faces again when we seek pardon for them. This is the eternal worm that gnaws at us. Light breeds these worms.

But then you will say, "It is best for us to remain ignorant and keep ourselves that way."

I respond, No. Refusing knowledge is just as damning as misusing it. You can see this in Proverbs 1:23, where Wisdom says, "You fools, who hate knowledge, turn and I will pour out my spirit upon you and make my words known to you." Well, in verse 24, they refused and rejected his admonition. Therefore, God says, "I will laugh at your calamity," meaning He will show no pity, but instead, God will laugh at you. "And when your fear comes, I will not answer because you hated knowledge," as stated in verse 29. So, this is just as bad. There is no middle ground of refuge to escape from this, no solution other than turning to God. Otherwise, you will only be more miserable than others. Moreover, this must be done swiftly. Since you possess knowledge, God is quicker to deny you grace and to give you over to a reprobate mind compared to an ignorant person. He will wait for someone who does not know His will and ways for twenty, thirty, or forty years, as He did with the Israelite children born in the wilderness who had not witnessed His wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea. But those who had seen His wonders, He swiftly swore against many of them, declaring that they would never enter His rest. Christ comes as a "swift witness" against those to whom the gospel is preached, as mentioned in Malachi 3:5; He expedites the process of grace with them. Therefore, few who possess knowledge are converted in their old age or after a long life under the means of grace. Hence, those of you who have knowledge are obligated to repent, turn to God, align your hearts with your knowledge, and do

so swiftly. Otherwise, not only will your damnation be more intolerable than others, but the sentence will be passed against you more promptly. As Christ said in John 12:36, "While you have the light, walk in it." The day of grace, which is clear and bright, is often brief. Although individuals may live many natural days afterward and enjoy the common light of the sun, the day of grace and the gracious calls to repentance may be fleeting.

## **AGGRAVATIONS OF SINNING AGAINST MERCY**

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.—  
ROM 2:4, 5.

This is the final and most significant aggravation that the apostle highlights regarding the sinfulness of the Gentiles (which he already pronounced fully in the previous chapter), emphasizing it even further. Their sinning against God's mercies and their disdain for the abundant goodness, patience, and forbearance of God, which are heinous evils and injustices, can be better understood and highlighted in our consciousness by considering the vast richness of that goodness which they sin against.

Therefore, my intention is to unlock and guide you into the treasury of outward mercies, a more familiar place, and lead you through its various rooms, all of which continuously guide you towards repentance. By reflecting on our ungrateful waste and abuse of these numerous mercies in our sinful actions, every sin, no matter how small, will appear even more sinful to us, who are less than the least of all these mercies.

Understand, then, that in addition to the unique treasure of "unsearchable riches of grace" stored up in Christ, which, when neglected and despised, contribute to our sinfulness to an extent beyond what can be described—like the vast difference between heaven and earth—there is another unspoken mine of riches that the earth is filled with, as the Psalmist states in Psalm 104:24, and as the apostle here affirms. These Gentiles only heard of this treasure, but we also partake in it just as much as they do. Just as there are inexhaustible riches of grace offered to you, there are also abundant riches of patience that have been poured out upon you, but in the end, you will deplete these riches through your actions. The cost of these riches, when calculated, amounts to an immense treasure of guilt in you and wrath in God, as these words inform us.

To assist you in understanding this matter, I will:

1. Firstly, explain what goodness or bounty, patience, and longsuffering mean in relation to God.
2. Show that these riches are bestowed upon all human beings.
3. Demonstrate how these attributes lead people to repentance. And then,
4. I will reason with you and emphasize the sinfulness of continuing to despise these attributes through unrepentance, just as the apostle does here.

Firstly, when God is described as (1) good or bountiful, (2) patient or forbearing, and (3) longsuffering, it seems to signify three levels of His common mercies towards humanity.

(1) First, He is a good and bountiful God. Although goodness and bounty can have distinct meanings, when the abundance of goodness is mentioned, it implies the same and is synonymous with bounty. Such is God, as all the noble and royal qualities that contribute to true goodness and beauty are present in Him, reflected in the blessings He bestows. These qualities are genuinely found in Him alone, and it is therefore true to say that there is no goodness except in God, as Christ affirms.

Now, God's bounty in general can be described as follows: It involves freely and willingly giving what is entirely His own, without expecting any recompense in return.

To elaborate on this, it is important to understand that all these conditions are necessary for true goodness, and they are only found in God.

[1] A truly bountiful individual must be a giver of good things, bestowing them as gifts, not as recompense or in response to deserving actions by the recipients. Christ states in Luke 6:33 that doing good to those who have done or will do good to us is not praiseworthy or an act of bounty. However, God is truly good because He simply and absolutely gives away everything He bestows. He does not owe anything to His creatures nor has He received anything from them that would compel Him to give. As Romans 11:35 asks, "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" Moreover, until God gave us existence, we were incapable of receiving any good thing from Him.

[2] The truly good or bountiful must give away what is genuinely their own. Similarly, everything that God bestows is His own. Psalm 24:1 states, "The earth is the Lord's," indicating that the ground we walk on and the places we reside in belong to Him; He is our landlord. But it doesn't end there. For a house can be the landlord's while the furniture belongs to the tenant. Therefore, the psalmist adds, "And the fullness of it is His," signifying that everything that fills the world, all its furnishings and provisions, all movable things, belong to Him. Psalm 50:11-12 declares, "The cattle on a thousand hills are mine," and the standing goods, the crops and oil that you plant, "are mine" (Hosea 2:9). Furthermore, the psalmist in Psalm 24 goes on to state that "those who dwell therein" are also His, referring not only to the house and furniture but also to the inhabitants themselves. This ownership is established through the most secure and supreme title imaginable, surpassing any form of purchase or inheritance from another, for God has created them. As David says, "All things come from you, and of your own have we given you" (1 Chronicles 29:11-12). All things not only come from Him but also exist through Him (Romans 11:36), meaning they cannot stand or subsist without Him. Even the most generous and bountiful of human kings, their generosity is akin to that of clouds, which, though they shower down abundantly, first receive all their water from the earth beneath them.

[3] True bountifulness requires giving in abundance. God is referred to as rich in goodness because He abounds in it. As we find in the comparison between Psalm 33:5 and Psalm 104:24, it is said that "the earth is full of His goodness" and "His riches." This can be understood by considering what the psalmist says in verse 27 of Psalm 104 about the provision and sustenance God provides: "All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your

hand, they are satisfied with good." King Ahasuerus, to demonstrate his generosity, held a feast for his chief subjects, but it lasted only six months and was not open to all. A few more such half-year feasts would have nearly bankrupted him. However, God continually bestows His goodness in this manner. Even the greatest and most generous of human beings, when attempting to express the extent of their generosity, speak of giving "half of their kingdoms." However, God bestows entire worlds and kingdoms, as Daniel says, and He gives them to whomever He pleases (Daniel 4:32).

[4] The truly bountiful must give freely and willingly. Although I am combining these aspects, they imply two distinct things. First, the giver must be a free agent in the act of giving, having the choice to give or not. The sun does much good for the world, providing abundant light that illuminates half the world at once, and all this light is its own, not borrowed like that of the moon and stars. Yet, the sun cannot be called good or bountiful because it emits light necessarily and naturally, unable to choose otherwise or control its beams. However, God is a free giver. He had the choice to create the world or not, and He can choose to withdraw His Spirit and presence, causing all to perish (Psalm 104:29). Secondly, the giving must be voluntary, without any coercion or extraction from the one being called bountiful. A willing mind in matters of generosity is more valued than the gift itself (2 Corinthians 8:12). Concerning God, it is said in Daniel 4:32 that He gives the kingdoms of the world to whomever He wills, and no one can sway or hinder Him (verse 35). Moreover, He gives everything with delight. Psalm 104:31, after speaking of feeding every living thing and other acts of His goodness throughout the psalm, concludes with the statement that "God rejoices in all His works," meaning that He does all the good He does to His creatures with delight. It brings Him joy to see even the poor creatures being nourished.

[5] Lastly, true bountifulness involves expecting no recompense in return. As Christ states in Luke 6:34, giving with the expectation of receiving in return, as sinners do, is not praiseworthy. However, your heavenly Father does not act in this way, as Christ affirms in verse 35. He says, "Do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High." In this statement, Christ implies a reason why God gives in this manner: because He is so great and exalted that our actions cannot benefit Him, as David states in Psalm 16:2, "My goodness extends not to you." He is too lofty to receive any benefit from our actions. Furthermore, the thankfulness He requires is but an acknowledgement of our duty and is for our own good (Deuteronomy 10:12).

(2) That covers the first point—what goodness and bounty entail, and how God is truly good and the only source of it. However, this attribute of God, along with its effects, extends not only to Adam in paradise but also to us, the fallen sons of men. As the apostle says, God extends and displays a further richness of patience and longsuffering towards us, qualities that the devils do not partake in and that the righteous angels and other sinless creatures are incapable of. As Christ affirms in Luke 6:35, in His blessings to us, God is kind to those who are evil and ungrateful. Mercy surpasses goodness since it always takes into account misery, and because all creatures are subject to a form of misery (Romans 8:20-22) —"bondage and decay"—His tender mercies extend to all His works. However, patience goes beyond mercy, just as mercy goes beyond goodness. Patience is not only exercised toward creatures in misery but also toward sinners. It encompasses three further aspects:

[1] It not only means that those individuals to whom God shows kindness and mercy offend and wrong Him, but also that God

Himself is acutely aware of and affected by these wrongs, being provoked to anger. Without this awareness and sensitivity, it cannot be considered patience. As stated in 2 Peter 3:9, God's delay is not due to slackness; He does not sit in heaven as an idol god who disregards the actions occurring on Earth or is indifferent to how people treat Him. Instead, He is patient and longsuffering, fully perceiving the wrongs committed against Him. He is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11); it takes great effort for Him to restrain Himself. Even when He forbears and refrains from punishment, He exercises an attribute, a virtue toward them, namely, patience, which is akin to holding fire in one's bosom.

[2] However, patience is not limited to merely forbearing and restraining anger. God grants the time He forbears individuals for, providing them an opportunity to repent during that time, demonstrating His mercies as a means to lead them to repentance. This is evident in the following passage from 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Likewise, in Revelation 2:21, it is referred to as "time to repent." All the blessings He bestows are given as instruments and guides to lead people to repentance, as stated here. In Matthew 18:29, the plea "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything" implies a request for an extended period and an acceptance of payment when it is brought, with the debtor being allowed to remain out of prison in order to settle the debt.

[3] Lastly, another aspect of His patience is His waiting and expectation for people to come in and repent. Luke 13:7 speaks of a figurative tree: "For three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none." There was an expectation, a longing, a

desire for it to produce fruit. "Oh, when will it bear fruit?" God asks (Jeremiah 13:27).

(3) Lastly, longsuffering is another attribute, which can be seen as an extension of patience, but patience extended further. This occurs when God has been patient, restraining Himself and waiting for people to repent, not for three years but perhaps for thirty or forty years, and yet they remain unrepentant. At this point, His patience may seem to be wearing thin, and His anger appears to be arising. He might say, as in the case of the unfruitful tree, "Why does it still waste the soil? Cut it down" (Luke 13:7). Yet, He continues to spare the person for another year and many more years thereafter. As Romans 9:22 states, He "endures with much patience" the vessels of wrath, enduring to a remarkable extent, surpassing all expectations and patience. This is longsuffering.

2. The second general point is that there are abundant blessings of God's goodness, patience, and longsuffering bestowed upon us.

These blessings are rich in themselves, both in terms of their abundance as they come from God, and in regard to their valuable usefulness to us if we make good use of them.

Firstly, in themselves, these blessings are rich. Consider that during this time, God expends not only His power to sustain and uphold all things, including us, which costs Him nothing. He upholds and creates everything by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). But when He sustains us sinners, it goes beyond His power. His glory is expended and diminished for a while. He loses infinite glory every day because of our sins, and He is aware of it. Every sin diminishes His glory and dishonors Him. He upholds the world, but He remains unknown, unserved, and even disgraced in the world. Sin, the devil,

and wicked men receive all the glory, exalting themselves and taking glory away from Him. This expenditure requires great riches.

Secondly, consider the multitude of sinners who live upon and exhaust these riches. God needs an abundance of patience because He forbears not just one, but all sinners. When we see one wicked person and wonder why God does not punish them, we should be even more amazed at God's forbearance toward the entire world. If the richest man in the world had millions of people in debt to him, it would ruin him. Yet, the whole world is indebted to God, accumulating more debt each day, and still He remains unbroken and does not destroy them.

Furthermore, to demonstrate the abundance even more, consider not only the multitude of sinners He forbears but also the length of time He has done so. God has been patient and out of pocket since the beginning of the world, for five thousand and a half years already, and we do not know how much longer until the day of judgment. Yet, His patience and bountifulness are as present now as they were in the early days. Even the apostle Paul, who considered himself the chief of sinners, marveled at God's longsuffering towards him, having been converted after only a short time of living in sin. If Paul, a small vessel, was so richly laden with God's patience, how much more is the vast ship of the world laden with these riches, sailing through the immense sea of time?

Finally, consider the extravagant wastefulness of all these sinners throughout history. Every sinner spends something, and people are prodigal with their oaths. The thoughts of men's hearts are continually evil from their youth. Every sin is a debt.

Secondly, these blessings are rich in their preciousness and usefulness.

Firstly, they are precious because of the cost—the blood of God's Son. Christ, as the Lord, has bought and redeemed all wicked men, their lives, and the time they have here on Earth. Christ's mediation with God has put a halt to the immediate execution of justice upon all, granting them time for repentance. Thus, Christ can be called not only the wisdom and power of God but also the patience and longsuffering of God. It is through Christ that God exercises patience and forbearance.

Secondly, these blessings are precious to us because of their usefulness. The time granted to us by God's goodness is valuable because it provides space for repentance, not only for respite but also for obtaining forgiveness. The blessings and provisions we enjoy are means that lead us to repentance. This time is rich because, if used wisely, we can obtain the incomparable riches of eternal glory and gain Christ Himself. All things derive their worth and value from their purpose and the use they can be put to. Time is not valuable in itself but in relation to the opportunities it provides. Each minute of this time has an influence on eternity. It is the currency with which we can purchase heaven. Holy men of the past, even after accomplishing their main purpose in life, esteemed time highly. David begged for a little more time to recover, and Hezekiah praised God when granted an extended life. Imagine how much an hour, a month, or a year would be worth on the day of death or in hell.

3. The third point I want to demonstrate is that all this goodness, patience, and forbearance from God are provided as means to lead us to repentance. Acts 17:28 states that God has allotted to mankind their times and places of habitation, richly furnished with blessings to sustain their lives. And why has God provided all this? So that we might seek Him, groping in the dark, and perhaps find Him. When combined with the words of my text,

we see that God's goodness takes us by the hand and leads us to repentance, turning us from sin to God. Through these blessings, God guides us, pointing us in the right direction.

Firstly, all this goodness testifies to your hearts about the gracious hand that extends itself in all these blessings. In the 17th chapter of Acts, the apostle adds, "God is not far off from any of us." The thought that a good God bestows all things upon you is not far off from all His blessings. Even though the Gentiles went on in their own ways, the apostle tells them that God did not leave Himself without a witness in their hearts. Their hearts were impressed with the knowledge that God's good hand provided them with food and gladness.

Secondly, when His goodness brings God to your thoughts, your own consciences convict you and lead you to introspection. They bear witness that by walking in your own ways, you do nothing but provoke and offend this good God. (Romans 2:15)

Thirdly, there is a universal principle among all people to love those who love them. Once the previous points have led you to this stage, it points you to repentance as the logical conclusion. Should we continue to sin against this good, so good God? Should we return evil for good? Isn't it a natural and necessary consequence to fear the Lord, who provides us with the early and latter rain? (Jeremiah 5:24) Though people may not fully and effectively consider these things, leading them to repentance, the witness of all this resides in their hearts. They are guided toward repentance if they would only see their way and follow their guide.

The practical application is one of exhortation, as the apostle does here, with sinful and unrepentant people for persisting in sinning against all this mercy. It also serves to highlight the magnitude of

their sinfulness. Young people often take advantage of their precious time, which is granted through God's longsuffering and the valuable opportunities and blessings they enjoy, using it solely to indulge in the pleasures of sin. They make their youth a harvest of sinning and believe they can repent later. Then, when they grow old, having already enjoyed a long and fair period of time to turn to God, having sown many seeds for the Spirit, the comfort of which they could now reap, they continue neglecting to do so, presuming they have any days left, even if the end is near. They recklessly choose to gamble their eternal destiny on God's merciful forgiveness without making any effort to change their hearts or lives, relying solely on their experience of God's forbearance in this world. I wish to reason with all such individuals for a moment, utilizing the riches of God's goodness, patience, and so on, expended on them. I want to challenge their impenitence and emphasize the severity of their sinfulness, and, if possible, persuade them to no longer despise these truths. If there is any trace of common decency, any flicker of innate goodness (I do not speak of grace but of the goodness inherent in human nature) still present, I hope it will impact you and produce some positive change before I am finished.

To that end, consider and compare the loving-kindness of God towards you with your ungrateful treatment of Him.

Let us begin with the beginning of your existence. How much richness of goodness was laid and buried in your foundation when the cornerstone was laid and you were made a human being (in addition to the ongoing cost spent on building since then)? Even the cursed foundation of your conception was soaked in bloody iniquities. The very materials of your soul and body, with sin mixed in, cry out to God against you every moment, like stones in a wall or beams in a building, urging Him to tear it all down.

Consider that just the other day, you were nothing, and an infinite number of potential beings, who will never be, were in the same possibility of existence as you. When God created this world, He could have set it aside entirely and created millions of other worlds, yet He chose to give you a place in this one and no more. He called you forth from nothing, commanding your presence when there was no need for you. I say He chose to grant you being, just as there is an election of things that are unto salvation, there is also an election of things that were not unto existence. And wretched as you are, if you do not repent, you will destroy what God has made, and it would have been better for you to remain in nothingness, never peering out, or to retreat into your original nothingness. For you are lost, and it would have been better if you were never born.

Furthermore, consider the additional goodness bestowed upon you. You could have been admitted into the lowest form of creatures, such as a worm, a flea, or a fly that we humans easily crush and kill. But instead, you were made a human being, placed in the highest order, crowned as a king even in the womb, as David says (Psalm 8:5). You were made "a little lower than the angels" but "crowned with glory and honour," given dominion over all the works of God's hands. One half of you is worth more than the whole world, as Christ says, who gave His life for souls. God has granted your soul an eternity of existence and made it in His image, while other creatures merely bear His footprints. Your body, the other part, merely a case or sheath (as Daniel's phrase and the Chaldee version put it, Daniel 7:15), is an intricately crafted work. It is "fearfully and wonderfully made," as David says (Psalm 139:15), "curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth." There, he refers to the womb because, just as skilled craftsmen perfect their choice works in private before revealing them to the world for admiration, God formed the epitome of the entire world, the index of all creation, out of a tear, a drop. The

sun, moon, and stars can be found within you (Ecclesiastes 12:2). Yet, wretched as you are, you also bear within you the seeds and principles of all the villainies committed in the world. If you do not repent, you would be better off as a toad or serpent, the most detestable of creatures, and you would gladly exchange your condition with theirs.

As a human being, do you possess all the members that belong to a human? It is because God wrote them all in His book (Psalm 139:16). Is that not a mercy? Ask the blind. If you were lacking those windows to look out of, your body would be a dungeon, and the world a prison. If you were without a tongue, your glory, or an ear, you would live among men like a beast among humans. Yet, when God granted you all these, He merely placed weapons in the hands of an enemy. For haven't you used all these as "weapons of unrighteousness"? (Romans 6:13) The apostle refers to the tongue, just one member, as "a world of iniquity." If you do not repent, as Christ says, it would be better to enter the world without an eye, an ear, or a tongue than to possess them and be cast into hell forever.

When you were brought out of the womb (where you resided only during your formation), what a splendid palace God has brought you into—the world, fully prepared and furnished with all things for your sustenance, just as Canaan was prepared for the children of Israel. You did not build this magnificent house; you did not plant the trees. The rich canopy spread above your head was not your doing. God set up a guiding light, the sun, for you to work by until you are weary (Psalm 104:23), and then it sets without your command because it knows its appointed time to go down (verse 19). He draws a curtain over half the world, allowing men to rest. "You cause darkness, and it is night" (verse 20). This world is a house so intricately designed that even to the smallest village, springs come like pipes to provide you

with water (Psalm 104:10-11). The very ground you tread on produces your food (verse 14). Bread for strength, wine to cheer your heart, and oil to make your face shine are synecdochically representative of all that is necessary for strength, adornment, and delight. Even the chambers of this house "drip with abundance" and water the earth (verse 13). God rotates the heavens, providing you with the passing of time. Each moment brings forth some form of blessing, and none are barren. Therefore, in Psalm 65:11, the year is described as being "crowned with goodness," adorned with a diadem of goodness. Yet, you have filled this world you have been brought into with nothing but rebellion, as it is filled with blessings. You have stacked up sins to heaven and compelled all these armies of blessings that fill the world to fight against their Creator under the banner of the devil, whom your wickedness sets up as "the god of this world." Though the year is crowned with goodness, your years are crowned with wickedness. No moment is barren; all your thoughts are continually evil. You have sinned against heaven and earth, subjecting the entire creation to vanity. You have burdened the earth and filled it with so much wickedness that it groans. The very axle of the earth is on the verge of breaking under your weight, and the ground you tread upon desires to spit you out.

Fifthly, since you entered the world, how long has God allowed you to live in it? He hasn't spared you just three years, like the fig tree, but thirty, forty. When you first dared to step into this world, death, which your sin brought into the world, could have arrested you and told you that this world was not meant for you, for hell is our true place (Acts 1:25). You should have been executed on the first day. Isn't the time of ease from punishment a sign of infinite mercy? Think about the fallen angels, who have been in hell since the moment they sinned. Consider what they would give to have a portion of time taken out of their eternal sentence, to have a period

of relief and freedom from torment. If the rich man in hell considered it a great favor to have just one drop of water to cool his tongue, how much more would he have valued the mercy of living many years free from torment? So what does it mean for you to live all these years without experiencing even the slightest drop of that wrath, which should have been poured out on you many years ago? The same judgment was pronounced against us as it was against the angels: "In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." What made the difference? The apostle tells us it was "his longsuffering toward us" (2 Peter 3:9), not toward the angels, for in chapter 2, verse 4, he had already said that "he did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell" as soon as they had sinned.

Sixthly, but let's go further. Has it been only a time of ease given to you, a time of reprieve? No, it has been more than that. It has been "space to repent" and obtain your pardon (Revelation 2:21). And as it has been more than just relief from torment, consider that it has not been a sign of negligence on God's part, as the apostle tells us. It's not that he has ignored your offenses; he is aware of every idle thought, every oath, every vain word. As Scripture tells us, he is deeply grieved, even to the heart, and regrets ever creating you. He is angry with you every day you rise, every time he looks upon you. When he sees you entering the tavern to get drunk or going to the brothel to engage in impurity, he has to restrain himself from striking you, just as he restrained himself from killing Moses when they met in the inn. He is ready to strike you, and it wouldn't take much effort. If he were to breathe on you, you would be consumed. Allowing you to live costs him a great deal of patience, but cutting you off would cost him nothing; he could do it effortlessly. But there is more to it. There is a willingness on God's part for you to repent and not perish, as that passage tells you.

It would be a great mercy for a traitor to be reprieved, to have their life spared for twenty years, even if there was no hope or possibility of obtaining a full pardon after that time, and even if it was only for one act of treason. Yet for you, this time has been more than just a longer lifespan and a postponement of execution, which should have taken place in the womb due to the guilt of that initial rebellion. It has been a time for repentance. And yet, has this time of reprieve made you more rebellious? Have you spent all this time increasing the measure of your iniquity? Has God's willingness to spare you not led you to repentance? Moreover, God has accompanied his willingness with waiting, longing for the moment when you would repent so that he could pardon you. As Jeremiah 13:27 expresses it, "When shall it once be?" Consider how many opportunities for repentance have been presented to you, how many promises you have made and broken. God has tested you and given you more time. Even though you have repeatedly failed him and broken your promises, he has been patient with you and waited for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years for you to come and be true to your word. And still, you have disappointed him. Yet, marvel at the richness of his longsuffering. After so many years, broken promises, failed expectations, and mockery, he is still willing to accept what remains of your life if you would spend it in accordance with his will, as the apostle says (1 Peter 4:2). He requires the same conditions that were initially proposed, but he promises to become a debtor to you, bestowing upon you more riches than you have ever seen or imagined. And he could punish you in hell and lose nothing by it, but he is willing to offer you this opportunity.

Seventhly, it has not merely been an act of patience and forbearance, though it is accompanied by God's willingness for you to not perish. It is not simply a permission for you to live. God displays even greater goodness in his longsuffering. "In him we live and move and

have our being." And do you only live in him? No, you also live on him. As David says, "I have relied on you since my mother's womb." Consider what your life is and how God has sustained it with such a small foundation. If he hadn't drawn it out from his own power, like a spider spinning its web from its own bowels, it would have ended within a minute. To maintain the vital moisture, the oil that sustains the lamp and light of your life, the radical balsam, this is as great a miracle as keeping the oil in the jar of the poor widow from running out. Furthermore, has he only sustained you? No, he has defended you, taken your side, protected you, and sheltered you under his wing like a hen does her chicks. Otherwise, how many ways could you have been snatched away from the land of the living? Your case is not like that of the fig tree, where when God said, "Cut it down," someone else said, "Leave it alone." Many have cried, "Cut you down," but God has cried, "Spare you." There is never a moment when the devil wouldn't have wanted to end your life, just as he desired to take Job's life. You, a mere mortal, walk among a host of fierce and cruel enemies who harbor malice towards you, yet God has said to them all, "Do not touch this person." And even if you were not vulnerable to their malice and power, consider the many dangers and risks from which you have been protected. Falls, drownings, various forms of death—how often have the arrows of death whizzed by you, taking others close to you, perhaps even family members, while missing you? And if we only consider the days we have lived in this world, with two great plagues that have afflicted our kingdom, how have most of us survived, with a third one now looming upon us? In such dear times, just having our lives preserved is mercy enough, as Jeremiah told Baruch. These arrows have flown around us, over our heads, and missed us. God's judgment has fallen upon people walking and talking with us, but he has spared us. How many times has your life been in imminent danger, with the executioner's axe poised above your neck, only to fall beside you? Consider your own

body—its humors, if God did not restrain them, would overflow and drown it, just as waters would flood the earth if God did not command them to stop. And even when these humors have been released during sickness, God has set a limit, allowing only enough to cleanse and purify the body, making it healthier, like the overflowing of the Nile. And when your body has been weak and vulnerable, like a frail, rotting ship in a storm, taking in water from all sides, such that no physician in the world could stop the leaks, God has rebuked the wind and sea, repaired you, and launched you back into the world whole, sound, and strong as ever. As Job says, God has declared that you should not die. In short, when you consider what your life is and the dangers it faces, you will acknowledge that preserving it is as great a wonder as seeing a glass that has been in constant use, passed through many hands, and experienced numerous bumps and falls, remaining unbroken for forty, fifty, sixty years. God has held your life in his hand like a candle in a paper lantern on a windy night, keeping it from being extinguished, whereas we often see in others that a mere draft can blow out their candle, as Job says.

Eighthly, how have these years and hours of your time been filled with goodness and countless comforts? Even if a traitor were to live on nothing but bread and water all their days, it would still be considered a favor. So, even if you had lived in great misery, eating your bread in darkness and experiencing much sorrow and sickness, as Solomon says, there would still be infinite mercy. Anything this side of hell is mercy (Lamentations 3:22). In the worst state the church has ever been on earth, they say, "It is your mercies" that have kept us from being consumed, for your mercies are renewed every morning. Even if you were on the brink of hell but not in it, it would still be mercy. But hasn't God filled your heart with food and gladness, as the apostle says? It would be infinite to enumerate all the different kinds of common comforts that God bestows upon

people here. We haven't even begun to fully account for the richness of his goodness; it would take a lifetime to list them all. Do you have a house to shelter your head and protect you from the elements (which is more than Christ had)? God is your landlord, even if you may not pay him rent. "He is the one who builds the house" (Psalm 127:1). Do you have a bed to sleep on? He provides it, especially during your sickness (Psalm 41:3). Do you have sleep (which is the restorative nurse for all your cares and sorrows)? He lulls you to sleep every night. Just as he gives you a home, he also gives you rest (Psalm 127:2). It is God who keeps away the gnats of distracting cares, worries, thoughts, and terrors of conscience that would otherwise buzz around you and keep you awake. And when you sleep, does it bring you pleasure? God makes it so (Jeremiah 31:26). Do you have clothes to cover your nakedness? Look at Jacob's example in Genesis 28:20, and you will see to whom they ultimately belong. "If you will give me clothing," that is one of the conditions mentioned. And do your clothes keep you warm? Even this is attributed to God (Job 37:17). He provides for you, feeds you, sets your table, serves you, fills your cup, as David describes his goodness (Psalm 23:5). He gives you your food at the appointed time, and you have never missed a meal, as Job says. And do you have health (which is the seasoning for all these blessings, without which you would find no pleasure in them)? He is "the God of your health" and keeps diseases away (Exodus 15:26). "I will put none of the diseases on you; I am the Lord who heals you." In short, God bestows these and countless other benefits upon even the poorest among you and "loads you with them day after day."

But do you have wealth added to these blessings? "The blessing of God makes one rich" (Proverbs 10:22). Even if you acquired wealth through inheritance, it was God who allowed your friends and parents to hold it in trust for you. They were mere trustees; it was

God who bestowed it upon you (Ecclesiastes 2:26). Or perhaps you have gained wealth through your own industry, but it is God who gives you the power to acquire wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18; Proverbs 12:24). He can take a small estate and make someone great (Job 8:8). It is by His providence that He has prevented your wealth from draining away and has stopped any financial leaks, as the prophet describes (referring to the hole in a bag). Along with these riches, has He given you a heart to use them properly? This, too, is a mercy from Him (Ecclesiastes 5:19; 6:2).

Or do you possess credit, which is even better than wealth, as Solomon says (Proverbs 22:1)? It is God who grants you favor, not your wisdom, abilities, or worthiness (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Skill alone does not guarantee acceptance; it requires the additional blessing from God. Therefore, apart from wisdom, God also promised honor to Solomon (2 Chronicles 1:11). It is God who shapes people's opinions. The apostle prayed to God that his service might be accepted by the saints, even though no service could be more acceptable, as it involved gathering and bringing alms and relief to them. God has control over people's tongues, instructing them to bless as He commanded them to curse. He has also protected you from committing gross sins that would tarnish your good reputation, and He conceals the sins you have committed. He shields you from the strife caused by gossip and slander (Job 5:21).

Do you have friends or people who love you, which brings much comfort to our lives? David spoke of Jonathan, saying, "You were pleasant to me" (2 Samuel 1:26). It is God who grants favor in the eyes of others. He did so for Joseph as well (Genesis 39:21). If anyone shows you kindness, it is because God has touched their hearts, as seen in the men who stood by Saul's side. God made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the Israelites, surpassing all

reason, as stated in the text. Jacob declared that he saw the face of God in the reconciled countenance of Esau, for God's favor was evident in his appearance. God has placed you in your occupations, ranks, and stations, and has given you the skills and success in your endeavors. Even the simplest trades, such as sowing, plowing, and threshing, are given by the Lord, who works in wondrous ways. This skill is comparable to that of the most talented engraver, painter, or embroiderer. Bezalel, for example, was taught by God Himself (Exodus 31:3). If you possess gifts and abilities for higher callings, it is not due to your birth or age. Great men are not always wise, and the elderly do not always possess understanding. It is the inspiration of the Almighty that grants wisdom (Job 32:8-9). If you have been called to be a scholar, with a mind enriched and elevated by the best jewel the world offers—wisdom and knowledge, surpassing the minds of others just as they surpass those of beasts—then God has been your great tutor. The mind of man is God's candle, and He makes one wiser than his teachers, as seen in Moses' Egyptian learning, Daniel, and David.

In conclusion, if you find comfort in riches, learning, credit, spouse, children, food, drink, and more, it is God who adds sweetness, delight, and pleasure to them all. Your joy and contentment depend on Him, just as air requires the sun to shine and wood needs fire to provide warmth. Acts 14:17 tells us that He fills our hearts with both food and gladness. Furthermore, consider the many unique instances and turns of His providence directed towards your well-being. He works things together for your benefit, orchestrating and planning them better than you could ever do for yourself. He has provided relief in times of difficulty and success in various endeavors. He works in and through us, as Isaiah says (Isaiah 26:12). Hasn't He taken special care and shown extraordinary providence towards you as if you were the only person in the world He cared about?

Now, as you ponder all of this, also reflect on your own actions toward Him. What have been the effects and results of all His goodness? Lift up your head, face God. It is a good sign that shame begins to cover you. How has His patience and longsuffering, granting you time to repent, influenced you? How close have you come to true repentance? It is the perverseness of human nature, as Solomon tells us, that because punishment for evil deeds is not immediately executed, people are inclined to do more evil. You think you can spend the best of your time and energy on sinning and give God the leftovers, the last sands of your life that even you and your friends are tired of. All these blessings and comforts bestowed upon you, how have you used them against Him? Instead of fueling your thankfulness, you have used the oil of His blessings to intensify the fire of your desires. Your lusts have consumed His gifts (James 4:3). You have turned the riches He gave you into idols and sacrificed your most precious thoughts and affections to them, as God laments in Ezekiel. You have offered His provision as sacrifices to satisfy your belly, which has become your god. Your strength is spent on pursuing worldly pleasures. The wealth He granted you has been used to indulge in sinful excess and acquire the costliest and most extravagant sins. The power He entrusted to you has been turned against Him, perhaps even against His children and ministers. Yet, He has kept your sins hidden and shielded you from the consequences of your actions (Amos 2:13). He loads you daily with His mercies (Psalm 68:19).

There is a third consideration from the text that highlights the seriousness of your sin in this regard. By continuing to sin and remain unrepentant, by despising His goodness, you are storing up wrath for the day of judgment. To sin against mercy increases the wrath you will face. You will have to repay treasures for the treasures you have wasted. Just as you have lavishly spent riches of mercy, God

will reclaim riches of glory from you. God will not lose in this exchange but will reckon with you in wrath for every instance of patience you have exhausted. For every grain of longsuffering that has expired, a drop of wrath will be poured into His vials. This wrath will become a treasure, a treasure that will bring eternal glory to God, surpassing all the glory lost and riches spent. It is a treasure that will demand an eternity to be spent upon you, yet it will never diminish. And the longer you continue, the greater this heap of wrath will swell.

Do you understand and consider how rapidly this treasure is accumulating? The longer you persist, the more you add to it. Each minute of impenitence contributes to this sum, much like adding new figures to a sum. The first figure is one, the second becomes ten, the third a hundred, the fourth a thousand. What will this sum ultimately become?

But you may argue, "Pshaw! I am in prosperity, in health, wealth, and ease. Today will be like tomorrow, and even more abundant" (Isaiah 56:12). Well, consider this fourth point from the text: there will come a day, and the following day will be a day of wrath. The treasuring up of wrath is happening now, but it will not be unleashed until the day of wrath. Until that day arrives, you may continue to prosper, just as Job explains why wicked men prosper in this world: they are being "reserved for the day of wraths" (plural) because treasures are being laid up against them. You are still spared because your sins are not yet complete, and that treasure is not yet full, just like the sins of the Amorites were not full. However, all your present prosperity only prepares you for hell. As Romans 9:22 says, they are referred to as "vessels fitted for destruction" through longsuffering. Similarly, Nahum tells us that they are like stubble left out in the sun to dry until it becomes fully dry, ready to burn better. They are like

grapes left to hang in the sunshine until they ripen, preparing for the winepress of God's wrath (Revelation 19:15).

But your senseless heart may say, "I don't see any of this, these are just empty threats." Perhaps you think so. That's why the text states that it is a treasure, which, like treasures usually are, is hidden until the day it is revealed, as the words express. Even if you don't see this day coming, God, who sits in heaven, sees your day approaching, as David says (Psalm 37:13). He is said to see it because you cannot see it. And it is approaching faster than you realize. "Damnation slumbers not" (2 Peter 2:3), even though you may be oblivious to it. It does not linger. It has been sent out like a hue and cry, and it is on its course. Eventually, it will catch up to you when you least expect it, "like a thief in the night," while you are asleep, unaware of its approach (1 Thessalonians 5). It will come upon you when you are least prepared for it, just as it happened in the old world when people were eating and drinking. Just as God watches for the perfect moment to take His child, when they are at their best and ripest, He will watch over you to take you in your negligence at your worst, perhaps without giving you any time to prepare. Some descend into hell in an instant (Psalm 73:19).

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