

ជីវិតពិតរបស់គ្រីស្ទបរិស័ទ

The Life of True Christian



ចនខាលវីន (John Calvin)

អនុសាសន៍៖ បណ្ឌិតវ៉ាយយ៉ង់យ៉ុង (White Young Jeon)

អ្នកបកប្រែ៖ អ៊ុន កក្កដា (Kakada Un)

2021.April 15

វិទ្យាស្ថានជំនឿកំណែទម្រង់កម្ពុជា

(Cambodia Reformed Faith Institute)

Sequence

Chapter I

Humble Obedience, the true imitation of Christ

I. *Scripture is the Rule of Life*

1. The goal of new life is that God's children exhibit melody and harmony in their conduct. What melody? The song of God justice. What harmony? The harmony between God's righteousness and our obedience. Only if we walk in the beauty of God's law do we become source of our adoption as children of the Father. The law of God contains in itself the dynamic of the new life by which his image is fully restored in us; but by nature we are sluggish, and, therefore, we need to be stimulate, aided in our efforts by a guiding principle. A sincere repentance from the heart does not guarantee that we shall not wander from the straight path and sometimes become bewildered. Let us then search scripture to find the root principle for the reformation of our life.

2. Scripture contain is a great number of exhortations, and to discuss them all would fill a large volume. The church fathers have written big works on the virtues without prating; even a scholarly treatise cannot exhaust the profundity of one virtue. For true devotion, however, it is not necessary to read the excellent works of the church fathers, but only to understand the one basic rule of the Bible.

3. No one should draw the conclusion that the brevity of one treatise on Christian conduct makes the elaborate discussion of others superfluous, or that philosophy has no value. Philosopher, however, are accustomed to speak of general principles and specific rules, but scripture has an order all its own.

Philosophers are ambitious, and, therefore, aim at exquisite clarity and dexterous ingenuity; but Scripture has a beautiful conciseness, and a certainty which excels all philosophers. Philosophers often make a show of affectation, but the Holy Spirit has a different method, which ought to be neglected.

II. *Holiness is the key principle.*

1. The plan of scripture of a Christian walk is twofold: first, that we be intrusted in the law to love righteousness, because by nature we are not inclined to do so; second, that we be shown a simple rule that we may not waver in our race. Of the many excellent recommendations, is there any better than the key principle: be thou holy, for I am holy?

When we are dispersed like scattered sheep, and lost in the labyrinth of the world, Christ gathered us again, that he might bring us back to himself.

2. When we hear any mention of our mystical union with Christ, we should remember that holiness is the channel to it. Holiness is not a merit by which we can attain communion with God, but a gift of Christ, which enables us to cling to him, and to follow him. It is God's own glory that he cannot have anything to do with iniquity and uncleanness; therefore, we must keep this in mind, if we desire to pay attention to his invitation. For why were we delivered from the quagmire of iniquity and pollution of this world, if we want to wallow in it's as long as we live? God's holiness admonishes us that we must inhabit the holy city of Jerusalem; we wish to belong to the people of God. Jerusalem is hallowed ground; therefore it cannot be profaned by impure inhabitants. The Psalmist says, this one shall abide in the tabernacle of the Lord who walks uprightly and works righteousness. The sanctuary is the Holy One must be kept immaculate. Lev. 19:2; I Peter 1:16; Is. 35:10; Ps. 15:1 and 2, 24:3 and 4.

III. *The imitation of Holiness means obedience to Christ.*

1. Scripture does not only show the principle of holiness, but also that Christ is the way to it. Because the Father has reconciled us to himself in Christ, therefore He commands us to be conformed to Christ as to our pattern. Let those who think that philosophers have the only just and orderly system of morality shows us a more excellent plan than to obey and follow

Christ. The sublime virtue according to philosophers is to live the life of nature, but scripture points us to the perfect Christ as our example. We should exhibit the character of Christ in our lives, for what can be more effective than this one stirring consideration? Indeed, what can be required besides?

2. The Lord has adopted us to be his children on this condition that we reveal an imitation of Christ who is the mediator of our adoption. Unless we ardently and prayerfully devote ourselves to Christ's righteousness we do not only faithlessly revolt from our Creator, but we also abjure him as our savior.

3. Scripture accompanies its exhortations with the promise of God's countless blessings and of our all-embracing salvation. Therefore, since God has revealed himself as a Father, we would be guilty of the base ingratitude of we did not behave as his children. Since Christ has purified through the baptism in his blood, we should not be anxious not to disgrace him by any blemish. Since Christ, our Head, has ascended to heaven, we should leave our carnal desire behind, and lift our hearts upward to Him. Since the Holy Spirit has dedicated us as temples of God, we should exert ourselves not to profane his sanctuary, but to display his glory. Since both our soul and body are destined to inherit an incorruptible and never-fading crown, we should keep them pure and undefiled till the day of the Lord. Such are the best foundation for a proper code of conduct. Philosophers never rise above the natural dignity of man. (But Scripture points us to our only sinless Savior, Jesus Christ. Rom. 6:4; 8:29)

IV. *External Christianity is not enough.*

1. Let us ask those who possess nothing but church membership, and yet want to be called Christians, how they can glory in the sacred name of Christ?

For no one has any communion with Christ, but he who has received the true knowledge of him from the word of the gospel. The apostle denies that anyone actually knows Christ who has not learned to put off the old man,

corrupt with deceitful lusts, and to put on Christ. External knowledge of Christ is found to be only a false and dangerous make-believe, however, eloquently and freely lip servants may talk about the gospel.

2. The gospel is not the doctrine of the tongue, but of life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but it is fully understood when the soul possesses the whole soul, and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart. Let nominal Christians cease from insulting God by boasting themselves disciplines not unworthy of Christ, their Master. We must assign first place to the knowledge of our religion, for that is the beginning of our salvation. But our religion will be unprofitable, if it does not change our heart, pervade our manners, and transform us into new creatures.

3. The philosophers rightly condemn and banish with disgrace from their company those who profess to know the art of life, but who are in reality vain babblers. With much better reason Christian ought to detest those who have the gospel on their lips, but not in their hearts. The exhortation of the philosophers is cold and lifeless, if compared with convictions, affection and boundless energy of the real believers. Eph. 4:20.

V. *Spiritual progress is necessary.*

1. We should not insist on absolute perfection of the gospel in our fellow Christians, however much we may strive for it ourselves. It would be unfair to condemn evangelical perfection before we acknowledge anyone as a Christian. There would be no church if we set a standard of absolute perfection, for the best of us are still far from the idea, and we would have to reject many who have made only small progress.

2. Perfection must be the final mark at which we aim, and the goal for which we strive. It is not lawful for you to make a compromise with God: to try to fulfil part of your duties, and to omit others at your own pleasure. The Lord first of all wants sincerity in his service, simplicity of heart without guile and falsehood. A double mind is in conflict with the spiritual life, for this implies and unfeigned devotion to God in the search for holiness and

righteousness. No one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength of his own to press forward with a due degree of watchfulness, and the great majority [of Christians] are kept down with such great weakness that they stagger and halt, and even creep on the ground, and so make very slight advances.

3. But let everyone proceed according to his given ability and continue the journey he has begun. There is no man so unhappy, that he will not make some progress, however small. Let us not cease to do the utmost that we may incessantly go forward in the way of the Lord; and let us not despair because of the smallness of our accomplishment. Though we fall short, our labour is not lost of this day surpasses the preceding one.

4. The one condition for spiritual progress is that we remain sincere and humble. Let us keep our end in view, let us press forward to our gaol. Let us not indulge in pride, nor give in to our sinful passions. Let us steadily exert ourselves to reach a higher degree of holiness till we shall finally arrive at a perfection of goodness which we seek and pursue as long as we live, but which we shall attain then only, when, freed from all earthly infirmity, we shall be admitted by God into his full communion.

Chapter II

Self- Denial

I. We are not our own, are the Lord's.

1. The Divine law contains a most fitting and well-ordered plan for the regulation of our life; yet it has pleased the heavenly Teacher of direction men by a very excellent key principle.

It is the duty of believers to "present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God"; this is the only true worship.

The principle of holiness leads to the exhortation, "Be not confirmed to this world; but be ye transformed by reviewing of your mind, that that may yet prove what is the will of God."

It is very important consideration that we are consecrated and dedicated to God; its means that we may think, speak, mediate, or do anything only with a view to his story. For that which is secret cannot, without great injustice to God, be applied to unholy usage.

2. If we are not our own, but the Lord's, it is plain what error we must flee, and to what purpose all our deeds must be directed. We are not our own; therefore neither our reason nor will should guide us in our thoughts and actions. We are not our own, therefore we should not seek what is expedient to the flesh. We are not our own, therefore let us forget ourselves and our own interests as far as possible.

But we are God's own; to him, let us live and die. We are God's own; therefore let his wisdom and will dominate all our actions.

We are God's own; therefore let every part of our existence be directed towards him as our only legitimate goal.

3. Oh, how greatly has the man advanced who has learned not to be governed by his own reason, but to surrender his mind to God!

The most affective poison to lead men to ruin is to boast in themselves, in their own wisdom and will power; the only escape to safety is the simply follow the guidance of the Lord.

4. The service of the Lord does not only include implicit, but also a willingness to put aside our sinful desires, and to surrender completely to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The transformation of our lives by the Holy Spirit, which Paul calls a renewal of the mind, is the real beginning of life, but foreign to pagan philosophers.

Pagan philosophers set up reason as the sole guide of life, of wisdom and conducts; but Christian philosophy demands of us that we surrender our reason to the Holy Spirit; and this means that we no longer live for ourselves, but that Christ lives and reigns within us. Rom.12:1; Eph. 4:23; Gal. 2:20.

II. *Seeking God's glory means self-denial.*

1. Let us therefore not seek our own but that which pleases the Lord, and is helpful to the promotion of his glory.

There is a great advantage in almost forgetting ourselves and in surely neglecting all selfish aspect; for then only can we try faithfully to devote our attention to God and his commandments.

For when scripture tells us to discard all personal and selfish considerations, it does not only exclude from our minds the desire for wealth, the lust of power, and favor of men, but it also banishes false ambition, and hunger for human glory, with other more secret evils.

Indeed, a Christian ought to be disposed and prepared to keep in mind that he has to reckon with God every moment of his life.

2. A Christian will measure all his deeds by God's law, and his secret thoughts he will subject to God's will.

If a man has learned regard God in every enterprise, he will be delivered from all vain desires.

The denial of ourselves which Christ has so diligently commanded his disciple from the beginning will at last dominate all the desires of our heart.

The denial of us will leave no room for pride, haughtiness, or vainglory, or for avarice, licentiousness, love of luxury, wantonness, nor any sin born from self-love.

Without the principle of self-denial man is either led to indulgence in the grossest vices without the least shame; or, if there is any appearance of virtue in him, it is spoiled by an evil passion for glory.

Show me a single man who does not believe in the Lord's law of self-denial, and who yet willingly practices virtue among men.

3. All who have not been influenced by the principle of self-denial have followed virtue merely from the love of praise.

Even those of the philosophers who have contended that virtue is desirable for its own sake, have been puffed up with so much arrogance, that it is evident they desire virtue for no other reason than to give them a chance to exercise pride.

God is so far from being pleased either with those who are ambitious of popular praise, or with hearts full of pride and presumption that he plainly tells "they have their reward" in this world, and that (repentant) harlots and publicans are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than such persons.

4. There is deliverance in store only for the man who gives up his selfishness, and whose sole aim is to please the Lord and to do what is right in his sight.

III. *The elements of self-denial are: sobriety, righteousness and godliness.*

1. The apostle Paul gives a brief summary of a well regulated life when he says to Titus: "the grace of God that bring salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our saviour Jesus Christ who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Paul declares that the grace of God is necessary to stimulate us, but that for true worship two main obstacles must be removed: first, ungodliness to which we are by nature strongly inclined, and then, worldly lusts which try to overwhelm us.

Ungodliness does not only mean superstitions, but everything that hinders the sincere fear of God. And worldly lusts mean carnal affections. Paul urges us to forsake our former desires which are in conflict with the two tables of the law, and to renounce all the dictates of our own reason and will.

2. Paul reduces all the actions of the new life to three classes: righteousness and godliness. Sobriety undoubtedly means chastity and temperance, as well as the pure and frugal use of temporal blessings, and patience under poverty.

Righteousness includes all duties of justice, that every man may receive his just dues.

Godliness separates us from the pollutions of the world, and by true holiness, unites us to God. When the virtues of sobriety, righteousness and godliness are family linked together, they will produce absolute perfection.

3. Nothing is more difficult than to forsake all carnal thoughts, to subdue and renounce our false appetites, and to devote ourselves to God and our brethren, and to live the life of angels in a world of corruption.

To deliver our mind from every snare Paul calls our attention to the hope of blessed immortality, and encourages us that our hope is not in vain.

As Christ once appeared as a Redeemer, so he will at his second coming show us the benefits of the salvation which he obtained.

Christ dispels the charms which blind us and prevent us from longing with the right zeal for glory of heaven.

Christ also teaches us that we must live as strangers and pilgrims in this world, that we may not lose our heavenly inheritance. Titus 2: 11-14.

IV. *True humanity means respect for others.*

1. Self-denial refers partly to men, but indeed, principally to God.

When scripture commands us to conduct ourselves in such a manner towards men, as “in honor to prefer others to ourselves, “and faithfully to devote our whole attention to the promotion of their advantage, it give such commands as our heart can by no means receive without being first cured of our sinful nature.

We are all so blinded and upset by self-love that everyone imagines he has a just right to exalt himself, and to undervalue all other in comparison to self. If God has bestowed on us any excellent gift, we imagine it to be our own achievement; and we swell and even bust with pride.

2. The vices of which we are full we carefully hide from others, and we flatter ourselves with the notion that they are small and trivial, and we sometimes even embrace them as virtues.

If the same talents which we admire in ourselves appear in others, or even our betters, we depreciate and diminish them with utmost malignity, in order that we may not have to acknowledge the superiority of others.

If others have any vices we are not content to criticize them sharply and severely, but we exaggerate them hatefully.

Hatred grows into insolence when we desire to excel the rest of mankind, and imagine we do not belong to the common lot; we even severely and haughtily despise others as our inferiors.

3. The poor yield to the rich, the common people to the upper ten, the servants their masters, the ignorant to the scholars; but there is nobody who does not imagine that he is really better than the others.

Many discover some gentleness in others as long as they find everything pleasant and able; but how keep many their good humor, if they are disturbed and irritated?

4. To live happily the evils of false ambition and self-love must be plucked from our heart by the roots.

If we listen to the instruction of Scripture we must remember that our talents are not of our own making, but free gift of God.

If we are proud of our talents, we betray our lack of gratitude to God.

“Who make you to differ?” says Paul. Now, if you receive all gifts, why do you glory as if you had not received them?”

We must watch and acknowledge our faults, and be truly humble. For then we shall not be puffed up, but have great reason to feel dejected.

5. On the other hand, whatever gift of God we notice in others, let us value and esteem both the gifts and their possessors, for it would betray great wickedness in us to rob them of their God-given honor.

The faults of other we are taught to overlook, not indeed to encourage them by flattery.

We should never insult others on account of their faults, for it our duty to show charity and respect to everyone.

If we pay attention to the honor and reputation of others, whoever they may be, we shall conduct ourselves not only with moderation and good humor, but with politeness and friendship.

For we shall never arrive at true meekness by any other way than by humiliating ourselves and by honoring others from the depth of our hearts.

Rom 12:10; Phil. 2:4; I Cor. 4:7.

V. *We should seek the good of other believers.*

1. How extremely difficult it is for you dutifully to seek the advantage of your neighbor, unless you quit all selfish considerations and almost forget yourself.

How can you perform the duties which Paul teaches to be works of love, unless you renounce yourself, and devote yourself wholly to others? “Love suffers long and his kind, love envies not; love vaunt itself; love is not buffet up; love does not behave itself unseemly; love seek not her own; love is not easily provoked”; and so on.

2. If this be all that is demanded, that we do not seek our own, yet we must not exert title pressure on our own nature which is so strongly inclined to love self exclusively and does not easily permit us to neglect self and our own affairs.

Let us rather seek the profit of others, and even voluntarily give up our rights for the sake of others.

Scripture urges and warns us that whatever favors we may have obtained from the Lord we have received them as a trust on condition that they should applied to the common benefit of the church.

The legitimate use of all the Lord's favor is liberally and kindly to share them with others. You cannot imagine a more certain rule or a more powerful suggestion than this, that all the blessing we enjoy are divine deposits which we have received on this condition that we distribute them to others.

3. According to the scripture our personal talents may be even compared to the power of the members of the human body.

No member of the body has its power for itself, nor applies it to its own private use, but only for the profit of the others; and equally, no member of the church receives any advantage from his own activity, but through his cooperation with the whole body of believers.

Whatever ability a faithful Christian may possess, he ought to possess it for his fellow believers, and he ought to possess it for his fellow believers, and he ought to make his own interest subservient to the well-being of the church in all sincerity.

Let this be our rule for goodwill and helpfulness that whenever we are able to assist others we should behave as stewards who must someday give an account of ourselves, and let us remembers that the distribution of profits must be determined by the law of love.

For we must not first of all try to promote the good of others by seeking our own, but we must prefer the profit of others.

4. The law of love does not only pertain to the sizable profits, but from ancient days God has commanded us to remember it in the small kindnesses of life.

God commanded his people Israel to offer him the first fruits of the corn, as a solemn token that it was unlawful for them to enjoy any blessings not previously dedicated to Him.

If the gift of God are not part of our sanctified life unless we dedicate them with our own hands to their Author, we must be guilty of sinful abuse of we leave such a dedication out.

5. But in vain we would attempt to enrich the Lord by distribution of our talents and gifts. Since our goodness cannot reach the Lord, as the Psalmist says, we must exercise it towards “the saints who are on the earth.” Alms are compared in the scripture to sacred offering to show us that the exercises of charity under the gospel have taken the place of the sacrifice under the law of the Old Testament.

I Cor.13:4-8; Ps. 16:2, 3.

VI. *We should seek the good of everyone, friend and foe*

1. That we may not become weary of doing well, for which the danger is near, the apostle has added that “love suffers long, and is not easily provoked.”

The Lord commands us to do well unto all men without exception, though majority are very underserving when judged according to their own merits. But Scripture here helps us out with an excellent argument when teaches that we must not think of men’s real value, only of his creation in the image of God to which we owe all possible honor and love.

The image of God, moreover, is most carefully to be regarded in those who are the household of faith, because has been renewed and restored in them by the spirit of Christ.

2. If anyone, therefore, appears before you who are in need of your kind services, you have no reason to refuse him your help.

Suppose he is a stranger; yet the Lord has pressed his own stamp on him and made him as one of your family, and he forbids you to despise your own flesh and blood. Suppose he is despicable and worthless; yet the Lord has deigned him worthy to be adorned with his own image.

Suppose that you have no obligation towards him for service: yet the Lord has made him as it was his substitute, so that you may have obligation for numerous and unforgettable benefits.

Suppose he is unworthy of your least exertion; but the image of God which recommends him to you deserve that you surrender yourself and all your possession to him.

If he has deserved no kindness, but just the opposite, because he has maddened you with his injuries and insults, even this is no reason why should not surround him with your affection, and show him all sorts of favors.

You may say that he has deserved a very different treatment, but what does the Lord command but to forgive all men theirs offenses, and charge them against him?

3. This is the only way to attain that which is not only difficult, but utterly repugnant to man's nature: to love those who hate us, to requite injuries with kindness, and to return blessing for curses.

We should forever keep in mind that we must not brood in the wickedness of man, but realize that he is God's image bearer.

If we cover and obliterate man's faults, and consider the beauty and dignity of God's image in him, then we shall be induced to love and embrace him.

Heb. 12:16; Gal. 6:10; Is. 58:7; Math. 5:44; Luke. 17:3.

VII. *Civil goodness is not enough*

1. We will not practice real self-denial unless we fulfill all the duties of love.

These are not fulfilled by him who merely in an external way perform his service without omitting even one, but by him who acts from sincere principle of love.

For it may happen that a man discharges his duties to the best of abilities, but if his heart is not in them, he falls far from the mark.

There are people who are known to be very liberal, yet they never give without scolding, or pride, or even insolence.

We sunk to such a depth of calamity in this awful age that scarcely any alms are given, at least by the majority of men, without haughtiness and contempt.

The corruption of our times is so enormous that it would not have been tolerated by the pagans.

2. Christian certainly ought to display more than a smiling face, a cheerful mood, and polite language when they practice charity. First of all, Christian ought to imagine themselves in the place of person who needs their help, and they ought to sympathize with him as though they themselves were suffering; they ought to show real mercy and humaneness and offer their assistance as readily as if it were for them.

Heartfelt pity will banish arrogance and reproach, and will prevent contempt domineering over the poor and the needy.

When the member of our physical body is diseased, and the whole body has to labor to restore it to health, we do not despise this diseased member, or hold it under obligation, because it needs all this assistance.

3. The mutual help which the different parts of the body offer to each other is by the law of nature considered to be no favor, but a matter of course, which it would be cruel to refuse.

Therefore, if a man has performed one service, he should not reckon himself discharged of all other duties. A rich man, for instance, who has given away part of his property and leaves the burdens for others, cannot consider himself to be excused.

Every man, however important he may be, should realize that he is a debtor to his neighbor, and that he gives to the limit of his ability.

VIII. *No happiness without God's blessing.*

1. Let us discuss more in detail the main aspect of self-denial, its relation to God. It is needless to repeat the many remarks that have been made before, but it will suffice to point out how real self-denial makes us calm and patient.

First of all, scripture draws our attention to this that if we want ease and tranquility in our lives, we should resign ourselves and all that we have to the will of God and at the same time we should surrender our affections to him as our Conqueror and Overlord.

To crave wealth and honor, to demand power, to pile up riches, to gather all those vanities which seem to make for pomp and empty display, that is our furious passion and our unbounded desire.

On the other hand, we fear and abhor poverty, obscurity and humility, and we seek to avoid them by all possible means.

We can easily see how restless people are who follow their own mind, how many tricks they try and how they tire themselves out in their efforts to obtain the objects of their ambition and avarice, and then again to avoid poverty and humility.

2. If God fearing people do not want to be caught in such snares they must pursue another course: they should not hope, or desire, or even think of prosperity without God's blessing. We may believe and trust that everything depends on divine blessing alone.

It may look to us that we can easily attain honor and riches through our industry, or strenuous exertion, or through the favor of others; yet, it is certain that all these things are nothing in themselves, and that we shall not make any headway by our insight or by our labors, but in so far as the Lord shall prosper both.

3. On other hand, his blessing will find a way to make us happy and prosperous, whatever adversities may come. And though we may be able to obtain a certain measure of wealth and fame without divine blessing, as we may daily observe in godless people who acquire great honors and enormous riches, yet we shall see that those who are under the curse of God have not the smallest particle of happiness.

Therefore, we cannot gain anything without divine blessing: and if we do, it will prove a calamity to us.

Let us then not be foolish and wish for things that will make us more miserable.

IX.

We should not be anxious to obtain riches and honors.

1. If we then believe that whole cause of desirable prosperity is found in the divine blessing, and that without this we may expect only miseries and calamities, it must be plain also that we should not anxiously strive for riches and honors by relying on our own diligence or cleverness, or by depending on the favor of men, or by trusting in the nation of good luck; but that we should always expect the Lord to direct us to the lot he has provided for us.

The result of this will be that first of all we shall not be in a rush to seize riches and honors by forbidden actions, by deceitful and criminal tricks, by robbing and injuring our neighbors; but that we shall limit ourselves to the pursuit of these interests which will not lure us away from the path of innocence. For who can expect the help of divine blessing in fraud, robbery, and other evil acts?

2. As divine blessing come only on him who is pure in his thoughts, and righteous in his deeds, so it influences everyone who seeks to steer away from irregularity and corruption.

Further, we shall feel restrained from the intense desire to grow rich and from the false ambition to seek honors.

For would it not be shameful to trust in divine assistance, if at the same time we should crave matters that are against his Word.

Far be it from God to prosper with his blessing what he curses with his mouth.

3. Finally, if we do not succeed according to our wishes and hope, we shall, however, be kept from impatience, and from detesting our condition, whatever it may be; because we shall understand that this would be rebellion against God at whose pleasure riches and poverty, honor and contempt are distributed.

In conclusion, he who retain God's blessing in the way we have described, will not passionately pursue the things which man in general covet, and will not use base methods from which he expects no advantage.

Moreover, a true Christian will not ascribe any prosperity to his own diligence, industry, or good fortune, but he will acknowledge that God is the author of it. If he makes but small progress, or even suffers setbacks while others are making headway, he will nevertheless bear his poverty with more calmness and moderation than any worldly man would feel when his success is average and contrary to his expectation.

This was in the mind of David who followed God and surrendered himself to his rule, and who declare, "I am as a child weaned of his mother; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." Psalm 131:1 and 2.

X. *The Lord is just in all his ways.*

1. This is not only case in which God fearing people should be quiet and patient, for they ought to try to live that way in all circumstances of life.

No one has rightly denied himself unless he has wholly resigned himself to the Lord, and willing to leave every detail to his good pleasure.

If we put ourselves in such a frame of mind, then, whatever may happen to us, we shall never feel miserable, or accuse God falsely because of our lot.

2. How necessary it is to train ourselves this way will appear, if we consider the numerous accidents to which we are exposed. Disease of all kinds come upon us, the one after the other: now the pestilence engulfs us, now the disasters of war are harassing us.

Sometimes our dearest ones, husband, wife, parents, children, and other relatives, are snatches away by death; or. Our home is consumed by fire. On account of such events people will curse their life, and the day of their birth; they will blame the sun and the stars, and even reproach and blaspheme God, as if he were cruel and unjust.

3. But faithful believers will even in all circumstance mediate on the mercy and fatherly goodness of God.

If he sees his relatives taken away from him and his home made lonesome, he must not cease to bless the Lord, and he had rather consider that the grace of God, which dwells in his home. Will not will it desolate.

Or, if he sees his grain fields and vineyards destroy by frost, or hail, and famine threatening him, he will not become discouraged and dissatisfied, but he will persist in this firm confidence: - we are "the sheep of his pasture," and, therefore, he will supply us with the food we need.

If he shall be afflicted with illness, he will not be broken down with bitterness, and give away to impatience, and complain against God, but he will consider the justice and goodness of his Eternal Father and grow in patience while he being chastened and corrected.

4. In short, knowing that whatever may happen is ordained by the Lord, he will receive it with a peaceful and thankful heart, that he may not be guilty of proudly resisting the rule of Him, to whom he has once committed himself, and all his belongings.

Far be it for the heart of a Christian to accept the foolish and wretched consolation of the heathen philosophers who tried to harden themselves against adversity by blaming Fortune, or Fate, for it.

They thought that it was foolish to be displeased with our lot, because there is blind and cruel power in the world which deals blows to everyone, worthy and unworthy.

But the principle of true devotion is that God alone is the Guide and Ruler of all prosperity and adversity, and that he is never in undue haste, but that he distributes all good and evil with the most equal justice. Ps. 79:13.

Chapter III

Patience and cross bearing

I. *Cross bearing is more difficult than self-denial.*

1. Moreover, it is fitting for the faithful Christian to rise to a still higher level where Christ calls every disciples to “take up his cross.”

For all whom the Lord has chosen and received into the society of his saints, ought to prepare themselves for a life that is hard, difficult, laborious, and full of countless grief.

It is the will of their heavenly Father to try them in this manner that he may test them. He began with Christ was always well pleased, yet see that was not treated with indulgence and tenderness, so that it may be truly said that he was not only continuously afflicted, but that his whole life was a perpetual cross.

2. The apostle explains the reason, that was necessary for him to “learn obedience by the things which he suffered.” Why we should we free ourselves from that condition to which Christ, our chief, had to submit, especially since his submission was on our behalf, to give us an example of patience?

For the apostle teaches that it is the destiny of all God’s children to ‘be conformed to him.’

And it is a real comfort to us when we endure many miseries, which are called adversities and calamities, that we partake of the suffering of Christ, in order that we may pass through our different tribulation as he escaped from an abyss of all evils to the glory of heaven.

3. For saint Paul tells us that if we “know the fellowship his suffering” we shall also understand the “power of his resurrection”, and, that while we

are “participating in his death,” we are also being prepare for sharing his glorious resurrection. How much this helps to lighten bitterness of the cross! For the more we are afflicted by adversities the more surely our fellowship with Christ is confirmed!

By this fellowship the adversities themselves not only become blessing to us, but they are also aids to greatly promote our happiness and salvation. Matt. 16:24; Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Heb. 5:8; Rom. 8:29; Acts 14:22; Phil. 3:10.

II. *The cross make us humble.*

1. Our Lord was not compelled to bear the cross except to show and prove his obedience to his Father. But there are many reasons why we should live under a continual cross.

First, whereas we are naturally prone to attribute everything to our human flesh, unless we have, as is were, object lessons of our stupidity, we easily form an exaggerated notion of our strength, and we take for granted that whatever hardships may happen, we will remain invincible. And so we become puffed up with a foolish, vain, and carnal confidence which arouses us to become haughty and proud towards God, as if our own power would be sufficient without his grace.

This vanity he cannot better repress than by proving to us from experience not only our folly, but also our extreme frailty. Therefore he afflicts us with humiliation, or poverty, or loss of relatives, or disease, or other calamities. Then, because we are unable to bear them, we soon are buried under them. And also, being humble, we learn to call upon his strength which alone makes us stand up under such a load of afflictions.

2. Even the greatest saints, though realizing that they can only be strong in the grace of God, and not in themselves, are nevertheless more sure than they ought to be of their own bravery and persistence, unless he leads them by the trials of life into a deeper knowledge of themselves. This

proud idea induced even David to say: "I am prosperity I said, I shall never be moved; Lord, by thy face, and I was troubled."

For the confess that prosperity had so stupefied and benumbed his senses that he disregarded the grace of God o which he should have depended, relied on himself instead, and imagined that he could not fall.

3. If this happened to such a great prophet, who of us should not be fearful and cautious?

Though in prosperity many saints have flattered themselves with perseverance and patience, yet they learned that they had deceived themselves when adversity broke down their resistance.

Warned by such evidences of their spiritual illness, believers profit by their humiliations.

Robbed of their foolish confidence in the flesh, they take refuge in the grace of God. And when they have done so they experience the nearness of the Divine protection which is to them a strong fortress. Ps. 30:6 and 7.

III. *The Cross makes us hopeful.*

1. This is what Paul teaches, that "tribulation worketh patience, experience." For God's promise to believers that He will help them in their trials, they experience to be true when they persist in their patience supported by his strength, and not by their own.

Patience, therefore, affords a proof to the saints that God will actually give them the help he has promised whenever there is need.

And this also confirms their hope, for they certainly would be ungrateful if they did not rely for the future on the truth of God, which they have found to be sure and unchangeable.

Now we see what a stream of benefits flows from the cross. For we discard the false opinions of our own virtue, and discover our hypocrisy which leads us astray with it flatteries, our natural and pernicious pride tumble down. When we are thus humble, we are taught to rely on God alone, and we shall not stumble, or sink down in despair. From this victory we shall gather new

hope, for when the Lord fulfils his promises; he confirms his truth for the future.

2. Though these were the only reasons, they are sufficient to show how necessary are the trials of the cross. For it is no small profit to be robbed of our blind self love so that we become fully aware of our weakness; to have such an understanding of our weakness that we distrust ourselves; to distrust ourselves so such extent that we put all our trust in God; to depend with such boundless confidence on God that we rely entirely on his help so that we victoriously persevere to the end; to continue to his grace that we may know that he is true and faithful in his promises ; and to experience the certainty of his promises so that our hope may become firmer. Rom. 5:3 and 4.

IV. *The cross teaches obedience*

1. The Lord has still another reason for afflicting this children, to try their patience and to teach the obedience. Indeed, they cannot show any other obedience to him than the one he has given them; but he pleased in this manner to exhibit and to rest the graces which he has conferred on his saints, that they may not remain hidden and become useless.

When God's servant openly manifest his gift of strength and firmness in their suffering, scripture says that he is trying their patience. Hence such expressions as " God tempted Abraham," who prove his devotion from the fact that he did not refuse to sacrifice his only son. Therefor Peter's states that our faith is tried by tribulations, just as gold is tried by fire in a furnace.

2. Who can deny that it is necessary that this most excellent gift of patience, which a believer has received from God, be developed by practice, so that he become sure and convinced of it? For otherwise men would never esteem it as it deserves. But, if God himself acts justly when He prevents such virtues from becoming obscure and useless by offering us an accession to exercise them, then this must be the best of reason for trying the saints, for without affliction they would have no patience.

3. By the cross they are also instructed, I repeat, to obedience, because in this way they are taught to follow God's desire, and not their own. If everything proceeded according to their wishes, they would not understand what it means to follow God.

Seneca informs us that it was an ancient custom to exhort people to bear adversity with patience by the maxim: "follow God." This implied that man submitted to the yoke of God only when he willingly accepted chastisement with meekness of the child.

Therefore, if it is reason able that we show ourselves obedient in all things to our heavenly Father, then we certainly should not deny him the right to use every way to accustom us to practice this obedience. Gen. 22:1,2; I Peter 1:7.

V. *The cross make for discipline.*

1. Often we do not understand how necessary this obedience is for us, unless we also consider our eager our flesh is shake off the yoke of the Lord as soon as we have been treated with some tenderness and indulgence. For it is with us just as with unwilling horses which first are pampered in idleness, and then grow fierce and untameable, and have no regard for the rider to whose reins they formerly submitted.

In other words, what the Lord complains of his people Israel is continually seen in every one of us; when we are grown "fat" and "covered with fatness," we kick against him who has fed and cherished us. The kindness of God ought to have led us into consideration and love is goodness, but since we are so ungrateful that we are rather constantly spoiled by his indulgence, it is very necessary for us to be restrained by some discipline from breaking out into wilfulness.

2. Therefore that we may not become haughty when we acquire wealth; that we may not become proud when we receive honour; that we may not become insolent when we are blessed with prosperity and health, the Lord himself, as he deems fits, uses the cross to oppose, restrain, and subdue the arrogance of our flesh. And he does this by various means which

are useful and wholesome for each of us. For we are not all equally afflicted with the same disease, or all in need of the same severe cure.

This is the reason why we see different persons disciplined with different crosses. The heavenly Physician take care of the well- being of all his patients; he gives some a milder medicine and purifies others by more shocking treatments, but he omits no one; for the whole world, without exception, is ill, Deut. 32:15.

VI. *The cross bring repentance.*

1. Moreover, it is necessary that our most merciful Father should not only prevent our future weakness, but also correct our past offences to keep us in the path of obedience. Therefore, in every affliction, we ought immediately to review our past life. When we do so we shall certainly find that we have deserved such chastisement. Nevertheless we should not draw conclusion that we are first of all exhorted to patience because we should remember our sins.'

For scripture furnishes us a far better reason when it informs us that adversity " we are chastened by the Lord, in order that we should not be condemned with the world."

2. Therefore, even in the bitterness of our trials we should acknowledge the mercy and kindness of our Father towards us; since even then he does not cease to promote our welfare. For he does not afflict to destroy or ruin us, but rather to deliver us from the condemnation of the world. This thought will lead us to what Scripture teaches in other place: 'my son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his corrections; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, even as a father the son in whom He delights.'

When we recognize the robe of a father, should we not show ourselves docile children rather than rebelliously imitate desperate men who have been hardened in their evil doing?

God would let us perish if he would not call us back to him by his corrections when we have failed, as the Apostle pointedly remarks, 'if ye be without chastisement then are ye bastards, and not sons.'

3. We are extremely perverse, if we cannot bear with him, when he shows his loving-kindness towards us, and his great concern for our salvation. Scripture point out this difference between believers and unbelievers; the latter; as old slaves of their incurable perversity cannot endure the rod, but the former like children of noble birth, profit by repentance and correction. Now we must choose where we prefer to stand. But having treated of this subject elsewhere let it suffice that I have touched on it here briefly. I Cor. 11: 32; Prov. 3:11, 12; Heb. 12:8.

VII. *Persecution brings God's favour.*

1. It is a source of singular consolation for us, when we suffer persecution "for righteousness" sake. For then we ought to remember how greatly we are honoured by God when He decorates us with the token of his service. I call it persecution for righteousness' sake not only when we suffer in defence of the gospel, but also when we are opposed in upholding any just cause. When defend the truth of God over against the falsehoods of Satan, or project good and innocent people against injustice and injury, it may be necessary for us to incur the hatred and indignation of the world, so that our lives, our possessions, or our reputation may be endangered.

But we should not be grieved when we exert ourselves in the service of God, and we should not count ourselves miserable when with his own mouth he call us most blessed. It is true that poverty by itself is misery; and the same may be said of exile, contempt, shame, and imprisonment; and finally, of all calamities death is the last and the worst. But when God breathes his favour on us, all things work together for our happiness and our well-being. Let us therefore be content with the approval of Christ rather than with the false opinion of our flesh. Then we shall rejoice like the Apostles, whenever He shall 'count us worthy to suffer shame for his name.'

2. What of it?

If we are in our innocence and with a good conscience are robbed of our goods by the villainy of the wicked, and are reduced to poverty among men, we shall thereby increase our true riches with God in heaven. If we are banished from our country, we shall be received into the intimate fellowship of God. If we are tormented and despised, we shall be the more firmly rooted in Christ for fleeing to him. If we are covered with reproach and shame, we shall receive the more glory in the kingdom of God. If we are massacred, shall be received into the eternal glory. We ought to be ashamed of deeming the everlasting values of less account than the shadowy and fleeting pleasure of the present life. Matt. 2:10; Acts 5:41.

Chapter IV

Hopefulness for the Next World

I. *There is no crown without a cross.*

1. With whatever kind of trial we may be afflicted, we should always keep our eye on this goal, that we accustom ourselves to the contempt [of the vanities] of the present life in order that we may, mediate on the future life.

For the Lord knows that we are by nature inclined to love this world blindly, and even carnally, and, therefore, he uses an excellent means to call us back, and to arouse us from our sluggishness, that our heart may not be too much attached to such a foolish inclination.

2. There is no one of us who does not strive passionately through the whole course of his life for the heavenly immortality, and who does not try to reach it. For we are really ashamed that we are not better than the dumb animals whose condition would not at all be inferior to ours, if it were not for our hope in eternity after death.

But, if we closely examine the ambitious plans, enterprises, and actions of every individual, we will find that they are all on the level of this earth. Hence our stupidity that our mind, dazzled with the outward splendor of riches, power, and honor, cannot see beyond them. The heart also, filled and distressed with avarice, ambitions, and other evil desires, cannot rise above them.

In one word, the whole soul, wrapped up in carnal delights, seeks its happiness on this earth.

3. To counteract this, the Lord by various and severe lessons of this misery, teaches his children the vanity of the present life. That they may not promise themselves a life of ease and comfort, he permits them, therefore,

to be frequently disturbed and molested by wars or revolutions, by robberies, and other injuries. That they may not hanker with too much avidity after passing and uncertain riches, or depend on what they possess, he reduces them to poverty, or at least limits them to mediocrity, sometimes by fire, sometimes by sterility of the land, sometimes by other means. That they may not become too complacent, or delighted in married life, he makes them distressed by the shortcoming of their partners, or humbles them through willful offspring, or afflicts them with the want, or loss of children. But, if in all these matters he is more merciful to them, he shows them by diseases and dangers how unstable and passing all mortal blessings are, that they may not be puffed up with vain glory.

4. We, therefore, truly reap advantage from the discipline of the cross only, when we learn that this life, taken by itself, is full of unrest, trouble, and misery, and not really happy from any point of view; and that all is so-called blessing are uncertain passing vain, and mixed with endless adversity. In consequence of this we should at once come to the conclusion that nothing in this world can be sought, or expected, but strife, and that we must raise our eyes to heaven to see a crown. But it must be admitted that our heart is never seriously inclined to wish for and mediate on the future life unless it has first thoroughly learned to forsake the vanities of the present world.

II. *We are inclined to overestimate this present life.*

1. There is no golden mean between this two extreme; either this earthly life must become low in our estimation, or it will have our iodinate love. Therefore, if we have any concern about eternity, must put forth our most diligent efforts, to free ourselves from our temporal chains. Now, since the present life has numerous attractions, and much pleasure, beauty and sweetness to delight us, it is most necessary for our highest interest that we should frequently be called away from it, that we may not be carried away by its glamour.

For what would be the outcome, if we were constantly happy in the enjoyment of the blessings of this life? We cannot even by the incessant round of evils be aroused to give enough thought to its miseries.

2. That human life is nothing but a vapor, or shadow, is not only known to the learned, but even the common people have many a proverb to that effect. They consider this knowledge so useful, that they have many striking phrases and rhymes about life and its vanity. But there no scarcely anything which we more carelessly; for we go about everything, as if we want to make ourselves immortal.

If we watch a funeral, or walk among the graves, and thus clearly see the image of death before our eyes, we philosophize, I confess, about the vanity of life. And even that does not happen every day, for often we are not moved at all. But when we are, our philosophy is only short-lived, it vanishes as soon as we go away, and does not leave the smallest trace behind. It passes out of existence like the applause for an entertaining program.

3. We not only forget death, but the fact that we are mortals, as if no word concerning this has never reached us, and we continue our foolish dream that we are to live forever. If any man in the meantime reminds us of the proverb that man is only a creature of a day we are willing to acknowledge this truth, but with such lack of attention that the idea of perpetual keeps on lingering in our minds.

4. Who, then, can deny that we need to be warned not only words, but that we should be convinced by every possible evidence that the present life is full of miseries!

For, even if after we have become convinced of this, we hardly know how to stop our perverse and foolish admiration of it, as if life were nothing but one great accumulation of blessings. But, if it is necessary for us to be taught by God, it certainly is also our duty to listen to him when he speaks, and arouses us from our sluggishness, that we may turn our backs upon this world, and try to mediate with all our heart on the life to come.

III. *The blessings of this present life should not be despised*

1. Nevertheless, our constant efforts to lower our estimate of the present world should not lead us to hate life, or to be ungrateful towards God. For this life, though it is full of countless miseries, deserve to be

reckoned among the divine blessings which should not be despised.

Therefore, if we discover nothing of God's goodness in it, we are already guilty of no small ingratitude toward him. But to believers especially this life should be a witness of God's kindness, since all of it is destined to advance their salvation.

2. For, before he fully reveals to us the inheritance of eternal glory, he intends to show himself as our Father in matters of minor importance; and those are the blessings which he daily showers upon us. Since this life, then, serves to teach us the divine kindness, should we dare to scorn it as if there were no particle of good in it? We must, therefore, have enough sense and appreciation to class it among the bounties of the divine love which should not be cast away.

For, if scriptural evidences were wanting, which are every numerous and clear, even nature itself urges us the light of life, and its many usages, and the means necessary to preserve it.

3. Moreover, we have far more reason to be thankful, if we consider that this life helps to prepare us for the glory of the heavenly kingdom. For the Lord has ordained that those who are to be crowned in heaven, should first fight the good fight on earth, that they may not celebrate their triumph without actually having overcome the difficulties of warfare, and having gained the victory. Another reason is that here on earth we may have a foretaste of the divine kindness, so that our hope and longing may be kindled for the full revelation of it.

4. When we have come this conclusion that our life in this world is a gift to God's mercy, which we ought to remember with gratitude, because we owe it to him, it will then be time for us to consider its misery. For only in this way will we be delivered from an excessive joy of life to which we are by nature inclined, as we have observed before.

IV. *What is with earth, if compared heaven!*

1. Whatever glory we must subtract from the sinful love of life, we may add to the desire for a better world. It is, indeed, true for pagans that the greatest blessing is not to be born, and the next, to die immediately. For without knowledge of God and true religion, what else would they see in life but unhappiness and misery? Nor was there anything unreasonable in the behavior of the Scythians who mourned and wept at the birth of their relatives, and who solemnly celebrate at their funerals. But their customs did not avail them in any respect, for without knowledge of true faith in Christ they did not understand how something which in itself is neither blessed nor desirable could be conducive to the benefit of the devout believers. And so, the views of the pagans ended in despair.

2. It should be the purpose of believers, then, when they estimate this mortal life that they understand that, as it is, it is nothing but misery. For then only will they try to diligently and with increasing cheerfulness and readiness to mediate on the future eternal life. When we come to a comparison of heaven and earth, then we may indeed not only forget all about the present life, but even despise and scorn it. For, if heaven is our fatherland, what is this earth but a place of exile, and this life but a journey through a strange land?

If leaving this world means the entrance into Leal life, what else is this world but a grave? What else dwelling on this sinful earth, but being plunged into death? If deliverance from the body means complete liberty, what is this body but a prison? If to joy the presence of God is the peak of happiness, is it not misery to be without it? For, until we escape out of this world, “we are absent from the Lord.” Therefore, if the earthly life be compared to the heavenly, it should undoubtedly be despised and counted as a failure.

3. But the present life should never be hated, except in so far as it subjects us to sins, although even that hatred should not properly be applied to life itself. However, we should become so weary and scornful of it that we may desire its end, though we should also be prepared to remain in it, as long as it pleases the Lord. In other words, our weariness should keep us from

fretting and impatience. For this life is a post at which the Lord has placed us, and we must stay at it until the Lord calls us away.

Paul, indeed, laments his lot that he is kept in the bondage of the body longer than he would wish, and he ardently sighs for deliverance. At the same time he rests in the will of God, and states that he is ready for either, to stay, or to leave. He acknowledges that he is bound to glorify the name of God, either by life, or by death; but that is belongs to the Lord to determine what is most expedient for his glory.

4. Therefore, if it is fitting for us “to live and to die for the Lord, “let us leave the limits of our life and death to his decision and good pleaser. At the same time let us ardently desire and continually meditate on death while we despise [the vanities of] the present life in comparison with future immortality. And, let us on account of our enslavement to sin wish to leave this life, whenever it will please the Lord. II Cor. 5:6; Rom. 7:24; Phil. 1:20; Rom. 14:7 and 8.

V. *We should not fear death, but lift up our head.*

1. It is terrible that many who boast themselves to be Christians, instead of longing for death, are so filled with fear of it that they tremble whenever the word is mentioned, as if it were the greatest calamity that could befall them. It should not surprise us, indeed, if our natural feeling should be alarmed at hearing of our separation from this life. But it is intolerable that there should not be sufficient light and devotion in a Christina’s breast to suppress all that fear with an overwhelming consolation. For, if we consider that this unstable, depraved , perishable, frail, withering, and corrupt tabernacle of our body is dissolved, in order that it may hereafter be restored to a durable perfect, incorruptible, and heavenly glory,-will not our faith then induce us to wish ardently for what nature dreads? If we remember that by death we are called back from exile to home, to our heavenly fatherland, shall we then not be filled with comfort?

2. But it will be said, there is nothing in this world that does not want to be permanent. It must be admitted, but for that very reason we should look forward to a future immortality, where we may obtain such a realm of stability as is not found on this earth. For Paul clearly teaches believers to go with anxious longing toward death, not to be stripped of our body, but to be clothed with a new garment. Shall brute animals, and even lifeless creatures, down to blocks and stones, aware of their present vanity, be looking forward to the resurrection at the last day, that they may be delivered from vanity, together with children of God; and shall we, gifted with the light of natural reason, and with far superior enlightenment of the Spirit of God; shall we, when we consider our future existence, not lift our minds above the corruption of this world?

3. But, it is not necessary or suitable for my present purpose to argue against such utter perverseness as fear of death. In the beginning I have already declared what I would not enter on a complicated discussion of commonplace topics. I would persuade such timid hearts to read Cyprian's treatise on *Mortality*, unless they should deserve to be referred to philosophers, that they may blush when they discover how even pagans despise death. But this we may positively state that nobody has made any progress in the school of Christ, unless he cheerfully looks forward to the day of his death, and towards the day of the final resurrection.

4. For Paul stamps this mark on all believers, and Scripture often calls our attention to it, when it wants to provide us with a motive for true joy. "Look up," says the Lord, "and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near." Is it reasonable to expect that the things which he planned to arouse us to ecstasy and wide-awakenings should cause us nothing but sorrow and consternation? If this is the case, why do we still glory in him as our Master? Let us, therefore, return to a sounder judgment, and notwithstanding the position of the blind and stupid desires of our flesh, let us not hesitate to long passionately for the coming of the Lord, as the most stirring of all events. And let us not only long for it, but even groan and sigh for (the day of judgment). For he shall come to us as a Savior, to deliver from this bottomless maelstrom

of all evils and miseries, and he shall guide us into the blessed inheritance of his glory. II Cor. 5:4; Titus 2:13; Luke 21:28.

VI. *The Lord will come in his glory: Maranatha.*

1. It is true beyond doubt that the whole family of believers, as long as they are living on the earth, must be “accounted as sheep for the slaughter,” in order that they may become more and more like Christ their Head. Their condition, therefore, would be extremely deplorable, if they would not raise their thoughts toward heaven, rise above the passing show, and look beyond the horizon of this world.

2. Let the impious flourish in their riches and honors, and enjoy their so-called peace of mind. Let boast of their splendor and luxury, and abound in every joy. Let them harass the children of light with their wickedness, let them insult them with their pride, let them rob them by their greed, let them provoke them with their utter lawlessness. But then the believers see this, let them lift their eyes above this world, and they will not have any difficulty to maintain their peace of heart under such calamities. For they look forward to the day when the Lord will receive his faithful servants into his kingdom of peace. Then he will wipe every tear from their eyes, clothe them with robes of joy, adorn them with crowns of victory, entertain them with infinite delights, exalt them to his glory, and make them partakers of his own happiness.

3. But the evildoers who have been great in this world, he will hurl down into the abyss of shame. He will change their delights into torments, and their laughter and mirth into weeping and gnashing of teeth. He will disturb their rest with dreadful agonies of conscience. He will plunge with their adulteries into the unquenchable fire, and put them in subjection to the faithful whose patience they have abused. For, according to Paul, it is a righteousness thing with God to award punishment to them that trouble the saints, to give rest to those who are troubled, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven.

4. This is our only consolation.

If we are deprived of this we shall have to sink to despair, or comfort ourselves with the vain pleasures of this world. For even the Psalmist confesses that he was confounded when he kept on wondering about the present prosperity of the wicked. And, he could not regain his composure until he entered the sanctuary, and marked the latter end of the righteous and the unrighteous.

To conclude in a few word:

The cross of Christ triumph only in the hearts of believers over the devil and the flesh, over sin and wickedness, when they lift their eyes to behold the power of the resurrection. Room. 8:36; Is. 25:8; Rev. 7:17; II Thess. 1:6 and 7; Psalms. 73:2.

Chapter V

The Right Use of the Present life

I. *Let us avoid extremes.*

II.

1. Just as scripture points us to heaven as our goal, so it fully instructs us in the right use of earthly blessings, and this ought not to be overlooked in a discussion of the rules of life. We cannot even avoid those matters which serve our pleasure rather than our needs. But that we may use them with a pure conscience, we should observe moderation, whether we mean the one, or the other.

2. This the Lord prescribes in his Word, when he reaches us that for his servants the present life is like a pilgrimage in which they are traveling towards the heavenly kingdom. Even if this earth is only a vestibule, we ought undoubtedly to make such a use of its blessings that we are assisted rather than delayed in our journey. It is not without reason, therefore, that Paul advises us to use this world as if we did not use it, and to buy possessions in the same frame of mind as when we sell them.

3. But as this is a moot question, and as we run the danger of falling into two opposite errors, let us try to proceed on safe ground, so that we may avoid both extremes. For there have been some people, otherwise good and holy, who saw that intemperance and luxury time and again drive man to throw off all restraints unless he is curbed by the utmost severity. And in their desire to correct such a pernicious evil they have adopted the only method which they saw fit, namely to permit earthly blessings only in so far as they were an absolute necessity. This advice showed the best of intentions, but was far too rigid. For they committed the every dangerous error of imposing on the conscience of other stricter rules than those laid down in the Word of the Lord. By restricting people within the demands of necessity, they meant abstinence from everything possible. According to them it would be scarcely

permissible to eat and drink anything but dry bread and pure water. Others sought even greater rigidity, like Crates of Thebes, of whom it is told that he threw his treasures into the sea out of fear that unless they were destroyed he himself would be ruined by them.

4. On the other hand, there are many nowadays who seek a pretext to excuse intemperance in the use of external things, and who desire to indulge the lusts of the flesh. Such people take for granted that liberty should not be restricted by any limitation at all; but to this we can never agree. They clamor that it ought to be left to the conscience of every individual to us as much as he thinks fit for himself.

5. We must grant, indeed, that it is not right, or possible to bind the conscience of others with hard and fast rules. But, since Scripture lays down some general principles for the lawful use of earthly things, we certainly ought to follow them in our conduct. I Cor. 7:70 and 31.

III. *Earthly things are gifts of God.*

1. The first principle we should consider is that the use of gifts of God cannot be wrong, if they were directed to the same purpose for which the Creator himself was created and destined them. For he has made the earthly blessing for our benefits, and not for our harm. No one, therefore, will observe a more proper rule than he who will faithfully observe this purpose.

2. If we study, for instance, why he has created the various kinds of food, we shall find that it was his intention not only to provide for our needs, but likewise for our pleasure, and for our delight. In clothing he did not only keep in mind our needs, but also propriety and decency. In herbs, trees, and fruit, besides being useful in various ways, he planned to please us by their gracious lines and pleasant odors. For, if this were not true, the Psalmist would not enumerate among the divine blessings “the wine that makes glad the heart of man, and the oil that makes his face to shine.” And the Scripture would not declare everywhere that he has given all these things to mankind that they might praise his goodness.

3. Even the natural properties of things sufficiently point out to what purpose and to what extent we are allowed to use them. Should the Lord have attracted our eyes to the beauty of the flowers, and our sense smell to pleasant odors, and should it then be sin to drink them in? Has he not even made the colors so that the one is more wonderful than the other? Has he not granted to gold and silver, to ivory and marble a beauty which make them more precious than other metal or stones? In one word, has he not made many things worthy of our attention that go far beyond our needs? Ps. 104:15.

IV. *True gratitude will restrain us from abuse.*

1. Let us discard, therefore, that inhuman philosophy which would allow us no use of creation, unless it is absolutely necessary. Such a malignant notion deprives us of the lawful enjoyment of God's kindness. And, it is impossible actually to accept it, until we are robbed of all our senses, and reduced to a senseless block. On the other hand, we must with equal zeal fight the lusts of the flesh, for, if they are not firmly restrained, they will transgress every bound. As we have observed, licentiousness has its advocates: there are people who under the pretext of liberty, will stop short of nothing.

2. First of all, if we want to curb our passions we must remember that all things are made for us, with the purpose that we may know and acknowledge their Author. We should praise his kindness towards us in earthly matter by giving him thanks. But, what will become of our thanksgiving, if we indulge in dainties, or wine, in such a way that we are too dull to carry out the duties of devotion or of our business? Where is our acknowledgement of God, if the excesses of our body drive us to the vilest passions, and infect our mind with impurity, so that we can no longer distinguish between right and wrong?

Where is our gratitude towards God for clothing, if we admire ourselves, and despise others because of our own sumptuous apparel? Where is it, if we prepare ourselves for un-chastity, with the elegance and beauty of our dress? Where is our acknowledgement of God, if our thoughts are fixed on the glamour of our garments?

3. For many so madly purpose pleasure that their minds become enslaved to it. Many are delighted with marble, gold and painting, that they become statues. They are, as it were, transfixed into metal, and begin to resemble colorful idols. The flavor of meats, and the sweetness of odors, makes some people so stupid that they have no longer any appetite for spiritual things. And this holds for the abuse of all other natural matters. Therefore, it is clear, that the principle of gratitude should curbs our desire to abuse the divine blessings. This principle confirms the rule of Paul, that we may “not make provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.” For, if we give our natural desires free rein, they will pass all the bounds of temperance and moderation. Rom. 13:14.

V. *Let us live with moderation.*

1. But, there no surer and shorter way (to gratitude) than to turn our eyes away from the present life, and to meditate on the immortality of heaven. From this flow two general principles:

The first is, “ that they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it, “ according to the precept of Paul.

The second is that we should learn to bear poverty quietly and patiently, and to enjoy abundance with moderation.

2. He who commands us to use this world as though we used it not, forbids not only all intemperance in eating and drinking, and excessive pleasure, ambition, pride, and fastidiousness in our furniture, home, and apparel, but every care and affection which would drag down our spiritual level, or destroy our devotion. It was in olden times truly observed by Cato,

that there is great concern about the appearance of the body, but great carelessness about virtue. There is also an old proverb, that they who pay much attention to the body generally neglect the soul.

3. Therefore, though the liberty of believers in external things cannot be restricted by hard and fast rules, yet it is surely subject to this law, that they should indulge as little as possible. On the contrary, we should continually and resolutely exert ourselves to shun all that is superfluous, and avoid all vain display of luxury. We should zealously beware that anything the Lord gave us to enrich life become a stumbling block. I Cor. 7: 29-30.

VI. *Let us be patient and content under privation.*

1. The other principle will be that people who are poor should learn to be patient under privations, that they may not be tormented by a passion for riches. Those who regard this moderation have made no small progress in the school of the Lord, and those who have not made this progress have scarcely given any proof of their discipleship in Christ.

2. For not only is a passion for earthly things accompanied by almost all other vices, but he who is impatient under privation will commonly betray the opposite vice when he is ashamed of a simple garment will be proud of a glamorous one. He who is not content with a sober meal feels uneasy because he desires a sumptuous one, and will even be intemperate as soon as there is an occasion. He who grows restless and dissatisfied while he puts up with privation and humility will not be able to guard against pride and arrogance, if he rides to honor. Therefore, let all those who want to be sincere in their devotion, earnestly try to follow then apostolic example, "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." Phil. 4:12"

3. Scripture also mentions a third principle by which the use of earthly things is limited, and this was mentioned when we spoke of the precepts of self-denial. For while all such things are given to us by divine kindness, and are meant to be for our benefit, they are at the same time like deposits

entrusted to our care, and of these we shall have to give an account someday. We ought to manage them, therefore, in such a way as if we incessantly heard this warning in our ears: “give an account of your stewardship.”

4. Let us also remember who demands this account. It is he so highly recommends restraint, sobriety, frugality and modesty. It is he who abhors excess, pride, showiness, and vain display. It is he who will not approve our management of his blessings unless we are urged on by love. It is he who with his own mouth condemns all pleasures which lead us away from chastity and purity, and which make us foolish and stupid. Phil. 4:12; Luke 16:2.

VII. *Be faithful in your divine calling.*

1. Finally we should not that the Lord commands every one of us in all actions of our life, to be faithful in our calling. For he knows that the human mind burns with restlessness, that it is swept easily hither and thither, and that it's ambition to embrace many things at once is insatiable. Therefore, to prevent that general confession being produced by our folly and boldness, he has appointed to everyone his particular duties in the different spheres of life. And, that no one might rashly go beyond his limits, he has called such spheres of life vocations, or callings. Every individual's sphere of life, therefore, is a post assigned him by the Lord that he may not wander about in uncertainty all the days of his life. And also necessary is this distinction, that in his sight all our actions are measured by it, and, often very differently from the judgment of human reason, or philosophy.

2. There is no greater heroism even among philosophers than to deliver one's country from tranny. But the voice of the heavenly judge openly condemns the private man who kills a tyrant. It is not within our plan to enumerate examples, but let it be sufficient to know that the principle and basis of right conduct in every civil case in our calling by the Lord. He who disregards his calling will never keep the straight path in the duties of his work. Sometimes we may perhaps succeed in doing something that appears

to be praise worthy. But, however good it may look in the eyes of man, before the throne of God it will not be acceptable. And besides, there will be no consistency in the various parts of his life.

3. Our present life, therefore, will be best regulated, if we always keep our calling in mind. No one will then be tempted by his own boldness to dare to undertake what is not compatible with his calling, because he will know that it is wrong to go beyond his limits. Anyone who is not in the front ranks should be content to accomplish his private task, and should not desert the place where the Lord has put him. It will be no small comfort for cares, labors, troubles, and other burdens, when a man knows that in all these matters God is his guide. The magistrate will then carry out his office with greater willingness. The father of a family will then perform his duties with more courage. And anyone in his respective sphere of life will show more patience, and will overcome the difficulties, cares, miseries and anxieties in his path, when he will be convinced that every individual has his task laid upon his shoulders by God. If we follow our divine calling we shall receive this unique consolation that there is no work so mean and so sordid that does not look truly respectable and highly important in the sight of God! (Coram Deo!) Colo. 1:1.